

Istook weighs in on school flap



Photo by Bert V. Goulali/The Washington Times

Paul Junior High is at the center of a public-charter dispute, with the possibility of students in both systems using the building.

DISTRICT

Wants Rivlin panel to solve public-charter dispute

By Rebecca Charry
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A congressman yesterday turned up the pressure on the financial control board to resolve the continuing power struggle between the District's public and charter schools.

U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook, Oklahoma Republican and a critic of the District's troubled schools, demanded answers about several ongoing turf wars, especially a recent flare-up over the future of Paul Junior High School in Northwest.

At issue is whether Paul, which is slated to become an independent charter school this fall, will have to share its build-

ing with a similar public school program.

School officials announced Wednesday that the charter school likely would have to make room in its building for a rival public school program.

That sets up the two programs — whose curriculums are strikingly similar — in direct competition for the same students and the city funding that goes with them.

"By what legal authority does [school Superintendent Arlene C.] Ackerman demand that Paul share its building with a startup DCPS program?" Mr. Istook wrote in a letter to control board Chairman Alice M. Rivlin.

"It appears that the problems faced by charter schools in acquiring facilities

may be an intentional obstruction, either by the control board or the school system itself," said Mr. Istook's spokesman John Albaugh. "We're going to look into this."

DCPS administrators contend the two programs could share the building at 5800 Eighth St. NW, even though the combined projected enrollment of 1,200 is far greater than the building's official capacity of 726 students.

But Mr. Istook said in his letter that "The intent of Congress was for conversion public charter schools to stay in their buildings."

Putting competing programs in the

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