

Turnout low for school forum

Few dozen show up for Charlotte High meeting

JUSTIN MURPHY

STAFF WRITER

Part of the reason Charlotte High School's graduation rate is so poor — 36 percent for school year 2012-13 — is that most students have to travel so far to get there, depressing attendance. Twenty percent of students were missing on any given day last year, the worst rate in the Rochester School District.

Attendance was no better Tuesday night at a community forum to discuss Superintendent Bolgen Vargas' suggestion to close the school in 2017. Fewer than 50 people came, the majority of them school staff, alumni or Charlotte neighborhood residents.

Some past school closure proposals have set off firestorms of opposition from school members and residents who cherish the school's presence there. Charlotte — at least in its current form, with its current students — is not inspiring the same defense.

Instead, the neighbors and alumni spent the evening contrasting the Charlotte High School of their memory — a community anchor, filled with dedicated students from the neighborhood — with the current version. Living close to the school, they said, is now generally an unpleasant experience. There was little evidence of meaningful connections between students and residents.

"If they can't be confined in this school, they shouldn't be in this neighborhood," said Kennetha DeBot, a Charlotte resident and parent of an 11th-grader, speaking of students at both Charlotte and the Leadership Academy for Young Men, which uses the same building. "They're not here to sit in my yard and smoke pot, to disrespect my property, to scare my dogs."

Instead, they asked for a neighborhood school or a magnet school of some kind — Monroe County Legislator Tony Micciche suggested it accept only students with at least a C average.

Vargas' plan would phase out Charlotte over the next two years and let the Leadership Academy expand in place. It still requires approval from the school board at a vote in March.

It is a pre-emptive measure intended to head off action from the New York State Education Department, which in March told the district it had a few months to close or radically alter East High School. After much scrambling, the University of Rochester stepped in to help at East High, but Charlotte is different — it only has 450 students on the books, of whom about a third either attend class at All City High or are chronically absent.

JMURPHY7@DemocratandChronicle.com