

## BOARD OUSTS SCHOOLS CHIEF, SAYING CREW LOST HIS FOCUS; MAYOR'S ROLE BECOMES ISSUE

### Building Up To a Parting

#### Fed-Up Giuliani Uses Allies Behind Scenes

By DAN BARRY

As recently as last week, Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani was grudgingly content to leave the fate of his former friend, Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew, in the hands of the seven members of the Board of Education. After all, the mayor is on the verge of declaring his candidacy for the Senate. He needs stability, not complication.

But in recent days, people close to the issue say, Mr. Giuliani became fed up with the long-playing Rudy Crew psychodrama, and let it be known that the chancellor's ouster would make a fine Christmas present. The telling detail behind the mayor's decision came when his two appointees to the board and a third ally suddenly called for an emergency meeting to discuss the vexing matter of whether to extend Dr. Crew's contract.

So there was little need to hold one's breath when school board members emerged from a closed-door meeting yesterday afternoon. By a 4-to-3 vote, Dr. Crew had essentially been fired. And the Giuliani administration had spoken.

"I have no doubt that the outcome of this vote occurred because this was precisely what the mayor wanted," said Steven Sanders, chairman of the State Assembly's Education Committee and a Manhattan Democrat. "At this point it is ridiculous to assert that the mayor does not control the Board of Education. He always did."

In recognition of that perception, Mr. Sanders said, he called Deputy Mayor Randy Levine yesterday morning and made an impassioned, last-minute plea to save Dr. Crew's



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

Rudy Crew's contract as schools chancellor was not renewed.

### TURMOIL CONTINUES

#### Disgusted by 4-3 Vote, Leader May Leave Job Before Term Ends

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

After weeks of complaining that Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew had lost his focus and slipped into deep ambivalence about his job, the New York City Board of Education voted 4-to-3 yesterday not to renew Dr. Crew's contract when it expires in June.

Aides to Dr. Crew said he was so disgusted by the board's action that he might leave sooner, raising the possibility that the nation's largest school system, with 1.1 million children, would be left rudderless at a time when it is under enormous pressure to introduce tough new graduation standards and raise test scores.

The vote was another product of the almost constant turmoil in the highest ranks of the school system and the politically charged atmosphere that has long surrounded education issues in New York City. The city has had 10 chancellors in the last 30 years, and 7 were ousted or resigned under pressure. Dr. Crew, who came from Tacoma, Wash., in October 1995, will be the longest-serving chancellor in decades if he finishes out his contract.

The votes to oust Dr. Crew were cast by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's three allies on the board and by Terri Thomson, the Queens member who in recent months has acted as the swing vote. Those members said after the vote that they had been particularly troubled by Dr. Crew's behavior in recent weeks. They cited his persistent refusal to reveal whether he wanted to stay on, his shrugging off a state report charging widespread attendance fraud, and his jibe last week that a City Councilman was "too short" to criticize him.

But a supporter of Dr. Crew, William C. Thompson Jr., the board president, said after the vote that "the mayor's fingerprints are on this" and that it was "a recipe for disaster for this school system."

Dr. Crew kept a low profile yesterday, staying inside his home in Brooklyn Heights with his four grown children, who were visiting for the holidays. He issued a long, at times emotional, statement saying that the city's schoolchildren "will always be in my heart." Dr. Crew's spokeswoman, Karen Crowe, said after the vote that he did not come to work yesterday because "he prefers to be lynched in absentia."

For his part, Mr. Giuliani said he

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## In Search of a New Chancellor

The New York City Board of Education's decision not to extend Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew's contract beyond its expiration next June was almost inevitable, given the persistent friction between Dr. Crew and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and the chancellor's failure to say definitively whether he wished to serve an additional term. To avoid a lame-duck period during which little would get done, the board needs to buy out the remainder of Dr. Crew's contract and install an able interim chancellor as swiftly as possible. Steady leadership in the coming months will be crucial if the system is to move forward with reforms that were begun on Dr. Crew's watch but have yet to reach fruition.

Dr. Crew leaves behind a commendable record after slightly more than four years in office. First and foremost, he preached accountability and championed the belief that all the system's children can learn. His devotion to higher standards allowed the system to boost reading scores slightly in each of the last three years. He persuaded the State Legislature to rewrite the school governance laws so that the system could hold principals and superintendents accountable for how their schools and districts perform. But the chancellor had yet to create the administrative infrastructure to carry out his reforms.

Dr. Crew initially enjoyed a close relationship with the mayor. But his fortunes began to decline last spring when he and Mr. Giuliani clashed over how the system should proceed on school construction. The two came into conflict again when Mr. Giuliani endorsed a school voucher experiment that the chancellor vehemently opposed. These disputes eroded Dr. Crew's support in City Hall and among the mayor's appointees on the board of education.

But Dr. Crew's biggest mistake in the eyes of his supporters was failing to make up his mind soon enough about whether he wished to serve beyond the term of his current contract. His ambivalence persisted from August — when it became known that he was being considered for another job — right up to this week, when board members got tired of the uncertainty and called a special meeting to vote on his contract extension.

Dr. Crew has been a stabilizing force both because of his leadership abilities and the fact that he is the longest-serving chancellor in nearly 20 years. This page has consistently urged him to stay on in the interest of seeing his reforms through to the end. But now that the board has voted to pursue a different course, it must move swiftly to choose a new leader who can build on what this chancellor has accomplished.