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Rudy's parting blast at Levy over school-spending deal

By CARL CAMPANILE
Education Reporter

Mayor Giuliani blasted the Board of Education yesterday for last-minute deal-making that reinstated $40 million for a controversial "Castle-on-the-Hill" school-repair project in The Bronx that has empty classroom seats.

The mayor also objected to the board adding a new Manhattan high school to its capital plan, while mothballing the sole proposed school for Staten Island.

A divided seven-member board cut its school-construction program by 11,000 seats to close a projected $2.3 billion shortfall in its five-year capital plan that runs 2004.

The approval — in a 4-3 vote after a contentious debate — was a victory for Schools Chancellor Harold Levy, whose initial plan to preserve schools in the most overcrowded districts was modified slightly to win votes to pass the cost-cutting plan.

The board members representing the mayor and Staten Island proposed a compromise to put Staten Island school IS 43 back into the plan by delaying construction of a Queens school.

But Queens representative Terri Thomson — noting that her borough's schools are the most overcrowded — rejected that idea.

Board members supported two key changes to the Levy plan.

As a compromise, PS 31 — the grandiose $75 million "Castle-on-the-Hill" project on Grand Concourse in The Bronx that Levy had scrapped the other day — was slashed to $40 million and reinserted in the plan.

The mayor opposed it, Coles said, noting the Bronx school district where PS 31 is located is underutilized.

Even more controversial was the deal to add $35 million to lease a facility for a new Manhattan high school, which secured the vote of borough representative Irving Hamer Jr. Two percent of the seats in the Manhattan high-school district are empty.

The project leapfrogged over six other proposed new schools in more overcrowded districts.

An agreement by the City Council to finance the new Frank Sinatra HS in Queens enabled Levy to free up $35 million for the Manhattan school.

Hizzoner boosts beeps on board

Mayor Giuliani yesterday contradicted his own lawyers and endorsed having borough presidents appoint themselves to the Board of Education.

Giuliani's preference comes a day a Corporation Counsel lawyer said it would be improper for the beeps to name themselves — instead of the designees — because they're involved in budget and school-siting issues, posing a potential conflict.

The mayor said he was "very surprised" to hear of the city's legal opinion, which has not yet been put in writing.

Giuliani said his successor, Mike Bloomberg, will have to address the issue. Bloomberg, like Giuliani, wants to abolish the Board of Ed.

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