

Trine to Authorize Bowman Academy

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ANGOLA —Just in the nick of time, Angola-based Trine University voted Monday to authorize the Drexel Foundation to continue operating Thea Bowman Leadership Academy, a public charter school in Gary.

The charter school lost its authorization from Ball State University in January and was set to close June 30 if Drexel Foundation, which operated as a school board, was unable to gain authorization from another state-approved authorizer.

An alternate group of parents who formed a separate organization was standing by to take over operating the school with the support of Ball State, if the Drexel Foundation had not been able to secure a new authorizer.

Earl Martin Phalen, president of the Indianapolis-based George and Veronica Phalen Leadership Academies, which operates two charter schools in Indianapolis, went before the Office of Charter Schools at Trine University during its Monday meeting.

The Phalen Group has partnered with the Drexel Foundation as its management company, and will begin running Bowman immediately.

Phalen said Trine awarded Drexel a three-year authorization.

"The board gave careful consideration to some of the deficiencies that existed, many of which have been corrected," Phalen said.

"There is a totally new Drexel Foundation and a new management company in Phalen Leadership Academies. They felt the kids in Gary deserve to have a high-quality school. Though it has struggled, Thea Bowman has been a strong school and has been a great place for children.

"We will come aboard immediately. Obviously, we need to communicate with teachers, staff and parents. We need to begin talking with everyone, so they are not in limbo," Phalen said.

Bowman supporters said state Rep. Robert Behning, R-Indianapolis, and state Sen. Dennis Kruse, R-Auburn, who are chairmen of the House and Senate education committees, have strongly supported Bowman's effort to get a new charter. Kruse also is on the Trine Board of Trustees.



*John J. Watkins, The Times
The middle/high school campus of Thea Bowman Leadership Academy is in Gary*



Bowman has gained the authorization in time to be on the agenda for the State Board of Education meeting June 1. State law requires Trine consult with Ball State and gain SBOE approval before the new charter authorizer can go forward.