

# School panel opposes expanding city districts

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The Staten Island Community School Board is opposing two of the major recommendations of the education commission headed by Sen. John J. Marchi: Expanding the number of local school boards and expanding the number of members in the citywide Board of Education.

Island school board member Jerry Cammarata, speaking on behalf of the board, told the Marchi commission yesterday that neither of the measures would enhance education in New York City.

The Marchi commission, which will present its final recommendations to the Legislature in March, had recommended to increase the number of community school boards from 32 to 50, in an effort to decentralize power.

Cammarata disagreed, saying: "In a time of fiscal instability, and looking to a future of less government involvement and bureaucracy, it is not wise to consider establishing 50 school districts."

The Island board also opposes

increasing the size of the citywide Board of Education from seven to nine, believing, Cammarata said, "that it will do nothing to enhance the substance of that governing body."

Cammarata was one of about 20 speakers who addressed the commission at its second day of public hearings yesterday in Manhattan.

The Island board attacked the recommendations on even broader terms. Cammarata said that while the recommendations may appear to support decentralization, they actually "give more power to the schools chancellor and Board of Education."

Cammarata said if the city wants to explore decentralization, it should make the Staten Island school district autonomous on an experimental basis. Noting that Staten Island has a good reputation for education management, he said: "Would it not make sense for this commission to study our school district, and have the other 31 school districts apply the same systems?"

State Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol said he agreed with

the commission's recommendation that the existing governance and management structure should be more thoroughly decentralized so as to create smaller, more autonomous operating units.

Sobol also recommended the city public school system be restructured so that community school districts administer education from kindergarten through grade 12. They now only deal with children from kindergarten through middle school.

Such an expanded system, Sobol said, would ensure a better continuity of education between middle school and high school education and ensure more parental and community involvement at the high school level.

He also suggested establishing "regional cooperative educational services" that would allow districts to provide special services — such as handicapped services and vocational training — to other districts in order to save money.

These units, which exist in other parts of the state, would have governing boards selected from the community school boards, he

said.

Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger said she was pleased that the draft recommendations include smaller school districts, school-based management and reducing the chancellor's role in selecting a superintendent.

She also urged a sharp reduction in the power of the citywide Board of Education, saying the board should be restricted to "oversight and monitoring." All its other functions, such as sup-

plies, transportation, maintenance, special education, high schools and instruction, should be left to the boroughs and the school districts, she said.

She recommended setting up five boroughwide boards, each with a borough superintendent with the rank of a deputy chancellor.

She also opposed enlarging the Board of Education, saying it would advance mayoral control at the expense of borough representation.

David Seeley, professor of education at the College of Staten Island, appeared on his own behalf and addressed several issues.

On the commission's goal of increasing accountability in the school system, he said: "Unless the participants within each school — the students, teachers, parents, administrators and support staff — are holding themselves and each other accountable for achieving shared goals on a day-to-day basis, the game is lost."