

The Metro Section

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Officials Say Levy Will Seek Chancellor Job

4 on Board Are Said To Favor His Candidacy

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS
and LYNETTE HOLLOWAY

With few strong candidates applying for the job, Harold O. Levy, New York City's interim schools chancellor, has been persuaded to declare his candidacy for the long-term position of chancellor, officials of the New York City school system said yesterday.

The officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that either Mr. Levy or the Board of Education would announce his candidacy at the regularly scheduled board meeting tomorrow. The board will then add him to the list of applicants, officials said, but it is not expected to take a formal vote on his or any other candidacy at this time.

Mr. Levy's entry immediately makes him the front-runner for appointment as chancellor since at least four of the seven members of the Board of Education have indicated that they have been impressed by Mr. Levy's leadership and would like to keep him on at least through December. By that time, Mr. Levy, whose six-month interim contract expires in June 30, would have shepherded the school system through the ambitious summer school program and the often-problematic opening of schools in September.

It will also be clear by then whether Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani will remain as mayor for another year or go to Washington as a United States senator.

What remained unclear yesterday was how long a contract the Board of Education members would be willing to give Mr. Levy — until December, which would give him a year as the school system's leader, or to December 2001, when a new mayor will have been elected, or beyond.

Mr. Levy, on a leave of absence as a corporate lawyer for Citigroup, declined comment yesterday and until now has declined to say whether he was interested in the long-term job. He has explained that he wanted to avoid the political maneuvering of the search for a new chancellor and concentrate on the immediate task of running the school system.

But officials said yesterday that in the last few days, some board members had been cajoling Mr. Levy to fill the vacuum of serious candidates that has developed during the search for a successor to Rudy Crew, who was ousted in December.

"He has been convinced to do it," one education official said.

Mr. Levy's ability to establish himself quickly as a strong manager and the uncertainty of the political landscape in New York — with an election for mayor scheduled for November 2001 — has made it difficult to attract strong candidates for chancellor. Some officials said that most of the board believed it did not make sense to appoint a new chancellor until after the November election, when it will be clear whether Mr. Giuliani will remain as mayor for another year.

Mr. Levy was appointed by a divided board, against the wishes of Mr. Giuliani. But the mayor, who was a harsh critic of Mr. Levy in the days after his appointment, remained determinedly and tellingly neutral yesterday on the question of whether Mr. Levy deserved to stay beyond his six-month interim contract.

Asked how he would grade Mr. Levy's