

Early College students, staff protest proposal

JUSTIN MURPHY

@CITIZENMURPHY

Several dozen students and staff members at Rochester Early College International High School protested outside the school Tuesday afternoon, trying to fend off a proposed move to the Charlotte campus on the opposite side of the city.

The school currently shares space on the Madison campus with Wilson Foundation Academy, which will grow next year to fill the entire building as part of a planned build-out.

Early College had a plan, too: to move to the downtown Monroe Community College campus. The school's main attraction is that students can take free courses there.

In its seven-year existence, though, the school has gotten no closer to that goal. It has instead stayed in its Genesee Street swing space until now, when it's been squeezed out.

The idea of moving to Charlotte was put forth last month by the district and immediately drew criticism from school community members, who said the college mission would be ruined if the school were placed so far from downtown.

RCSD Chief Operating Officer Mike Schmidt last month said the conversations with MCC are 'ongoing and productive,' but he wouldn't commit to moving Early College there in the short or long term.

As for MCC, spokeswoman Cynthia Mapes wrote in an email: 'MCC has space at our downtown campus for (Early College) students; whether or when they will occupy that space is the subject of ongoing conversations.'

Prophet Hampton, an 11th-grader, is enrolled to take sports management and introduction to business next year at MCC, but doesn't know whether he could make it work with the commute to Charlotte.

'I have a car, so that would be a lot of driving and a lot of gas,' he said Tuesday. 'I'm pretty sure my attendance would suffer.'

Anfa Bulle, like Hampton, lives right down the street from the current school site. She walks to school, which keeps her family from worrying about her on a long commute.

'This school has the right amount of people, it's really diverse and it has a lot of opportunities that other schools don't offer,' she said.

A new wrinkle emerged Tuesday regarding the Charlotte plan. Early College counselor Stefan McDonald said he's been in meetings at All City High, another high school program on Ridgeway Avenue, to discuss sending some Early College students there rather than Charlotte.

The district insists no final decisions have been made, and its plans are apparently continuing to evolve.

'Our intention was never to move all students to Charlotte,' district spokesman Amit Chitre wrote in an email Tuesday. 'We were seeking to move eligible students to an MCC campus, as was our original intent, while finding a space for the remaining students.'

In an interview last month, Schmidt and School Chief Amy Schiavi did not mention dividing students between Charlotte and any other building, whether MCC or All City, in 2017-18.

There is no obvious good solution. Early College doesn't want to stay on Genesee Street any longer than it needs to, but staff there are afraid a lateral move to Charlotte would be a step backward from their ultimate goal.

'The kids feel like they're getting traded like poker chips,' McDonald said. 'Things are going on, and families and kids don't know about it.'

JMURPHY7@Gannett.com



OpenTable®
Diners' Choice Award

portico BY PIERO VIVIANI | **LAGO** RESORT-CASINO

Whether celebrating a night out, a big win or simply enjoying the finest that the Finger Lakes region has to offer, Portico has your table waiting.

MAKE RESERVATIONS

Must be 21 or older. For help with problem gambling call 877.8.HOPENY or text HOPENY (467369).