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After 2 Years, Couple Can Give New York a School

By JOSEPH BERGER

A wealthy couple who have tried for two years to give the threadbare New York City school system a new school will finally get to do so.

Joseph H. Reich, an investment banker, and his wife, Carol, came before the Board of Education yesterday and were showered with gratitude, the kind of reaction they rarely got from lower-level bureaucrats who kept looking their gift horse — a school building in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and a \$1 million investment — in the mouth.

Central board officials had raised discouraging questions about the number of windows per room, the height of the urinals and the amount of asbestos that must be removed, and officials of School District 14 were unhappy with the meager role they would play.

But yesterday each of the seven Board of Education members avidly welcomed the Reichs' proposal for an elementary school in the poor and working-class Williamsburg neighborhood. The school will be run by a board of parents and trustees and will be housed in an office building donated by Pfizer Inc., the drug and chemical company at the Reichs' urging. One board member, Ninfa Segarra, described the school as a private school that will be run with public funds, and others glowed about what they said was a model of a "private-public partnership."

Vote Next Month

"It's hard to turn a big organization around, but when it starts to move in one direction it keeps going," the 56-year-old Mr. Reich (pronounced RICH) said in an interview.

The board has scheduled a vote next month on the proposal, and the school's opening, with a kindergarten and first-grade class at the start, is



Steve Hart for The New York Times

Joseph H. and Carol Reich, who are seeking to give the city a school, as they addressed members of the Board of Education.

set for next September. The second through sixth grades will be added one year at a time.

To create the school within the bounds of school system regulations and politics, the Reichs and top aides of Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez had to devise the educational equivalent of a Rube Goldberg contraption.

The school will be designated a satellite of nearby Eastern District High School as a way of getting around the decentralization requirements that elementary schools be run

by one of the 32 locally elected school boards. Mr. Fernandez does run the high schools, however, and he will have jurisdiction over the new school. School District 14 wanted nothing to do with it.

Tutors and Advisers

The school's eventual enrollment of 350 will be chosen from the entire borough. Eastern District students will tutor students at the new school, and the high school faculty will advise the new school's teachers.

The school's classes will be in both

English and Spanish. Parents, many of whom are recent Spanish-speaking immigrants, will be offered workshops in English and given training in helping their children in school.

The Reichs will raise \$500,000, much of it their own money, and Pfizer will add another \$500,000 to pay for renovation of the industrial-style office building and other start-up costs. A foundation created by the Reichs will lease the Pfizer building to limit the board's liability in a building that does not strictly meet all board regulations.

The governing advisory board will be a mix of parents of students and such figures as Tom Kline, manager of Pfizer's sprawling Brooklyn plant; Eugene Lang, the president of a foundation that guarantees a college education for pupils that it adopts, and Joseph Shenker, the president of Bank Street College in Manhattan.

The Reichs decided to start a school three years ago after they had adopted two Williamsburg sixth-grade classes as part of Mr. Lang's "I Have a Dream" program. They soon realized that many of their students were already so far behind that their promise of a college education could prove to be an empty one.

A school that would insist on parental involvement and be free of bureaucratic controls might be an answer, but they soon ran into a series of hurdles.

Their ordeal is not over. A few days ago they were presented with a four-page Board of Education plan for the school that included this specific mandate: 70 percent of first-year instruction will be in a student's native language — English or Spanish — 20 percent in a second language, and 10 percent in a mix of the two.

Such specifics are precisely the kind that the Reichs want left up to the parent-trustee board.