

Early College HS may move to Charlotte

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The Rochester City School District is proposing moving high-achieving Early College International High School from its cramped space on Genesee Street to the roomy but remote Charlotte High School campus, it announced Wednesday.

Early College had a 70 percent graduation rate in 2016 and anticipates that number will rise to about 78 percent this year. About 50 students are taking free college courses at Monroe Community College.

In a district where building space and academic needs are seldom perfectly aligned, though, it has become the odd school out. It shares the old Madison High School building with Wilson Foundation Academy, which next year will grow out to K-8 and take over all three floors. Since Early College was founded six years ago, the dream has been to locate it on the downtown Monroe Community College campus. That has proven easier said than done, though. Last month, School Chief Amy Schiavi said the tentative plan was to keep the school in tight quarters with Wilson Foundation for another year. That has changed, though. Schiavi and Chief Operations Officer Mike Schmidt said Wednesday they're recommending that the school be moved into swing space at the Charlotte campus, where it would share quarters with the all-male Leadership Academy for Young Men.

"You can only put so much instructional coursework in one space," Schmidt said. "The more we worked the problem from a facilities perspective, we realized we couldn't meet the (two schools' needs) on Genesee Street."

The plan is not final; it still requires the approval of Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams and, perhaps, the school board, though neither the administration nor School Board President Van White were clear on that point Wednesday.

The main drawback to the Charlotte solution is that students' commute from school to MCC, or home to school, becomes much longer. Only six of the school's 370 or so students live north of Seneca Park.

The Rochester-Genesee Regional Transit Authority's trip planner shows that the bus ride from Charlotte High School to the Kodak Tower, site of the new MCC campus, is 26 minutes. The trip from the Genesee Street building, on the other hand, is 16 minutes, or 42 minutes to the Brighton campus. Schmidt said the district would be willing to supplement the RTS bus service if it proves too slow. As for Leadership Academy, it had been promised a building to itself after Charlotte High School was closed two years ago. The school community considered that particularly important because it is all boys; the effect is ruined if girls from another school are walking the same halls.

"It took us awhile to get (Charlotte) to just house males, and now we're talking about maybe putting some females in there, so that's a concern I

have about how it affects the mission,” White said.

Schmidt and Schiavi said the two schools’ schedules would be staggered, and physical spaces separated, in a way to segregate them as effectively as possible. They would not merge sports teams.

Neither school’s principal could be reached for comment Wednesday afternoon.

Early College staff and parents already complained about this arrangement once last year, when it was proposed as part of a short-lived idea to preserve Martin Anderson School 1. A good portion of the school’s grant funding is contingent on it sending a significant number of students to college classes.

As for the ultimate goal, Schmidt said the district wants to find “a better solution,” but wouldn’t commit to an eventual colocation on the MCC campus. He also left open the idea that Leadership Academy could end up moving as well, as part of a broader facilities survey that’s beginning now.

“We’re open to any scenarios that involve our schools,” he said. “We have a lot of motivation to make this as short a stay as possible (for Early College). ... We believe we’re going to have successful closure to this.”

White said he’s been speaking with the superintendent and is hoping to find some alternate solution.

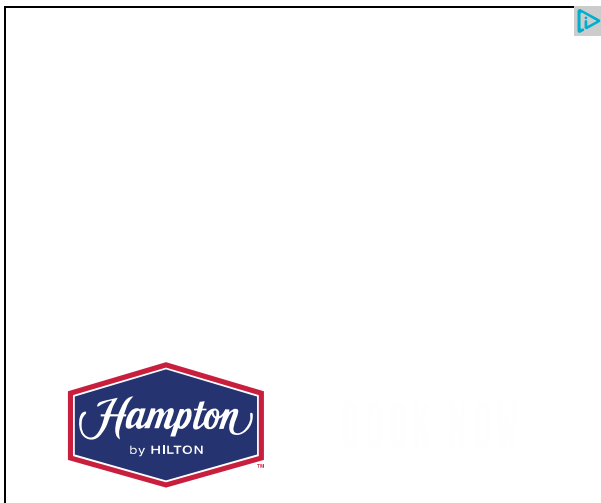
“Charlotte is one of the clear options,” he said. “But I don’t know if it’s the final one.” Early College community members intend to speak their minds at the school board meeting next Thursday.

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