

R E G I O N

If Crew's Job Offer Is a Ploy, It May Backfire

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

As Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew considers a new job in Seattle, the possibility of his staying in New York until his contract expires next June may depend on whether the Board of Education is willing to keep him beyond that.

News

Analysis

Dr. Crew has said that he wants to stay, but will leave if he finds he is no longer effective. Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and his allies on the Board of Education, however, have not said whether they want to keep him by renewing his contract, a decision that must be made by January.

In confirming that he is interested in the Seattle job, Dr. Crew may be trying to smoke out the Mayor and the board, forcing some signal on his contract earlier than they intended.

Without a long-term commitment from the board, there are many reasons why Dr. Crew could see diminishing returns in serving out even the current school year. Why struggle with several extremely risky initiatives — like taking over the city's 40 worst schools and preparing to send an estimated 300,000 failing children to mandatory summer school next year — if the board no longer wants him and will be searching for a successor? Why stay until the very last day of his contract, dealing with a Mayor who has clashed with him over education policy, if the board is going to force him out four months before he becomes entitled to a city pension?

And if he is going to be a lame duck by January, embarrassed at not having his contract renewed, deprived of the authority to command his troops, why not get it over with and leave now?

Of course the disadvantage of confessing that he had thought about moving on is that critics could question his commitment to the 1.1 million schoolchildren in New York City. Parents, children and educators might ask which matters more: Rudy Crew's ego and career plans, or the work itself? In fact, Dr. Crew said last week, it is the children who weigh most heavily on him.

Already, some aides to Mr. Giuli-

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ani say that Dr. Crew has left them no choice but to start thinking about a successor, and they are blaming the Chancellor for creating a sense of uncertainty on the eve of a new school year.

"It is unfortunate, particularly with the timing just before we begin school, that he has raised any issue about finishing the school year, and that he raised the specter about the next year," Ninfa Segarra, a deputy mayor and Mr. Giuliani's appointee to the Board of Education, said yesterday. "It does add a certain tension to the environment that shouldn't have been there."

Ms. Segarra said that although no one was talking yet about a search for a new chancellor, she would not be surprised if discussions did arise,

at least in general terms, on how to look, where to look and what kind of person to look for.

"Because he's given us these mixed clues, you don't want to find yourself, as an institution or as a city, without anybody," Ms. Segarra said. To approach candidates, she said, would be "jumping the gun." But to think about the transition, she added, would simply be responsible.

Other officials close to City Hall said yesterday that Mr. Giuliani's aides had already begun talking about limiting a future search to candidates from New York City because they might be more likely to stay. Dr. Crew has cited his personal connections to the Northwest as a factor in his decision. Three of his four children live on the West Coast, and two of them are students at the University of Washington, which is recruiting him.

As Dr. Crew recognized on Friday, when he said politics would be a factor in his decision on whether to stay or go, Mayor Giuliani has all but declared that he will run for the Senate next year, a campaign in which education is likely to be a major issue. With Dr. Crew out of the way, Mr. Giuliani might be able to resurrect such ideas as publicly financed vouchers to send children to private school, which the Chancellor had blocked.

For Mr. Giuliani, the appearance of forcing out another chancellor — after the departure of Ramon C. Cortines under pressure four years ago — could be damaging, especially when Dr. Crew is the most prominent black official in New York City. But the picture looks different if the talk of leaving comes from Dr. Crew, not the Mayor.

While Mr. Giuliani does not necessarily control the board, he was able to engineer a 4-to-3 majority last spring, in a bitter dispute over the school system's budget for construction and repairs. He might be able to do so once again, when Dr. Crew's job is at stake.

Richard L. McCormick, the president of the University of Washington, confirmed on Friday that university officials would like Dr. Crew to become the director of its newly approved Institute for K-12 Leadership, a research center to train principals and superintendents. He said the university had no timetable and would hold the job open for Dr. Crew, who is the only candidate at this point.

One clue to the future may come toward the end of September, when the Board of Education will deliver its annual review of Dr. Crew's performance. The evaluation usually results in a pro forma document, so bland and bureaucratic it is ignored by the school system and the press alike. But this year, Jerry Cammarata, the Staten Island member of the board and chairman of the review committee, is promising a much tougher, more comprehensive look at Dr. Crew's policies and how well they have succeeded.

Mr. Cammarata, traditionally an ally of Mr. Giuliani, said there was no link between the evaluation and the extension of Dr. Crew's contract. But people familiar with the thinking of City Hall recalled yesterday that in an interview last summer, Dr. Crew gave himself a C. What if, they wondered, the board followed his lead? No one would say whether, in the fight for a contract, a C was a passing grade.