

## Cuomo signs bill to fund upgrades to city schools

### Schools

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ALBANY - Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed a bill late Tuesday allowing the next phase of Rochester's \$1.3 billion school modernization program to go forward as planned.

Cuomo's signature ends several weeks of uncertainty surrounding the bill, which frees up state funds to cover costs for Phase II of the construction program.

Cuomo, a Democrat, signed the bill without com-

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ment. He faced a Wednesday deadline to approve or veto it.

The bill allows the modernization program to get an extra allotment of state building aid for certain schools, which will allow officials to complete projects more efficiently and avoid serious funding shortfalls that occurred during Phase I.

"This is great news for the families and staff members of the Rochester City School District," interim Superintendent Linda L. Cimusz said in a written statement. "It's especially important for the eight school communities whose facilities will be fully renovated more quickly, at lower cost, with less student disruption and greater project efficiency than we could achieve without this important bill."

Building aid is meted out in allotments meant to cover a five-year period. The bill provides 10 years' worth of aid that can be spent now, to ensure the construction work is fully funded.

Startup work on Phase II, in which officials plan to spend \$435 million to modernize 13 schools, had been largely halted because of lack of funds.

The funding shortfall came as the result of a cascade of events triggered by the unwillingness of state Assemblyman David Gantt to support the funding legislation.

Gantt, D-Rochester, delayed an Assembly vote on the bill until June 17, the final full day of the state Legislature's 2016 session. The uncertainty led the Rochester City School District to stop advancing money for Phase II startup work and the city of Rochester postponed action to reimburse the school district for those advances.

The senior member of Rochester's state legislative delegation, Gantt said he had unanswered questions about some aspects of Phase I work. Ultimately, the Assembly passed the bill 134-8, with Gantt voting against it.

In her statement, Cimusz thanked Assemblyman Joseph Morelle, DIrondequoit, for his staunch support of the plan.

The Senate unanimously passed the bill earlier in June.

Design work on several schools planned for the start of Phase II ground to a halt.

The one exception was Monroe High School, where modernization officials pressed ahead with preparations for a construction start later this summer.

A portion of the work began more than a year ago and the building already has been unoccupied for a full school year.

Mike Schmidt, the school district's chief operating officer, said now that the funding has been approved, the Monroe project is ready to move forward. Work could begin there by August. Students are expected to be back in the building by September 2017.

"We're scheduled to be on track, but we need to hit all of our benchmarks to hit that timeline," said Schmidt.

Construction work could begin in the spring of 2017 at John Walton Spencer School 16 and Virgil I. Grissom School 7.

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