

Plainfield BOE approves school's latest move

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PLAINFIELD — The city's alternative high school is moving to its fourth home in four years, a shift that could save the school district as much as \$600,000.

But staffing levels are expected to be reduced, a district official said.

The Board of Education voted 6-0 late Thursday to move the Barack Obama Academy for Academic and Civic Development to the lower level of the dis-

trict's administrative building at 1200 Myrtle Ave. Board member Brenda Gilbert abstained, while Katherine Peterson and Patricia Barksdale were absent.

Occupants of administrative offices, currently in the lower level of the Myrtle Avenue building, started packing their things several days ago, district spokesman Eric Jones said Friday.

"The district is excited to begin preparing for the

move," Jones said.

The switch will displace the district's information-technology staffers, who will relocate to the high school on Park Avenue, according to Jones. Other offices, including public information, will be relocated to other parts of the Myrtle Avenue building.

District workers will start readying the lower level for classes this week, Jones said, with the space anticipated to be ready by the scheduled Sept. 7 start

of the school year.

Interim Schools Superintendent Anna Belin-Pyles first announced the move during a meeting with a small group of parents after the board transferred administrators at the academy, including former principal Shirley Johnson-Tucker, to other schools. The moves had prompted speculation that the academy might be downsized or closed.

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The alternative school, created for students who fail to find success at the primary high school on Park Avenue, was founded as Alpha Academy in 2004.

Alpha classes were held at the main high school until 2008, when the academy was converted to an independent school, as recognized by the state Department of Education, and was renamed the Plainfield Academy for Ac-

ademic and Civic Development. The academy spent 2008-09 at the district's swing school on West Front Street.

A student-led movement in early 2009 resulted in the academy's current name. The school was believed to be the first in the state and the second in the nation to be named after President Barack Obama.

The academy, serving nearly 60 students in grades seven through 12, spent the 2009-10 school year at the historic Lincoln School site on Berckman Street.

Belin-Pyles said the academy would retain its name and autonomous status despite moving to the administration building, but she added that its staffing levels are expected to be reduced.

Under the new plan, a district administrator is slated to replace Johnson-Tucker as the person responsible for the day-to-day operations of the academy, but that person also would have other responsibilities.

Staffing cuts and operational savings are antici-

pated to be the two key factors that will add up to total projected savings of \$600,000. The move also is expected to offer academy students a variety of benefits they didn't have at Lincoln, including cafeteria services and the use of a computer lab, a gym and a library.

The switch won't be the first time classes have been held at the Myrtle Avenue building, according to Jones, who said the lower level recently hosted kindergarten classes for a city elementary school.

An orientation for students and their families will be held once the space is ready for classes to begin, Jones said.

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