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Opinion

Another Voice / Buffalo Schools

Another Voice: King's criticism is a vicious, vindictive attack

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By Philip Rumore

State Education Commissioner John B. King Jr. and apparently the Board of Regents, with the media's help, are attempting to demonize our school district, unfortunately raising tensions between Buffalo and the suburbs and creating a toxic environment.

Incredibly, King extols the leadership of Rochester and Syracuse despite the fact that our math and English scores were 92 percent and 130 percent better than Rochester's (5 and 5 versus 9.6 and 11.5) and 39 percent and 32 percent better than Syracuse's (6.9 and 8.7 versus 9.6 and 11.5).

Yet King points to them as models while viciously attacking Buffalo, where there is greater poverty and more students speaking little English (more than 40 languages).

According to The News: "King said last week that while the Rochester and Syracuse school districts are also struggling with low student achievement, the superintendents of those districts 'have been very clear with their community that they can, and must, do better.' "

King's insulting assertion that we have not been clear that Buffalo "can and must do better" but Rochester and Syracuse have, is not only false but outrageous. Every time I have heard the superintendent speak she has said, as we all have, that we can and we must do better.

Next the commissioner "went on to say that the Rochester superintendent 'pointed to what's happening in Buffalo to call for a sense of urgency in Rochester around improving performance.' "

Incredibly, this is said even though Buffalo is significantly outperforming Rochester.

"King pointed out a number of factors that make the state of affairs here particularly troubling. He asks:

‘Do you or do you not believe that students can achieve at high levels?’ ”

Commissioner, how dare you? Buffalo teachers, and, indeed, all educators in Buffalo, each day continue to work to surmount challenges few others understand. Why? Because we want our students to reach their fullest potential.

When we submitted the first teacher evaluation plans, they were rejected with no clear explanation of exactly what the commissioner was looking for. Incredibly, we had parts that were initially approved, later disapproved.

King’s suggestion of sending Buffalo students to suburban schools has sadly already exacerbated tensions in our area. Once the suggestion becomes known and attempted in other parts of New York State, it will unfortunately rip other communities apart as well.

Indeed, why is it that of all the other districts with the approximately 250 supposedly “failing” schools, only Buffalo has been ordered to transfer students?

King’s vindictive actions, which apparently come with the support of the Board of Regents, should be below the dignity of a commissioner of education.

Philip Rumore is president of the Buffalo Teachers Federation.