

## THE ISLAND

# Fate of Board of Ed president to be decided next week

By MARJORIE HACK  
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Board of Education President William C. Thompson Jr. will know Tuesday morning whether he will retain his three-year hold on the presidency.

He is on record as wanting the job but it's no secret that he could be ousted in behind-the-scenes dickering at the Board of Ed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. The maneuvering could see Jerry Cammarata, Staten Island's representative to the board, vote against the incumbent — a man whose name he seconded when it was put into nomination three years ago.

Thompson, a 46-year-old investment banker who represents the borough of Brooklyn at the Board of Ed, is a close ally of schools Chancellor Rudy Crew. He took over the top spot in July 1996, just eight months after Crew arrived in New York.

Thompson replaced Carol Gres-

ser, the former Queens representative to the Board of Ed. He earns a stipend of \$20,000 a year for his services; the other six members earn \$15,000 annually.

Board of Education spokeswoman Margie Feinberg said yesterday that Crew "has a very good relationship with Mr. Thompson and he would see a change in the presidency as a disruption."

Ms. Feinberg added that Crew is eager to advance "major reforms that he put in place and would like to continue implementing them. Any change would disrupt that."

But Giuliani appears to be gunning for the chancellor.

Earlier in May, the mayor was able to manufacture a four-member majority of the seven members on the board to defeat an \$11 billion, five-year capital improvements proposal favored by Crew. Members who joined together to push through the mayor's scaled-down plan included Cammarata; the Queens representative to the

Board of Ed, Terri Thomson; and the mayor's two appointees, Irene Impellizzeri and deputy mayor Ninfa Segarra.

Under terms of the mayor's alternative plan, funding was included for three new schools on Staten Island. Under Crew's plan, there was no provision made for additional school seats here.

The mayor appeared earlier this week to be trying to resurrect the makeshift coalition again, this time to fire yet another shot across the chancellor's bow.

Sources say the mayor is "not anti-public education," but rather, profoundly dissatisfied with what he sees as a root cause of the recent decline in student test scores: The lack of action at the Board of Education, even after record high funding of special programs like Project Read and the enactment of sweeping new governance legislation passed in December 1996 that strengthened the chancellor's powers immeasurably by giving him direct control over the hiring

and firing of superintendents and principals.

Giuliani has also not forgotten that he and Crew bitterly locked horns earlier this year over the issue of funding a pilot voucher program in the city. The initiative would have allowed some students in low-performing schools to attend private schools with public dollars. The mayor ended up not including money for the trial program in his proposed budget.

But yesterday at a City Hall press briefing, the mayor seemed to back off the Thompson showdown. When asked if he wanted Thompson ousted, the mayor replied, "No, that isn't true. I'm content with having Thompson remain president."

He said he has not instructed his two representatives to the Board of Ed to vote for the Thompson ouster. "That's not a wise thing to do at this point," said Giuliani who noted that Thompson had always been "honest and straight-forward in his dealings with me."

The mayor added that "at this point, the school system should be given every chance to reform itself."

The mayor also doesn't really have a viable alternative to Thompson waiting in the wings.

Sources say that Ms. Thomson, the mayor's most likely choice, doesn't want the added responsibility because her professional career at Citibank keeps her busy enough.

Ms. Segarra already serves as a deputy mayor. Her election, with the mayor's blessing, to the top spot at the Board of Education would likely be viewed as a major conflict of interest for Giuliani. It would also link him directly to the school system's performance which could be a liability in the mayor's expected run for a Senate seat against First Lady Hillary Clinton.

Insiders say Cammarata, a staunch Giuliani supporter when it comes to Board of Ed politics, is not being considered by the mayor

at this time.

Cammarata, who took over as chairman of the Conference of Big 5 School Districts earlier this week, confirmed this on Thursday, saying that the first alert he had to the possibility of being looked at as a dark-horse candidate for the presidency came in a New York Times article on Thursday.

"They never call me," he said of the paper noting that he had not provided any information for the report. "I'm staying out of all of this."

Sources say, however, that Cammarata largely follows Ms. Segarra's lead on matters like these. If Ms. Segarra supports a candidate other than Thompson, at the mayor's behest, Cammarata probably would also.

Ms. Feinberg said the outcome is anyone's guess.

"We've heard almost everything up here, including co-presidents. We have no idea." (*City Hall reporter Reginald Patrick contributed to this report.*)