

Girls-Only School May Violate Boys' Rights, U.S. Officials Say

By JACQUES STEINBERG

The experimental all-girls public academy that opened in East Harlem last fall appears to violate civil rights laws by discriminating against boys, but a compromise could keep it open, Federal education officials said yesterday.

Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew, however, balked at any suggestion of concessions and hinted that he would be willing to go to court to defend the school.

The Federal education officials did not issue a formal finding of violation against the school yesterday or order it to close. Instead, they asked the Board of Education to begin negotiations on a possible solution: either arranging to admit boys to the school, the Young Women's Leadership School, or establishing a separate program near the 106th Street campus for boys only. But a spokesman for the Chancellor said he did not intend to support either option.

"I am confident that strong legal grounds support the continued operation of this school and believe a final ruling ultimately will be issued in its favor," Dr. Crew said in a statement.

The Chancellor has been a strong advocate of the school, which admitted 56 seventh-grade girls last September and, this month, expanded its

Founded as a way to develop self-confidence in young women.

roster to 150 girls in grades seven through nine. The school is scheduled to expand to grades 10 through 12 by the fall of 2000.

The preliminary finding by the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights was conveyed yesterday in a series of telephone calls to the school board's lawyers, as well as to the civil rights advocates who are challenging the single-sex school as a violation of the Title IX prohibition against sex discrimination.

But because the department's message was two-fold — that the school appeared to violate the law, but that a remedy was possible — both the school's advocates and its detractors claimed some measure of victory yesterday.

Ann Rubenstein Tisch, the philanthropist who conceived the school as a way to build girls' confidence, said

she was "cautiously optimistic" that Federal and city officials would find a way to keep the school operating as a single-sex institution.

But Michael Meyers, the executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, which joined in the complaint against the school, said he was heartened that the Federal officials had signaled their concerns that the school was discriminatory.

Mr. Meyers said, however, that he would be angered if the ultimate solution was the opening of a comparable school for boys, because he had filed the complaint out of opposition to any form of single-sex education.

"That would be a Pyrrhic victory," said Mr. Meyers, who added that he would settle for nothing short of the school's recruiting of boys.

For their part, Federal education officials were saying little publicly yesterday. A spokesman for the Office of Civil Rights, Rodger Murphey, said that officials had expressed "concerns" to the Board of Education, but he refused to elaborate.

In seeking to negotiate a compromise, the department was apparently trying to avoid establishing a broad precedent on a politically volatile issue. The courts have never clearly established whether Title IX, which took effect in 1972, bars the creation of single-sex schools.



James Estrin/The New York Times

Students at the Young Women's Leadership School in East Harlem.

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Single Sex Schools