

UPDATE: SBOE approves Trine authorizing Bowman

Carmen McCollum carmen.mccollum@nwi.com, (219) 662-5337

June 1, 2016

NEW ALBANY — The State Board of Education approved Trine University becoming the new authorizer for Thea Bowman Leadership Academy in Gary.

The board met Wednesday morning at Indiana University Southeast in New Albany. Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Glenda Ritz recused herself from the vote.

SBOE member Eddie Melton, who represents the 1st Congressional District and has been elected as the democratic candidate for state senator to replace Earline Rogers, said Bowman has been around for more than 13 years, and has done a great job in the community.

"Although we know in the last few years it has suffered academically, with this new leadership in place we expect them to move forward," he said during the meeting. "I'm excited to learn that Phalen Leadership Academy and Trine University will make improvements. Parents and community members have been calling me regularly and they are concerned about what's next for the school. I'm glad that Trine University stepped up and will authorize Bowman."

Melton also said he is "encouraged" by Trine University's commitment to work collaboratively with the families, staff and board to strengthen academic and administrative achievement at Thea Bowman Leadership Academy."

While some have accused Bowman leaders of "charter shopping," SBOE member Gordon Hendry said he thought this process was an example of how the increased accountability under the law was actually working.

SBOE member Vince Bertram said he has some reservations about the three-year timeline that Trine University gave Bowman.

"It seems to me that given the deficiencies, rather than a three-year authorization, it should have been one year with clear benchmarks to meet," Bertram said.

Ritz said there are special conditions to Trine's approval, and the university and the Indiana Department of Education have been very specific about what has to be done.



*File, John J. Watkins, The Times
Henry Skinner talks triangles in geometry class at Thea Bowman Academy in Gary during the school year*



Lindsay Omlor, Trine University's Director of Charter Schools, said her board was not comfortable with a five-year authorization.

"I think we need three years. It's difficult to recruit qualified teachers who would be excited to sign a one-year contract," she said. "Three years allows them the flexibility they need. They will have an accountability timeline. Everything will be measured. I will be there monthly. We will have very clear conversations throughout that three-year period. I believe three years is necessary to make the changes they need to make and get their feet back on the ground."

Omlor told SBOE that in her talks with Ball State, the department of education and a parent group headed by Taryl Bonds, it is clear that Bowman had deficiencies in three areas: board governance, academic performance and Title I and Title II compliance.

Omlor said some of the teachers were not highly qualified but Phalen Academies would now be responsible for all hiring. She said in her conversations with the department of education, she feels sure that Bowman will be able to correct the deficiencies cited in the Title programs.

Bowman's current authorizer, Ball State University, declined in January to renew the charter citing numerous school board management issues and failure to comply with state and federal laws. The charter expires June 30.

The Drexel Foundation, which held the charter, was completely replaced in late March and Indianapolis-based Phalen Leadership Academies was selected to operate the school for 2016-17.