

## EDUCATION

## Dr. Crew's Most Outspoken Critic on the School Board

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

The Board of Education grew frustrated with Chancellor Rudy Crew in the months leading up to his recent ouster, but most of the seven members were too diplomatic — or shrewd — to chastise him publicly.

The most obvious exception was Jerry Cammarata, the Staten Island representative. A speech pathologist, social conservative and one-time wedding singer, Mr. Cammarata unabashedly deplored Dr. Crew's ambivalence about staying on the job and complained for months that the chancellor had stopped communicating with all but a few favorite board members.

"The chancellor never learned to be a New Yorker in doing business," Mr. Cammarata proclaimed after the board voted 4 to 3 on Thursday to oust Dr. Crew. "He didn't understand that every decision is based on budget and resources, and those only come from the people who control it."

He meant Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, who was once a close ally of Dr. Crew but whom the chancellor came to loathe in his fourth and last year in the job. Mr. Cammarata, who holds Mr. Giuliani up as the city's hero and as his own philosophical role model, has consistently sided with Mr. Giuliani's appointees on the board.

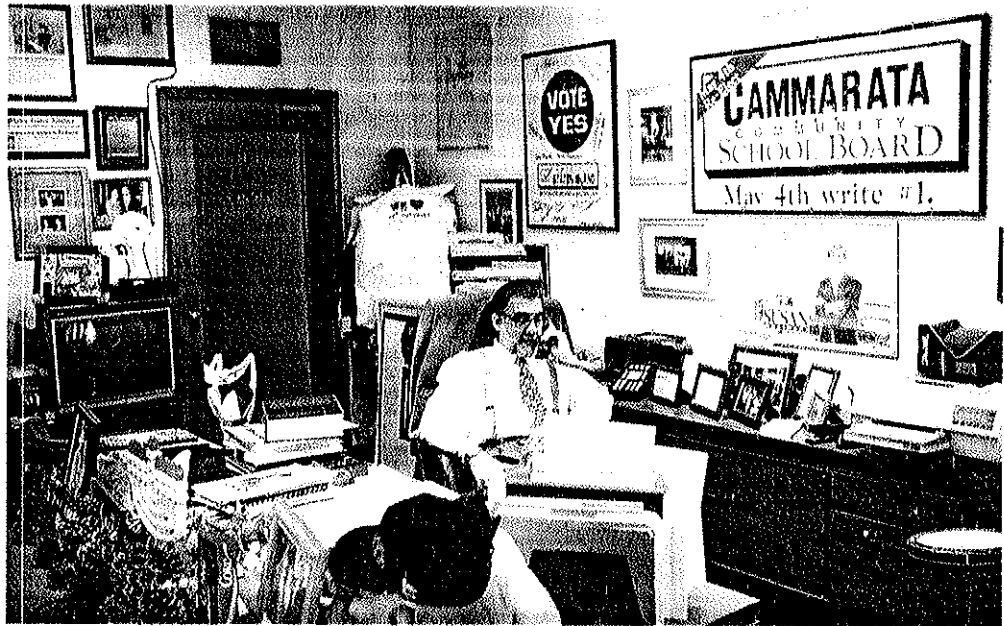
Mr. Cammarata, who had a bit part in Mr. Giuliani's favorite movie, "The Godfather," promotes the mayor's agenda with relish and with relatively few political repercussions for Mr. Giuliani, since Mr. Cammarata has no official link to City Hall. Mr. Giuliani's critics would have an easier time connecting him to the actions of his appointees, Deputy Mayor Ninfa Segarra and Irene Impellizzeri.

The most notable example of Mr. Cammarata's loyalty to Mr. Giuliani came shortly after he was appointed to the board in 1995 by Guy Molinari, the Staten Island borough president. He had sided with the majority when it voted 4 to 3 to appoint Daniel A. Domenech as the successor to Chancellor Ramon Cortines. But when the board met the next day to ratify the vote, Mr. Cammarata changed his vote, dooming the selection of Mr. Domenech and paving the way for the mayor's choice, a Tacoma, Wash., educator little known in New York named Rudy Crew. Mr. Cammarata acknowledged that day that a conversation with the mayor had persuaded him to change his mind.

"It was a day in which I had to search my soul to learn how to do business," Mr. Cammarata said the other day, sitting in his office at the Board of Education. "I had lost focus of the fact that each of us had a responsibility to think and act on behalf of the city."

A visitor could call his office littered. Among the things he keeps nearby are Coca-Cola paraphernalia, photos of himself with politicians, and a T-shirt, swaying overhead on a hanger, that says, "I Survived the 1995 New York City Board of Education Chancellor Search." He even has a model of a human larynx. (He was once listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for singing the longest in a bathtub: 75 hours in the middle of Washington Square.)

Mr. Cammarata's critics dismiss him as an attack dog, but few criticize him publicly. One official at the Board of Education, who would not allow his name



Angel Franco/The New York Times

Jerry Cammarata, in his office at the Board of Education. He has consistently sided with Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's appointees and, in recent months, pointedly and publicly attacked the performance of Chancellor Rudy Crew.

to be used, said that Dr. Crew's relationship with Mr. Cammarata had deteriorated after the chancellor fought with the mayor over school vouchers last spring. The official said Mr. Cammarata needled the chancellor mercilessly in the months that followed.

William C. Thompson, the board president and one of Dr. Crew's strongest allies, said he admired Mr. Cammarata's frankness.

"I may disagree with Jerry on a lot of things but I like that he is direct and honest," Mr. Thompson said. "In a job

To some, an attack dog. To others, a worthy adversary.

like this, it's always refreshing to talk to someone like him."

Mr. Cammarata insisted this week that his contempt for Dr. Crew was based solely on the chancellor's professional behavior in recent months. But his resentment seems at least partly personal. Mr. Cammarata repeatedly mentions that Dr. Crew stopped talking to him months ago. And Mr. Molinari said Mr. Cammarata had grown increasingly upset by what he considered disrespectful behavior from Dr. Crew.

"He complained to me a month or so ago that Rudy Crew had stopped returning his phone calls," Mr. Molinari said in an interview. "At one event, Jerry offered his hand to Rudy Crew and Rudy Crew refused to shake it."

Yet Mr. Cammarata wrote glowing evaluations of Dr. Crew as recently as last year, and pictures of the chancellor are still scattered around his office. One,

in a prominent spot next to Mr. Cammarata's computer, shows Dr. Crew and Mr. Cammarata with their arms slung around each other.

"That was a very meaningful day that we had," Mr. Cammarata said wistfully, adding that he had no plans to remove the picture.

Mr. Cammarata, the son of a butcher, was working as a speech pathologist and audiologist when a friend who was a school principal persuaded him to run for his local school board in 1989.

He spent six years on the school board in District 31, one of the city's most conservative districts, before Mr. Molinari appointed him to the central board. During his second school board race in 1993, Mr. Cammarata campaigned against the Children of the Rainbow curriculum, which taught tolerance for homosexuality. Backed by the Christian Coalition, he won more votes in that election than any school board candidate in the city, he said.

Mr. Cammarata said he was the most conservative member of the Board of Education on social issues; for example, he favors prayer in school. But he has mostly kept his positions to himself, he said, because he thinks the board should focus right now on improving academic standards.

Instead, Mr. Cammarata expresses his views on social issues through articles he writes for academic journals and newspapers. He says he reads and clips dozens of newspaper articles daily, then ruminates over them and develops his own ideas about education policy.

"This guy sends me at least two or three faxes a day," Mr. Molinari said. "He drives me crazy, but he is very good on visionary things."

Mr. Cammarata clearly wants to keep thinking nonstop about education issues, Mr. Molinari said, because he turned down a job Mr. Molinari found for him in

the Giuliani administration earlier this year. "I was kind of stunned," said Mr. Molinari, who refused to disclose the nature of the job. "He could have used the money, but I guess there are more important things in Jerry's life than money."

When Mr. Cammarata thinks out loud, listeners sometimes catch a glimpse of his eccentric side.

"A magazine has asked me to do a futuristic article about what we will be like in 2050," he said excitedly in the interview. "And I told them we probably now will literally be able to inject information. There are going to be certain chips, liquid chips, that we will be able to implant into somebody's brain that will help them engage in concepts and information."

He produced a record called "Plant Serenade: A Collection of Tonal Experiences for Your Lawn, Vegetable Garden and Exotic Plants," which he says helps plants grow faster. Visitors to Mr. Cammarata's personal site on the World Wide Web can learn how to perform the Heimlich maneuver.

In one of the darker moments from his past, Mr. Cammarata was ejected from a junior high school in 1993 during vote-counting for the local school board election after police discovered he was carrying a .38-caliber pistol. Even though he was licensed to carry the gun, state law prohibits guns on school premises while votes are being counted.

Although chancellor searches are notorious for being grueling and tense, Mr. Cammarata said he was looking forward to the task of finding Dr. Crew's successor. He spoke of the coming search in grand terms.

"There is nothing sad about this, because it's the opportunity to open up the system to the future changes that need to occur," he said. "That, to me, will be absolutely exhilarating."