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Levy wants to nix fix of schools

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Schools Chancellor Harold Levy yesterday proposed shelving construction of a dozen school facilities containing 7,800 additional seats — including the controversial $73 million "Castle-on-the-Hill" in The Bronx — to close a $2.3 billion shortfall.

That's about one-third of the outstanding projects in the 2000-2004 capital plan.

Scores of repair projects would also be delayed to bring the $7.7 billion proposal back to reality.

Levy submitted the cost-cutting amendment to the seven-member Board of Education, which must approve or revise it. He said the projects saved or mothballed were based on crowding conditions in each district.

Still, two members were upset that their pet projects were eliminated.

The Post reported in July how the costs to renovate PS 31 — the century-old, landmarked, castle-like building on Grand Concourse — had ballooned from a minor $3.7 million repair project several years ago into a complete overhaul and expansion totaling $60 million. The cost has since risen to $73 million — a 2,000 percent increase.

Gov. Pataki's school investigators said PS 31 was the symbol of what's wrong with the board's capital planning.

Levy initially supported the expansion, but said the shortfall makes it impractical.

"At $70-to-$75 million, it soaks up too much money," the chancellor said.

But Bronx representative Sandra Lerner blasted Levy's action during a board meeting yesterday, and appealed for the project be salvaged — albeit as a less costly repair job, rather than the current grandiose plan.

Lerner complained that The Bronx, with so few projects in the capital plan, continues to be "short-changed."

Building projects that Schools Chancellor Harold Levy plans to cut from the capital budget:

- $73 million renovation-expansion of PS 31 "Castle-on-the Hill" on Grand Concourse in The Bronx. Building is now closed.
- 800-seat high school in Brooklyn.
- 704-seat PS 263 in District 29, Queens.
- 120-seat addition in District 27, Queens.
- 900-seat PS-IS 900A in District 20, Brooklyn.
- 1,200-seat middle school in District 30, Queens.
- 300-seat Early Childhood Center in District 22, Brooklyn.
- 1,200-seat high school in Manhattan.
- 947-seat IS 43, Staten Island.
- 430-seat PS 244 in District 25, Queens.
- 200-seat addition in District 25, Queens.
- PS 54, Brooklyn.

Projects would not be built in the capital plan that runs through 2004, but design work would continue on all but PS 31.

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