

# School board complains about letters, phone calls

## Relates tales of public pressure over principal appointments

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Letters and phone calls have inundated Staten Island Community School Board members, who complained last night that public pressure intensifies every time there is a principal slot to fill.

Parents and teachers routinely coax board members to vote for one candidate by smearing his or

her opponent, the board members said.

"We've gotten piles of letters in favor of this person or against that person," said Vice Chairwoman Betty Martinucci, who heads the board's personnel committee. "I'd prefer not to get them ... Some of them were actually form letters."

"I'm getting calls at work," said

Chairwoman Olivia Brennan, who estimated she has received about 190 calls yesterday at the board's monthly work session in its Tompkinsville headquarters.

Mrs. Martinucci suggested that the letters not be copied for each of the nine board members.

"I think as a public body we have an obligation to hear what any parent has to say ... We are

elected officials. We should be more politic before we reject the public's letters," said board member Lillian Popp.

"I have no problem with hearing parents' opinions. I think they should be involved in the process," said board member Denise Pedro.

Parents and teachers on selection committees must submit the names of five candidates to Acting Superintendent Christy Cugini, whose own two choices are voted on by board members.

The latest round of letter writing came in the wake of a controversial appointment at PS 4, Arden Heights, in March. Acting interim principal Joyce Fonollosa was not appointed to the job; the board voted 6-to-1 to appoint Mark Harris to the school. So far, five of the 19 principal vacancies have been filled.

Mrs. Pedro suggested that acting interims be barred from applying for the schools where they serve. "They are spending that

time gathering a mob of parents who will support them," she said.

In other business, board member Jane Tardell said parents at PS 23 have requested that the Richmond school be rezoned to relieve overcrowded conditions. During a recent meeting at the school, 300 parents supported a plan to move incoming children from families in the Tanglewood developments to PS 32 in Great Kills and incoming families from the Oakwood area into PS 50, Oakwood.

Cugini said the parents aren't "very altruistic."

"They are saying leave us alone and take all the newcomers and take them out," he said. "Those parents' voting is of no consequence because they aren't affected."

Cugini said there is no immediate need to rezone the school. He promised to look into various possibilities. Board member Jerry Cammarata said the board should take its direction from Cugini.

Board member Jeffrey d'Auguste disagreed. "This is a reality we must face as a board: We have to sit down and rezone schools on the South Shore."

During a closed-door session prior to the meeting, two board members were selected in a lottery to accompany 30 intermediate school students on an exchange trip to Japan. D'Auguste and Eleanor Conforti were chosen to go on the expense-paid junket from May 15 to 25. Mrs. Brennan said. The lottery was not held in public because board members were eating dinner, she said.

The bulk of the \$40,000 trip will be financed by private fund-raising efforts, Cugini said. Borough President Guy V. Molinari has pledged \$11,900 toward the trip, he said.

Also, Mrs. Conforti announced that the Board of Education approved the renaming of PS 8 in Great Kills after the late Shirlee Solomon.

Mrs. Tardell said the Budget Committee, which she chairs, is seeking a \$75,000 federal grant to establish an alternative site for children who are suspended from school. Currently, those children are sent home.