

Crew: It's vouchers or me



CIVICS LESSON: Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew at Public School 20 in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, in January. He vows he'll resign if Mayor Giuliani's school voucher plan succeeds.

Chancellor vows to walk if mayor's plan passes

By **JOANNE WASSERMAN**
and **RUSS BUETTNER**
Daily News Staff Writers

Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew threatened to quit yesterday if Mayor Giuliani pushes through a plan to give public money to parents who send their kids to private schools.

"I wouldn't stay here if that happens," Crew said. "Always in your life you come up to the proverbial hill to die on. This is mine."

Crew's stance raised the specter of a fight to the floor with Giuliani over the hot-button issue of school vouchers, possibly rupturing a close relationship that contrasted with the mayor's caustic dealings with Crew's predecessor.

The mayor has touted vouchers across the country and put \$12 million in next year's budget for a test voucher plan, arguing that city schools would benefit from competition.

The plan would use tax money to pay a portion of private-school tuition for city students, thus allowing lower-income parents to choose between private and public education.

Crew called vouchers "doing something for some at the expense of many."

"Vouchers take money from this system, which is already underfunded, and it really does end the notion of public school education in this city," Crew said, speaking to the Daily News Editorial Board by telephone from California. "I'm not going to be the head of a system that will embrace something that will cause its own demise."

Crew added: "I'm against the principle of using public dollars to start private schools — it devalues public schools."

A source close to Crew, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Crew told the Board of Education it must decide between vouchers and him.

"He has told them, 'If that is what you think the direction of public education should be, that is the nail in the coffin. ... I will not be part of a system that is torn apart,'" the source said.

The mayor — who called the voucher plan "a terrible mistake" four years ago but has since changed his stance — was traveling in Washington and couldn't be reached. Around the nation, voucher plans are supported by the Republican Party, whose support Giuliani needs to seek higher office.

Deputy Mayor Joe Lhota last night called Crew's threat to quit "overreacting."

"At the end of the day," he said, "I believe that reason will prevail and that Rudy Crew will come around on this issue as well."

Giuliani officials lobbied Board of Education members to approve a voucher plan. Three of seven board members are prepared to approve the proposal.

Three others are sided with Crew. The teachers union also opposes vouchers.

Giuliani needs the vote of Terri Thomson, who was appointed by Queens Borough President Claire Shulman, a frequent Giuliani ally.

Irving Hamer, the board's Manhattan representative, said Crew shouldn't have taken the battle public — but agreed the chancellor should oppose vouchers. "I want him to duke it out with the mayor and whoever else," Hamer said.

It's not clear whether Giuliani's plan could go forward without changes to state law. Assemblyman Steven Sanders (D-Manhattan) has warned that it would violate the state Constitution.

Hinting at Giuliani's aspirations for higher office, Crew said he hopes the mayor will back down. "I'm really hopeful that the mayor will reconsider — it's not worth the political currency."

A Queens mom holds swing vote on board

By **JOANNE WASSERMAN**
and **ALISON GENDAR**
Daily News Staff Writers




Terri Thomson, a woman with a reputation for getting things done out of the limelight, is in a high-profile spot. She's the swing vote on an issue that could mean the resignation of a schools chancellor.

With Board of Education votes on school vouchers lining up 3 to 3, Thomson could tip the balance. But the mother of two parochial school graduates said she hasn't decided where she stands on vouchers.


"I have a 3-foot-high stack of reading material on vouchers, to be read, thought about," said the Citibank vice president. "This came out of the blue. Vouchers have not been on the

WHERE THEY STAND




Board members who back the mayor's voucher program:

<p>Ninfa Segarra mayoral appointee</p>  <p style="font-size: 2em;">✓</p>	<p>Dr. Irene Impellizzeri (vice president) mayoral appointee</p>  <p style="font-size: 2em;">✓</p>	<p>Jerry Cammarata Staten Island representative</p>  <p style="font-size: 2em;">✓</p>
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Undecided:

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Board members against program:

<p>William Thompson (president) Brooklyn representative</p>  <p style="font-size: 2em;">X</p>	<p>Dr. Irving Hamer Manhattan representative</p>  <p style="font-size: 2em;">X</p>	<p>Sandra Lerner Bronx representative</p>  <p style="font-size: 2em;">X</p>
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front burner for me." Thomson's former boss and long-time friend Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-Queens) said she won't give in to pressure. "She is a tough lady, with a lot of integrity," said Ackerman, who is against vouchers.

He said Thomson asked his opinion two weeks ago, but she didn't share her view. "She was appointed by [Queens Borough President] Claire Shulman, a good, strong, political ally of the mayor," he said. "But I would

not be shocked if she did not support the mayor." Thomson has developed a reputation for getting things done for Queens schools. She's lobbied to get overcrowded schools in the borough a bigger slice of the proposed \$10.9 bil-

lion capital plan. She talked with Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew last night for more than 20 minutes. He was in California at a conference. She said the call had nothing to do with vouchers, but was a routine chat.