

THE CITY

School chief search focuses on 6

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With an announcement from Manhattan Board of Education member Dr. Irving Hamer yesterday afternoon that he planned to torpedo his surprise candidacy for city schools chancellor just a day after revealing it, the search to replace ousted Chancellor Rudy Crew is expected to re-focus on six more conventional candidates.

In the wake of Hamer's speedy exit, Jerry Cammarata, Staten Island's representative to the board, indicated yesterday that interim Chancellor Harold O. Levy re-

mains the odds-on favorite to get the long-term nod.

"[Levy] was a fait d'accomplit," admitted Cammarata yesterday when asked about the field of candidates before learning of Hamer's withdrawal announcement.

But unnamed sources in the Board of Education aren't sure Levy's shoo-in status will hold up in the wake of recent events.

They believe Hamer's left-field move was calculated and designed to open up the field by making it impossible for the Manhattan board member to give Levy a thumbs-up.

A spokeswoman in Hamer's of-

fice said yesterday that Hamer would have no official comment, but Levy was given a 6-month contract as interim chancellor in January by a vote of 4 to 3, with Hamer one of those voting in his favor. Cammarata and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's appointees to the Board of Ed — Irene Impellizzeri and Ninfa Segarra — voted against Levy.

If all the board members, except Hamer, stick with their positions of four months ago, Levy's hopes for confirmation may well be dashed, opening the way for a dark horse.

Hamer, a former deputy commissioner in New York state's education department and a one-time candidate for chancellor before being appointed Manhattan's representative to the board by Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, surprised everyone — including Cammarata and Borough President Guy V. Molinari — Thursday when word leaked out that he had belatedly tossed his hat into the ring the previous evening during a private meeting with board president William C. Thompson Jr.

Borough President Guy Molinari yesterday called Hamer's move "an interesting kettle of fish."

He said that he had met with Levy a few weeks ago and found him "very engaging, personable

and likable."

"I was favorably impressed," he added.

But when asked if he would support his bid for permanence in the chancellor's seat, Molinari demurred. "I can't go that far to support his candidacy. I really don't know the other candidates."

Victoria Streitfeld, publicist for the central Board members, said interviews have officially been extended to just six candidates.

In addition to Levy, a list released by Ms. Streitfeld's office yesterday included Dr. Jerome Clark, chief of staff and vice president for institutional advancement at Bowie State University, Bowie, Md.; Dr. James P. Gallagher, president of Philadelphia University in Pennsylvania; Dr. Joan P. Kowal, most recently superintendent of schools for Palm Beach County, Fla.;

Also, Dr. Richard T. LaPointe, president and publisher of Loubach Literacy and New Readers Press in Syracuse, N.Y.; and Anthony J. Trujillo, director of district and school services who also heads the America's Choice Program at the National Center on Education and the Economy.

"The interviews have been scheduled in the next several weeks," said Ms. Streitfeld. "Levy's contract goes through July. The timetable [for selecting a permanent chancellor] has not changed."