

# Vitaliano rebuffs school board governance plan

By CARL CAMPANILE  
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano yesterday ripped into the Staten Island Community School Board's plans to become a self-governing school district and to house an educational complex at the College of Staten Island's Sunnyside campus.

Vitaliano's blunt comments were delivered to members of Community School District 31 who lobbied for their legislative agenda here yesterday. Vitaliano, D-Dongan Hills, also locked horns again with board secretary Jerry Cammarata, the Republican challenger he trounced in last fall's elections.

Vitaliano, a member of the Assembly Education Committee, questioned the school board's proposal to become an experimental independent Local Education Association (LEA). The board recommends establishing a pilot district that would have total control of all Staten

Island education operations from kindergarten through high school, including all special education programs.

Vitaliano said it was unrealistic for Staten Island to have an LEA without also having the responsibility of raising taxes.

"In other words," he said, "you would spend money but not raise the taxes... If I could spend money without raising taxes, this would be a great job."

School Board Chairwoman Olivia Brennan afterward agreed with Vitaliano that LEA, or complete self governance for schools, was "the wrong terminology." The Island school district wants more flexibility within the city Board of Education structure, she said.

But Cammarata described Vitaliano's position as one "which is derogatory to the needs of Staten Island. Obviously, he was not sympathetic to see the value of it."

Cammarata noted such a pilot pro-

gram would prepare the school district for a potential Staten Island secession from New York City. Also attending the session were Jane Tardell, chairwoman of the school board's budget committee, and Jeff d'Auguste, who heads the school construction panel.

Vitaliano's criticism was just as pointed concerning the school board's wish to house an education complex at Sunnyside once the College of Staten Island relocates to its new consolidated campus in Willowbrook. Touro College has submitted a more detailed proposal, he said.

He said that until now he had received no official request from the school board to do anything on the matter, although the state has an interest in the property located in his district.

Aside from school board and district offices located there, the plan would provide space for a maintenance office, a library and curriculum center, supply

center for schools, magnet school classes, auditoriums and indoor and outdoor facilities for Special Olympics and major athletic events.

While noting the proposal was an appropriate public use, Vitaliano complained the plan was short of dollars and support from Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez. He expressed concern that without a clear commitment from the city, the property would end up vacant. But Touro College's plan provides a financial commitment up front, he added.

"My point is that you're running out of time. You have to match that program as far as I'm concerned," he said.

Moreover, Vitaliano called the school board proposal "vague" with a "cloud of unreality" hanging over it in a letter submitted to school board members yesterday.

Cammarata countered that public hearings have to be held on the Sunnyside issue.

During the meeting, Vitaliano urged board members to "rattle the cages" of Republican lawmakers who argue that Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's bare-bones budget plan favors New York City. Educators must know that the GOP works against the city, he said.

"What a time for Republicans to leave," Cammarata quipped as left Vitaliano's office to attend another meeting.

Asked about running into his foe Cammarata again, Vitaliano chuckled: "It only underscores the point that I will meet with anybody."

In other matters, members of Camelot Counseling Centers, the Port-Richmond-based drug treatment agency, also lobbied for state assistance.

Executive director Luke Nasta also wants a law to prevent discrimination against substance abusers and to ensure siting of drug treatment services in home communities.

## Wrench team troubleshoots to victory

## Street basketball hoop may make its last stand