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Trine agrees to sponsor Thea Bowman charter

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Pending a State Board of Education vote next week, Gary's Thea Bowman Leadership Academy will be able to keep its doors open next year.

On Monday, officials on the Education One board at Angola-based Trine University unanimously agreed to sponsor the charter of the Drexel Foundation, which operates Thea Bowman, one of the city's oldest charters.

"We are excited to give the families, students and educators at Bowman the peace of mind of knowing their school will continue operating, as well as the opportunity to continue the school's success," said Lindsay Omlor, director of Charter Schools at Trine.

Under a new state law, the State Board of Education has to approve the change of sponsor. The board meets June 1 in New Albany.

Monday's action came as time was running out on the school, which faced losing its charter on June 30.

"I can't tell you how much stress this has been," said attorney Tony Walker, a new member of the Drexel Foundation school board.

The Drexel school board is meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday to revise service agreements with Phalen Leadership Academies and the Leona Group, Walker said.

In January, charter sponsor [Ball State University](#) announced it would not renew Bowman's charter, citing governance issues with the Drexel board.

Soon after, Drexel reconstituted its school board and asked the Indiana State Charter School Board to sponsor the school. It also lined up the Phalen Leadership Academies, based in Indianapolis, to operate Bowman, which maintains a grades 7-12 school at 3401 W. 5th Ave. and an elementary at 975 W. 6th Ave. Its enrollment is about 1,300 students.

Bowman's school board now has five new members. Michael Suggs, a Northern Indiana Public Service Co. official, is interim chairman. Besides Walker, other board members include Eve Gomez, Cliff Gooden and Richard Leverett.

Walker said State Rep. Robert Behning, R-Indianapolis, supported Thea Bowman in its quest for charter authorization from Trine. Behning is chairman of the House Education Committee and author of a so-called charter shopping law that changed regulations for charters trying to change sponsors. The move sought to prevent failing schools from escaping sanctions by finding a new a new sponsor. It's the reason Bowman will need approval from the State Board of Education next week.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-bowman-charter-sponsor-st-0525-20160524-story.html>

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"We got some critical help from Rep. Bob Behning," said Walker. I think he believed in the school and the new leadership team of Phalen Leadership Academy."

Walker said state Sen. Dennis Kruse, R-Auburn, who's a member of the Trine board of directors, also supported the school's charter.

Walker said Omlor and another Trine official visited both Bowman schools last week.

School leaders met with teachers and staff members to tell them the good news and parents received robo calls, Walker said.

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