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Levy's 'Awful' Construction Cuts

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Schools Chancellor Harold Levy yesterday presented the Board of Education with a proposal to put 11 school construction projects on hold because the board's five-year capital plan is over budget.

In selecting which of 32 projects would be delayed, Levy said he based his decision on which districts were the most overcrowded and which projects already had an approved site.

Of the 11 that would not be built over the next three years, five are in Queens, four in Brooklyn, one in Manhattan and one in Staten Island.

"The kind of choices we are being forced to make are too awful for words," Levy said before the board met yesterday.

Levy's plan was fairly well received by board members, though they had problems with certain aspects, such as how he picked the 11 projects and how he determined whether a district is overcrowded.

Board president Ninfa Segarra praised Levy's plan — after having repeatedly attacked him over the past few weeks for taking too long to come up with a proposal.

"He met his obligation today, so now the board has to meet its own obligation by quickly approving it or not," Segarra said after the meeting.

Segarra asked board members to be prepared to vote on the chancellor's plan at a special meeting Monday. She predicted yesterday that the plan already had the four votes it needed to pass.

For the 11 projects that won't get built during the current five-year, $7.75-billion capital plan, the chancellor set aside $26 million that will be used to design the schools so they will be ready for construction in the next capital plan.

But there's no telling when the next plan might be passed and how much will be in it or whether Levy will even be chancellor then. Segarra, who was appointed to the board by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, said she was awaiting word from Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg on whether he wanted the board to extend Levy's contract, which expires in June. Segarra said the board is required to take action by April 1.

The board decided to amend the current capital plan because there's only $1.9 billion left but $4.3 billion worth of projects that still haven't been done. Levy's proposed that the board spend the $1.9 billion in the following way: $1.2 billion to build 21 schools, $400 million to do repairs in the schools in the worst condition, $107.5 million to lease and prepare another 10 buildings to ease overcrowding, $125 million to pay for site acquisition for some of the projects and $26 million to design the 11 schools whose construction has been delayed.

The projects are: in Queens, PS 244, PS 263, IS 1200, a 200-seat addition in District 25 and a 120-seat addition District 27; in Manhattan, High School 1200; on Staten Island, IS 43; and in Brooklyn, PS 54, PS/IS 900A, ECC in District 22 and High School 800.

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