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Cash clash threatens Levy plan

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The city schools chancellor's plan to build new schools in the most overcrowded districts was in danger of unraveling last night as several Board of Education members moved to save their pet projects.

The board is scheduled to vote on Schools Chancellor Harold Levy's plan to trim nearly $2.4 billion from a capital plan that has run overbudget.

Levy had pledged that his plan to close the gap would be based on need and that he would deliver schools and repairs to the districts that needed them most.

But sources said the board, for example, was expected to throw $35 million into the plan to renovate a landmark Bronx school to appease the borough's representative on the board, Sandra Lerner.

The original budgeted cost of the Public School 31 project had skyrocketed to nearly $80 million. The school, on the Grand Concourse in the South Bronx, is in a neighborhood with 3,000 empty classroom seats.

"It just soaks up too much money," Levy said at a meeting on the plan Wednesday. "It's expensive, and we need to make a policy decision."

But a spokeswoman for Levy said last night that the chancellor supported Lerner's scaled-back request.

Sources said another board member, Manhattan representative Irving Hamer, was urging his colleagues to add a Manhattan school to the list based on "educational need." Hamer could not be reached for comment last night.

Staten Island representative Jerry Cammarata was expected to fight to protect the one school in his borough that had been included in the capital plan before being cut this week.

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