

CONDORONT



EDITORIAL ■ GOSSIP

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Frustration over transit wells up at PTA forum

■ Parents and officials are in a mood for more radical measures to get help from Board of Education

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Secession and strong-arm tactics on their minds, frustrated parents and elected officials are ready to up the ante to resolve transportation and safety concerns that continue to plague Staten Island schools.

The calls for tougher, more radical action were issued yesterday during a legislative forum sponsored by the Staten Island Federation of PTAs. The gathering, which was organized by federation members Barbara Tepper and Annette Angiuli, was held in the Petrides Educational Complex in Sunnyside and drew about 80 parent representatives and elected officials.

Jerry Cammarata, Staten Island's representative to the Board of Education, was notably absent from the gathering, sparking Julia Brusco, PTA president of New Dorp High School, to charge him with being "parent un-friendly." This is one of the worst decisions he's ever made.

Cammarata's insight was sorely needed as legislators tried to explain the workings of the Board of Education and why their role in effecting change — particularly on the transportation front — is so limited.

In response to repeated complaints about the recent crackdown on school busing distance limits, resulting in hundreds of youngsters being bounced off yellow school buses Islandwide this year alone, City Councilman Steve Fiala (R-South Shore) told PTA representatives he is so frustrated by Board of Education policies that residents really have no choice but to secede from the city's public school system.

"The system lends itself to one that doesn't provide accountability," said Fiala, who called on parents to take a fresh look at state Sen. John Marchi's bill that would create a quasi-independent borough Board of Education, separate from the current district that incorporates all five boroughs.



Mothers and PTA members listen intently to comments at the forum.

ADVANCE PHOTO ■ MIKE FALCO

Marchi's bill would provide for allocation of funds directly to the borough on an overall percentage basis, and would give educators control over classroom instruction and curriculum. But Staten Island would still be financially tied to the Board of Education for funding and contracts covering teachers and other employees.

The measure has failed at the state level every year since it was first introduced in 1994, but Fiala said that without independence, Staten Island is doomed to stepchild status.

"A borough board would have say over how the money is spent and how we transport our children. Right now we have no jurisdiction over it. All we can be is advocates. I'm tired of being the scapegoat — as we all are. You will continue to suffer from this,"

he said.

Others urged parents to stick with the system, but to forget letter-writing and faxes and instead "take off the gloves."

One, a mother from Oakwood, told parents she was successful in winning seats for her two children on a yellow school bus only after making a personal visit to Board of Education headquarters in Brooklyn and dangling the possibility of a lawsuit before one official.

"The system does work if you go right to the system," she said. "The problem is that we constantly have to remind somebody how to do their job." The parent declined to give her name, for fear her vari-