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Board of Ed unveils bid to ease the squeeze

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The cash-strapped Board of Education could move students from crammed high schools into underutilized elementary- and middle-school buildings to relieve crowding, Chancellor Harold Levy said.

He also suggests reassigning fifth-graders from elementary schools into less crowded middle schools.

Levy proposed a series of options to help the Board of Ed close a projected $2.3 billion shortfall in its $7 billion capital plan that runs through 2004, while creating more classroom space.

Levy, in a Nov. 21 memo to board members, said there are no easy choices in closing the yawning gap — it may require sacrificing construction of new schools; postponing needed repair projects, or reassigning large numbers of students.

"The triage required to fit the board's policy goals into the available funding will mean no matter what approach you choose, the achievement of important objectives will have to be delayed," Levy said.

State law requires the chancellor to submit amendments to the capital plan when costs exceed budget by 10 percent. The seven-member board must approve changes.

Nearly all the options Levy discussed could create a political firestorm.

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