

Rahm Emanuel selects school superintendent

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For his first and most important decision as mayor, Rahm Emanuel has not made an educated choice.

We needed a strong, accomplished, and principled leader for the Chicago Public Schools. Parents, teachers, students and community members have been very clear about what is needed to move our school system from lackluster to top of the line. The Chicago Collaborative Superintendent Search Panel offered criteria for a high-quality superintendent which include a demonstrated knowledge of what works in education and a track record of collaboration, using high-quality assessments instead of over-relying on standardized tests, and improving schools instead of closing or privatizing them.

In J.C. Brizard, we have none of the above.

We local school council members have learned that when we select a principal, we have to focus on the track record, what the person has done, not what he or she says she will do.

According to what parents in Rochester have been telling me today, here's what Mr. Brizard has done: closed schools without community input, expanded standardized testing, cut the arts, increased class size, brought in more charter schools, and overall followed the corporate agenda to privatize public schools.

Equally disturbing is that he has apparently made false claims about his track record regarding the city's graduation rate. He has claimed to have increased the rate, but the facts show that the rate has actually decreased during his tenure, from 49% in 2007 (the year before he became superintendent) to 46% in 2009 (the most recent year reported by the state).

At ANY rate, that's about 25 percentage points below Chicago's current high school graduation rate of 71.8% – so, why are we bringing him here?

Here's more from a 2010 program audit in Rochester: The district didn't have consistent standards for grading students, so grade-point averages varied from school to school. It didn't consistently document the enrollment of district students in charter schools and sometimes paid charter schools for students who weren't city residents. It didn't have standards for buying information technology to make sure that it was compatible with the district's existing infrastructure. There wasn't a good procedure for getting information about "seat capacity" - how much room there was in a grade or class, and how many students could enroll - and there was no process for identifying when students had dropped a class or left a school.

This may not be the welcome Mr. Brizard is hoping for, but parents in Chicago are tired of poor leadership, tired of CEOs who don't listen to us, and, mostly, tired of our schools and our children being used as laboratories for rich corporate philanthropists instead of treated as the precious national treasure that they are. We aren't going to sit still for another disaster waiting to happen.

Candidate qualifications adopted by the Chicago Collaborative Superintendent Search Panel

- Strong education credentials including an excellent teaching history, a track record of high-quality school leadership, and.
- A track record of collaboration with school administrators, teachers, school staff, parents, students and the community.
- A demonstrated commitment to democratic principles in the governance, pedagogy, and culture of our public schools and a challenging comprehensive and enriched curriculum for all children.
- A clear respect for cultural diversity and a belief that education should prepare students to deeply understand the roots of inequality and be prepared to act to change the world.
- A track record of using multiple, high-quality, comprehensive measures to identify school and student needs rather than relying on standardized tests as the single measure of student and school progress.
- A demonstrated commitment to equitable resource allocation and a fully transparent budget process.
- A strong track record of improving schools instead of closing or privatizing them,
- A strong, demonstrated commitment to quality public neighborhood schools with smaller class sizes, equitable funding, union protections, fully-empowered local school councils, and neighborhood enrollment that protects children from exclusion and push out.