

OUR SCHOOLS IN TURMOIL

2 Qns. schools gain freedom from Ed. Board

By SUSAN EDELMAN
Education Reporter

Two alternative city high schools in Queens are set to become the first in the state to convert to charter schools — and shed the shackles of the Board of Ed bureaucracy.

Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew gave his blessing yesterday to applications by International HS, which admits recent immigrants who can't speak English, and Middle College HS, which focuses on kids with difficulties, to become independently run charter schools.

The applications were the first sent to the state Board of Regents for approval.

"We think it's significant that these very schools, which have a mission to work with low-achieving or at-risk students, are the first charter conversion schools out of the box in New York City," said Arthur Greenberg, head of the chancellor's Office of Charter and New Schools.

Parents and administrators at the two schools — both located at La Guardia Community College — were ecstatic.

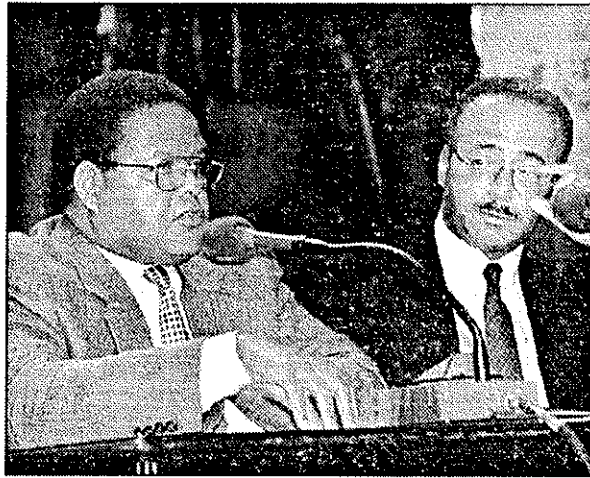
"We won't have to answer to the board. We won't have to go through the board for anything," said Debbie Rizzo, PFA president at Middle College HS, which has 510 kids.

Charter schools get tax money — which goes into their bank accounts to spend as they see fit. They can shop around for the best deals on items like cafeteria and payroll services instead of relying on the Board of Ed to provide them.

"We can probably get things at a much better price a lot quicker," Rizzo said, adding that savings would be used to beef up the school's computer lab and library.

Under the board's stranglehold, even planning a field trip can go awry. Last spring, Rizzo said, the school spent months planning a field trip to Long Island — only to be told by board bureaucrats that "no field trips are allowed in June."

"I almost had a heart attack," she said. "We were stressed out for 10 days before we got that reversed."



FATE UNDECIDED: Board of Ed President William Thompson could be out Tuesday, after the board meets. Elizabeth Lippman

Crew: Ed. Board prez deserves a 2nd go-round

By Brian Blomquist in
Washington and Tom Topousis
in New York

Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew sprang to the defense of embattled Board of Education President William Thompson yesterday, saying the schools are in for a "long and arduous haul" if he's deposed.

Crew's spirited support for Thompson comes as Mayor Giuliani says he's still undecided over whom he'll back when the board meets Tuesday to choose a president. Thompson has said he wants to serve another year.

"There's no reason to take Thompson out as president. He's done a good job as the president," said Crew, who was in Washington yesterday to meet with U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley. The two talked about efforts to end social promotion.

Asked if a move to unseat Thompson would be considered a bloodbath, Crew said, "It would be. It would be. But that doesn't say anything about [me] leaving. It just says you're in for a very, very long and arduous haul."

Giuliani appoints two of the seven board members and he has the support of at least one other, Staten Island's representative Jerry Camaratta. A fourth member, Terri Thomson of Queens, often backs the mayor's positions and is the swing vote.

Sources say Giuliani's aides approached Thomson about taking the president's job, but she turned it down. Next in line on the mayor's list is one of his appointees, Deputy Mayor Ninfa Segarra.

It wasn't clear yesterday whether Queens Borough President Claire Shulman would back Giuliani in a bid to oust Thompson. Shulman didn't return calls.

Giuliani would not answer questions about Thompson's fate. And he declined to assess the board president's performance over the past three years.

"Well, I've given a lot of thought to it, of course. I would be less than candid if I didn't say I gave a lot of thought to it. But I don't think I'm ready to tell you those thoughts," Giuliani said.

Thompson has been one of Crew's staunchest allies on the board, most recently backing the chancellor in his battle against Giuliani's call for private-school vouchers — the cause of a huge rift between the chancellor and the mayor.