

School board approves HIV/AIDS curriculum

By Chris Franz

The Community School Board elected new officers and approved use of the city's HIV/AIDS education curriculum, as the factions of the board became more deeply entrenched last week.

The board re-elected its present officers for a new term beginning with the July 1 start to the fiscal year: Chairwoman Eleanor Conforti, Vice Chairman Jim Chin, Secretary Ira Goldstein, and Treasurer Ellen Trapp.

The votes, however, for all of the positions were 5 to 4. Board mem-

ber Sal Ballarino nominated himself for chairman, and his nomination was seconded by member Jerry Cammarata. Ballarino, Cammarata, and members Bob Sacchi and Bunny Reddington all sided against the existing slate of officers, voting "no" in each of the uncontested races for the slots below chairman.

The voting was split along exactly the same lines when the HIV/AIDS curriculum was approved. The district has been using the state's 1987 curriculum guide, with subsequent updates, rather than the city's more controversial

guide. The state has just issued a new guide, as has the city.

The board was given the choice of accepting the city's guide, making alterations to the city's guide, writing a new guide, or accepting another guide.

Cammarata and his allies have been pushing for the board to wait to examine the new state guide before making a decision, because, they say, the state guide in the past has stressed abstinence from sexual activity as the best way to avoid contracting HIV, and the tone of the state guide has been less presumptive that youngsters

are engaging in sexual activity, which puts less pressure on the seventh and eighth graders in question who are not sexually active.

The city guide contains six lessons each for seventh and eighth graders, two of which in each grade are mandatory, and four of which are optional at the parents' choice. The mandatory lessons are designed to be more medical and biological.

Board member Olivia Brennan, who co-chairs the HIV/AIDS committee, with Cammarata and Reddington, argued that the issuance of the new state guide made the old guide obsolete, meaning that the district now has no adopted guide, putting it out of compliance with the law. She stated that the board ought to adopt the city guide as an acceptable document since the state guide would not be available for review until August, and the nature of the state guide would require a lengthy process of writing individual lessons.

Cammarata and others, including most of the parents' groups, expressed anger that the board was "rushing" the process. They complained that the board should wait to evaluate both documents, and parents' groups were annoyed that they had not been given time to review, discuss, and vote on the city curriculum themselves.

The "opt-out" provision was also attacked. Currently, a child receives all of the HIV/AIDS lessons, unless parents specifically choose to opt out of the program. Some parents feel that the program should be "opt in," that is, the parents should have to give permission for their children to receive the lessons.

Island reading, math scores up

Staten Island elementary school children continue to perform substantially better than the rest of the city's students, according to annual standardized reading and math test scores released by the Board of Education last week.

Third through eighth graders from District 31, which encompasses all of Staten Island, placed second in reading scores and fourth in math, while improving in both areas over the previous year. In fact, for the first time in six years, overall scores in the entire city improved: 47.5 percent of the city's students now read at or above grade level, an improve-

ment of 1.9 percent, while 53.3 percent perform similarly in mathematics, an improvement of 3.4 percent.

Island students scored 65.8 percent in reading and 68.8 percent in math, an increase of 1.2 and 1.6 percent, respectively.

District 26 in Bayside, Queens led the city in both reading and math scores, scoring 80.4 percent on reading and 86.3 percent on math.

The Island traditionally places in the top three in both reading and math, sharing the top spots with Queens' Districts 25 and 26. Manhattan's District 2, however, with a 3.1 percent improvement in

math this year, jumped to 71.6, bumping the Island to fourth.

Throughout the city, third graders performed lowest in reading, with a 34.7 ranking, following a 2.9 percent decrease this year. At 54.6, fifth graders were the city's best readers, an increase of 3.8 percent over last year. In math, seventh graders ranked lowest, at 45.2 (a 1.6 percent increase), while fourth graders scored highest, at 60.7 (a 9.7 percent increase).

Later this month, the city's test scores will be further broken down — by sex and ethnicity — and in the fall, school-by-school rankings will be released.