

# Fate of Boys Academy at School 9 undecided

## Vargas set to meet with state representatives Friday about plan

**JUSTIN MURPHY**

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The Rochester school board met late into Thursday night on the question of the Boys Academy at School 9 and whether some of its students should move to the Charlotte High School campus, but its input may be rendered moot Friday. The board had a lengthy closed-door discussion on whether to direct Bolgen Vargas, the city's superintendent of schools, to keep the academy at School 9 on North Clinton Avenue until he gets approval from the state education department to do otherwise. The meeting lasted past press time, but Vargas said a meeting with the state on that very topic is scheduled for Friday.

If the state agrees with his proposal to move the academy, he can go forward with it against parents' wishes due to the receivership powers he recently received at School 9 and 13 other schools.

The Boys Academy program was begun several years ago by School 9 Assistant Principal Burnice Green as a way to focus on boys who were struggling academically or emotionally. Its students wear shirts and ties to school and try to foster in one another a sense of responsibility and discipline.

Its popularity led to a grow-out to the seventh and eighth grades, even though the rest of the school is only K-6. The students and their parents extoll its effectiveness in changing their outlook on school and life. "Mr. Green is a savior to these boys," said Liana Justiano, whose son Juan attends the academy. Vargas, however, points to a lack of academic progress, particularly on state tests. He announced in June the Boys Academy's seventh- and eighth-graders would move to Leadership Academy for Young Men, a secondary school on the Charlotte campus. He billed it as a way to create continuity for the allboys model and give them access to a wider array of academic and extracurricular opportunities.

Parents, students and many supporters quickly objected to the idea. They said Vargas made procedural errors, including announcing the change before he officially got receivership power or approval from the New York state Education Department. That power lets him take some unilateral action without input from the school board.

School board member Mary Adams lambasted Vargas' approach to the decision and asked that the change be delayed a year to give parents more time to make alternate plans. "This is one place within the district ... where we have excellence in terms of cultural leadership and conduct. It's thriving," she said. "This to me looks like yet more marginalization and disregard for our students and programs who need it the most." Parents and students are stuck in the middle — it's not yet clear which building several dozen students will be in when school opens next week.

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**MARY ADAMS,**

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER



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