

School Bd. to elect officers

Cammarata seeks chairmanship

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A political fight for control of the Staten Island Community School Board is under way, pitting moderates and liberals against religious conservatives.

The battlefield will be New Springville's Laurie Intermediate School Monday when elections of school board officers are called at 8 p.m.

On the conservative side is Jerry Cammarata, the number one vote-getter in last year's school board election. Cammarata will try to parlay his election-year popularity into a chairmanship of the nine-member board.

Backed by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition and the Right-to-Life Party during the school board election, Cammarata is now vying for the post held by Olivia Brennan for the past four years. Mrs. Brennan is considered a moderate.

Cammarata announced Monday that Robert Sacchi, endorsed by the Right to Life Party, is seeking the vice chairmanship. Sacchi could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Carmel Reddington will run for secretary and Sal Ballarino will run for treasurer. Both were elected to the board with conservative religious support.

Moderate and liberal board members are said to be scrambling to put together a challenge slate, sources told the Advance.

Eleanor Conforti confirmed yesterday that she has been asked to run against Cammarata, but said she hasn't yet decided to do so.

"If I had five votes, I'd be very happy to take over as chair," said Mrs. Conforti. "As long as I don't have to owe anybody anything, I would be content to serve."

Mrs. Conforti, elected to the school board without support from conservatives or liberals, ran for the chairmanship last year. She lost to Mrs. Brennan by a 6 to 3 vote.

If Mrs. Conforti agrees to run, sources said James Chin will seek re-election as vice chairman. Chin, who came to the board with liberal support, said yesterday he "didn't know yet" if he would run.

Cammarata and Ballarino said the board is not split along ideological lines. Rather, said Cammarata, his challenge is a reflection of a mood in the country that favors term limitations for elected officials.

"Whatever happens, it's still a nine-member board that has to make decisions. The chair only assists that process," he said.

Cammarata praised Mrs. Brennan for steering the board through the turmoil over a controversial

teachers' guide, Children of the Rainbow, and through a time of transition when some 40 assistant principal and principal vacancies were filled.

A five-year veteran of the school board, Cammarata said his seniority is one of his strongest assets. Cammarata, who spearheaded the fight against the Children of the Rainbow, was considered too conservative to head the board last year.

The conservative vs. liberal battle informed the school board elections in May 1993 when a record number of voters went to the polls to vote. The election was fueled by the controversial Children of the Rainbow guide, which had been spotlighted by the conservatives.

"The political and religious right are determined to take control of the board by removing [Olivia Brennan] who's been acting as a moderating force," said Gene Prisco, a member of the liberal Staten Island Alliance for Responsible Education.

Cammarata has been board secretary for four years. Ellen Trapp has been the board treasurer.

"It was a good blend of people," said Mrs. Conforti.

Although Mrs. Trapp came to the board with Christian Coalition support, she has not aligned herself with the board conservatives. Mrs. Trapp said she would not vote for Cammarata for president, calling him a "fillibuster person."