

Staten Island Advance

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School Board bites the budget bullet

■ 5-2 vote approves steps to avoid layoffs, big jumps in class size

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The Staten Island Community School Board last night dealt with the two most urgent issues that face it: approving a budget that cuts staff and increases some class sizes, and beginning a search to replace a board member.

The panel, generally pleased with the superintendent's submitted budget, which absorbs a \$3.76 million cut without any layoffs or across-the-board surges in the number of students per class, gave its OK by a vote of 5 to 2.

The board also considered how it would fill the space left by Jerry Cammarata, who has become the Staten Island representative to the Board of Education.

Of the members that remain on the board, James Chin, Eleanor Conforti, Carmel Reddington, Robert Sacchi and Olivia Brennan voted for the budget. Ira Goldstein and Salvatore Ballarino dissented while member Ellen Trapp, who is recovering from surgery, didn't attend the meeting at the Michael J. Petrides Education Complex, Sunnyside.

The board approved a budget plan that is balanced by juggling state grant money. In general, the budget uses federal Title I funds to decrease class size in the 11 schools on Staten Island that qualify for it.

The increase of nearly \$2.6 million in this year's Title I alloca-

Citizen panel's jabs have teachers angry
See Page A 20.

tion allowed Staten Island to take state grants that had previously gone to those 11 Title I schools and spread them across the district instead, according to District Superintendent Christy Cugini.

During the meeting Deputy Superintendent Anthony Potomene praised his boss's work. Cugini was able to "massage" the numbers to come up with a budget that lessened the pain of the cuts throughout the district, he said.

Despite the fiscal fine-tuning, the borough still will lose positions

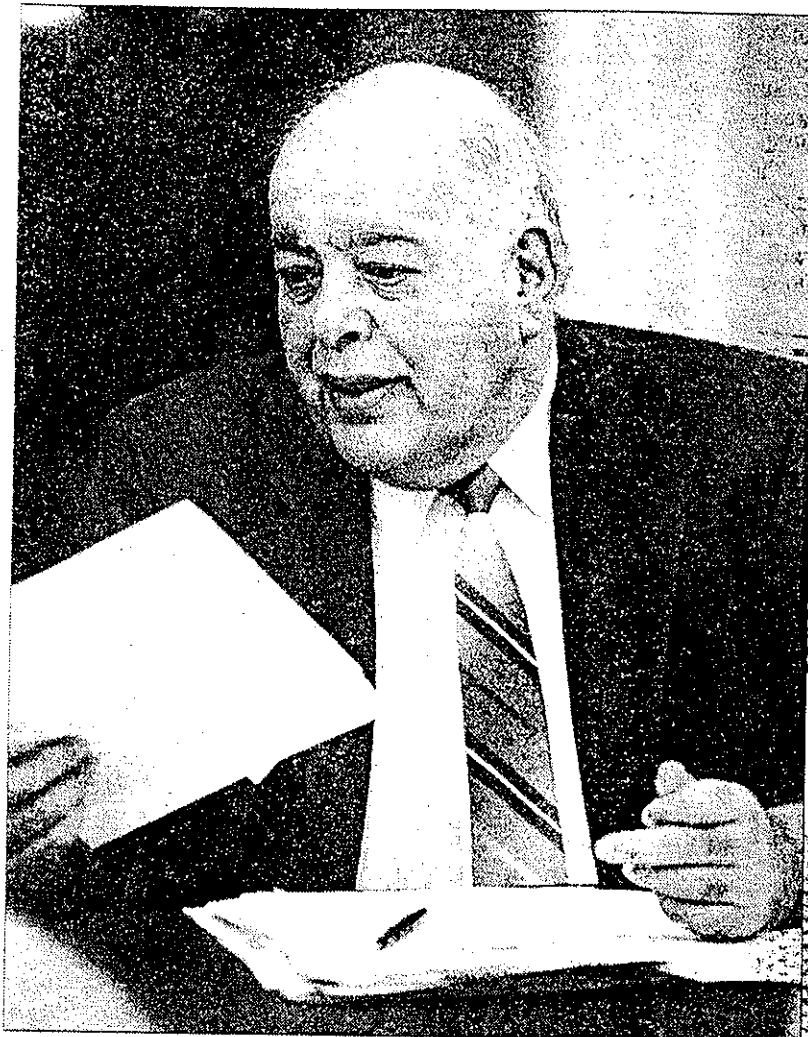
In voting against the fiscal plan, Ballarino and Goldstein expressed frustration with the budget process. Ballarino said he didn't approve of how the Board of Education handled the Title I grant. "Even with the extra Title I money," he said, "the central board skimmed off \$20 million for paperwork."

Goldstein said after the meeting he didn't like the fact that proposals made by educational groups to stretch budget dollars weren't taken more seriously by the board. "I think there were legitimate suggestions sent in," he said. Some of these measures included board members being reimbursed for expenses and film specialists replacing school aides lost through attrition.

Before the vote on the budget the panel discussed the vacancy left by Cammarata. Chairwoman Ms. Conforti said that those interested in the position should send letters of intent, resumes and a brief statement about why they want to serve to the board office before Oct. 2.

In the two weeks following that date, educational and parent groups can send in letters on behalf of candidates. The board plans to announce an appointment by its November meeting, Ms. Conforti said.

Cammarata himself addressed the board last night about his new job. Known for his controversial conservative social agenda, Cammarata reassured members that he intended to work on behalf of all Islanders. "If you knock on the door, the door will open and I will listen," he said.



Christy Cugini reads from a document during the meeting.

In other business, board member Sacchi said that district officials are searching for ways to accommodate as many children as possible in the latchkey after-school program, which is not being subsidized this year. Parents will be required to pay a \$75- to \$80-a-month fee per student, and a minimum of 35 children per

school must participate to make the plan economically feasible, he said.

District officials are examining if it would be possible to bus children from schools with fewer than the required number to other schools with the program, he said. The program is scheduled to begin Sept. 18.