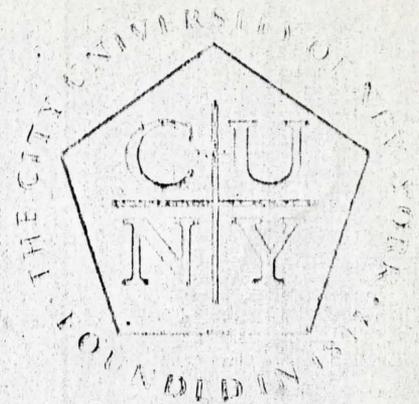


FOR YOUR INTEREST AND INFORMATION

The City University of New York Office of the Chancellor

535 East 80 Street, New York, N.Y. 10021

212/360-2121



May 22, 1969

Mr. Albert Vann, Chairman
Bedford-Stuyvesant Coalition for
Educational Needs and Services
Hotel Granada, Room 602
268 Ashland Place
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Al:

I write to you in your capacity as Chairman of the Coalition rather than of the Negotiating Team. I hope that you will be willing to read or otherwise convey the contents of this letter to the Coalition organizations, and to the community, generally, along with your report.

I am addressing this letter to you on the basis of reports I received about that latter portion of last night's meeting at the Graduate Center, at which I could not remain. However, this letter really flows from all our recent meetings with the Negotiating Team. Since I was associated with this undertaking before the Board Committee was appointed, I feel a special responsibility for this proposed college as well as a deep attachment to its goals and purposes. Moreover, I wish to assume my share of the responsibility for the decision which has been arrived at by the Committee of the Board by directly associating myself with it.

I very much regret that we have come to an impasse -- a deadlock -- with the Negotiating Team. From the beginning I have been a principal sponsor, advocate and proposer of a community-oriented, community-involved Community College, aimed at providing innovative but high quality education to the young people of Bedford-Stuyvesant and central Brooklyn. This was proposed as an experimental undertaking. It was accepted by the Board as such. The Board is aware of, and is sensitive to the great interest in this enterprise shown by the people of Bedford-Stuyvesant. I have been personally pleased and gratified by this development. The City University is thus made all the more aware of its responsibilities to establish in Bedford-Stuyvesant a branch of City University of which all the people of Brooklyn and the City University can be proud.

It has been fifteen months since I came to Brooklyn's Borough Hall, along with many Brooklyn citizens, and announced our readiness to proceed with plans for Community College #7. Our goal -- I believe our common goal -- at that time, as it is today, has been to establish an institution which would not only train and educate young people for useful and fruitful careers, but would contribute to the community and to the quality of life within it, for the benefit of all citizens. Quality is the key word. Both the easiest and the worst thing we could do is to create an institution, without quality or the aspiration to quality, a second-class institution.

It was a keynote of my announcement at that time, fifteen months ago, that this undertaking would be a joint undertaking between the Board of Higher Education and those in the local community concerned with educational opportunity for the young people of the involved neighborhoods.

Since that meeting in Borough Hall fifteen months ago, there have been many, many other meetings devoted to the same subject. One of the results of one of the early meetings was a decision, made in Bedford-Stuyvesant, to form a coalition of neighborhood organizations, and for that coalition to select a Negotiating Team to meet with a committee of the Board of Higher Education to select a President. Those meetings have been going on for almost a year. Numberless hours of meeting time and of staff time have gone into these meetings, both in Bedford-Stuyvesant and at the headquarters of the City University. There have been points of friction and points of agreement.

It is my impression that there were more points of agreement than there were points of friction, for instance on ways and means of providing support and facilities, and for receiving the views of interested individuals and groups on the subject. From the beginning the Board Committee agreed that the voices of the community representatives would be given full and equal weight in the decision. I said equal weight. The Board of Higher Education could not, by law or policy, divest itself of its responsibility to establish and operate a college in central Brooklyn -- a college belonging to all the people of Brooklyn and of New York City, but devoted to the special interests and service of the Bedford-Stuyvesant and adjoining communities.

Now the Board Committee has come to an impasse with the Negotiating Team over the first major step toward the establishment of a college, namely the selection of a President. The Board -- the Burkhardt Committee -- pledged that it would not recommend to the Board the election of any person for President who is not acceptable to the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, as represented by the Negotiating Team. That pledge has been implemented, to the letter.

On the other hand, the Board Committee never pledged, suggested or implied that the Negotiating Team could ever be given the power to name the President, regardless of the views of the Board Committee and of the Board. There is also to be considered the views of the Board of Trustees of the State University which also has legal power over the selection of a President for this college.

I emphasize that there is no legal way in which the choice of a President of a college of the City University can be delegated to an unofficial group, however well intentioned and however deeply devoted its members feel to the interest of the neighboring community.

If it were a question of a private college, private sponsors could delegate a private responsibility. A public institution cannot do this. The most fundamental responsibility of the Board of Higher Education is to appoint the chief officers of the University including the Presidents of the colleges. The Board may, if it wishes, share that responsibility, but it cannot give it away.

The insistence by the spokesmen for the Negotiating Team at last night's meeting that the community, through the Negotiating Team, could insist on a particular candidate, regardless of the contrary views of the Board Committee, came as a surprise. It was a complete rejection of the basis of all our previous deliberations and considerations.

It has always been agreed -- implicitly and explicitly -- that the Board members would respect the veto power of the representatives of the community and of course the community would recognize the veto power and inherent legal responsibility of the Board Committee and, of course, of the Board. This reversal of position on the part of the Negotiating Team made last night's impasse a real deadlock.

Now let me get to the specific point of the crisis, the insistence by the Negotiating Team that Mr. Rhody McCoy be named President of the College.

The Board Committee is unanimously opposed to Mr. McCoy's appointment and will not agree to it. There is clear evidence from informal discussions which have gone on among the Board, as a whole, that even if Mr. McCoy's name were brought before the Board, it would be overwhelmingly rejected.

As the chief educational and administrative officer of the City University, I would recommend against his appointment, on educational and academic grounds. In my judgment, he would not be a successful president of this college. I know Mr. McCoy. I have the highest personal and professional esteem for him, in the capacities for which he is qualified. It pains me greatly to be forced, under these circumstances, to make any public statement prejudicial to him. However, there seems to be no alternative.

On the plus side, Mr. McCoy obviously is deeply sensitive to and closely related to the aspirations of the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, and enjoys the affection and confidence of a large proportion of the people of the Bedford-Stuyvesant and of other parts of the city as well. That doesn't make him a good college president. Thus, he may get high marks on his community identification and understanding. He cannot be given the same high marks on his administrative experience in higher education. To succeed as college president, he must have good relations with the academic community in higher education, in order to attract the faculty required to equip the students with the necessary academic tools and skills.

I do not hesitate to say that he has other qualifications, as well as other disqualifications. It is unnecessary to go into either category. His disqualifications constitute so severe a handicap that I could not, in good conscience, recommend him to the Committee or to the Board.

It has always been the ironclad rule and practice never to disclose the names of those being considered for the Presidency of any college, to save the individuals being considered from consequent personal embarrassment. This rule and practice have been totally disregarded and abrogated in this case. I regret very much that this is so. I suppose that I, myself, am contributing to this breaking of precedent by this letter. I do it out of deep concern that the members of the Bedford-Stuyvesant community should know all the facts.

It is asserted that the presence of Mr. Rhody McCoy's name on a certain list implies a measure of approval of his qualifications by the Board Committee. This is utterly without basis in fact. We did agree that Mr. McCoy's name be placed on a list which constituted an agenda of names that would be considered. The Board committee agreed to the inclusion of Mr. McCoy's name because we thought that the Negotiating Team deserved the right to have an equal voice in making up the agenda of names to be considered. The list was an agenda, and nothing more. When we reached Mr. McCoy's name, his qualifications were discussed at length, and the Board members -- and I -- gave our reasons for our negative position on Mr. McCoy. As far as we were concerned, Mr. McCoy's candidacy was disposed of.

To sum up on this point, the presence of Mr. Rhody McCoy's name on the particular list of names did not mean, imply or suggest approval. It was a list of names to be considered. It was an agenda. It had no other force or value. When the name of Mr. McCoy came up for consideration, I expressed my views and recommendations. So did other members of the Board Committee. As far as the Board Committee was concerned, Mr. McCoy was ruled out, for the reasons already cited, and for others.

The Board members clearly wanted to pursue the search for a president of this college by interviewing and discussing other and alternative candidates. The Negotiating Team, on the other hand, insisted on Mr. Rhody McCoy. Consequently, we are at a point today at which the machinery established more than a year ago has broken down, because the agreements underlying that machinery have broken down. Under these circumstances I do not see how the discussion can continue.

Nor can plans for the college be pursued, unless and until new arrangements for community participation in the discussion and in the planning can be arrived at.

The hour is late. Unless some new light can be shed on the situation through an appropriate reply to this communication, I will be at a loss as to how to advise the Board, on ways and means of proceeding with college #7. The decision on proceeding with that college must be made within the next days.

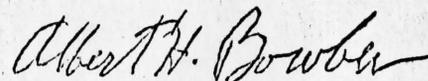
May 22, 1969

I do hope that the Coalition and the community will see fit to engage with us again, through whatever means are appropriate, in constructive discussion, avoiding the errors of the past -- some of which were doubtless made by us -- towards the creation and development of a college in Bedford-Stuyvesant to serve the needs of the areas in question and most of all, of the young people in those areas.

Speaking for myself, for Board Chairman Porter Chandler, and Dr. Burkhardt we have profited from the many hours we spent in discussion and deliberation with the Negotiating Team. We grew to respect and esteem them. Most of the work of the Committee has been valuable and will not be wasted if we can now move forward to to the selection of a President and the detailed planning of the college. We therefore regard with the utmost regret the breakdown of the negotiations. We had hoped the outcome would be otherwise.

I am a proponent of major community input into the life of this new college. I hope the dream will become a reality, for the sake of all of those who will serve and be served in the new college.

Sincerely,



Albert H. Bowker