

## THE ISLAND

# Mayor finds \$\$\$ for IS 43

■ Intermediate school planned for New Springville had been taken out of the Board of Ed's plans

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A new intermediate school for Staten Island has been saved for now.

Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani is expected to announce this afternoon that he secured money to build a 900-plus seat school in New Springville, recently shelved by the Board of Education in a bitter battle over the school construction budget.

In their final days in office, the mayor and Borough President Guy V. Molinari apparently found money for IS 43 and will be able

to reverse the Board of Education's decision to bounce the project into the next five-year capital plan.

"If it wasn't included in the current plan, we would be looking at seven or eight more years before it opened. We have tremendous growth on Staten Island and that would be a disaster for the community," said Molinari. "We are not small town USA on Staten Island anymore."

By reallocating money in the city budget, including \$40 million for a new museum that was to built next to be the St. George Ferry Terminal, the mayor was able to fund the \$55 million school. Designs for the museum, to be operated by the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, hadn't been completed and the project was likely to be pushed back anyway, said Molinari.

"We aren't going to be building a new school at the expense of the other projects," Molinari said.

The mayor will identify exact sources of funding at a City Hall press conference today, according to Molinari, who plans to be at his side.

Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy postponed 11 new schools or additions, including IS 43, in an effort to cope with a more than \$2 billion construction budget shortfall. Severe cost underestimates left the school system with only half the money needed for construction and repair jobs through 2004.

Levy's decision, based on current district capacity, garnered fierce criticism from Staten Island officials and the mayor because it ignored projected growth. Already, Molinari and Borough President-elect James Molinaro have said they don't want the chancellor's contract renewed.

"Levy was going to stop that school no matter what he had to do," said Molinari, who

has convinced the Island's board representative, Jerry Cammarata, to vote against keeping Levy when the time comes.

The chancellor, through a spokeswoman, declined to comment on the mayor's anticipated announcement, but two weeks ago in an interview with the Advance, Levy said he disagreed with Giuliani's attempt to fund a Staten Island middle school when other parts of the city are far more crowded.

Overall, District 31, which oversees all Staten Island elementary and intermediate public schools, is at 94 percent capacity. By comparison, Queens high schools are at 122 percent capacity. Still, some last minute political maneuvering managed to add school seats to underutilized districts in Manhattan and the Bronx.

Levy hasn't indicated if he wants to remain as schools chief and Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg has been hush on whether he wants Levy to stay. The seven-member board must decide by April if his contract will be extended.

"The chancellor and the board have done a gross injustice to Staten Island and Staten Island children," said Cammarata, an outspoken critic of the chancellor. "It was disappointing that the school couldn't be saved legitimately and appropriately from the Board of Education."

Although Cammarata and the mayor's two appointees voted against the chancellor's construction amendment, board members from the other four boroughs supported the plan.

Queens representative Terri Thomson wouldn't approve an alternate plan that axed a high school in her district to save a middle school in Staten Island because Queens has the most severe overcrowding problem in the city. Queens Borough President Claire Shulman favored the trade-off, but Ms. Thomson defied her boss' wish.

"Terri wasn't sensitive to Staten Island, but Claire Shulman understood our needs. If she had a representative she could exercise more control over, we might have gotten that school without the mayor's intervention," said Molinari.

Molinari and Deputy Mayor Anthony Coles admitted that Cammarata's fractured relationship with Levy didn't help his ability to lobby for IS 43. However, they said Cammarata's job is to speak out if Staten Island is being treated unfairly or if he disagrees with the direction of the Board of Education.

IS 43, designed to open in 2004, will siphon overflow from Laurie Intermediate School, New Springville, and Markham Intermediate School in Graniteville. Laurie is at 112-percent capacity with just under 2,000 students. Markham, which is at 119-percent capacity, operates on split sessions, with one group of students taking classes in the morning and another group attending in the afternoon.

The planned intermediate school will be built on Marsh Avenue, next door to PS 58, which is currently under construction and scheduled to be finished by December 2002. The site behind the Staten Island Mall is in the middle of one of the borough's most densely populated communities.

Regardless of who saved the school, parents and local educators are just glad it's back on the map.

"Like every other borough, new schools are always needed here. We welcome new neighbors, but we don't have enough seats for their children," said Roberta Koffert, PTA president at Laurie. "This will alleviate some of the pressure, but it's not the answer. It's still very good news and right now, I'm willing to accept that."