

Board Members Say Levy Wants to Stay

By Jessica Kowal

STAFF WRITER

Interim Chancellor Harold Levy probably wants to keep his job on a permanent basis, Board of Education officials said yesterday, and is already making plans to streamline the administration.

Levy is to consult with the full board tomorrow to discuss his future; a majority would support him staying, officials said yesterday. While he has not yet spoken to boardmembers about his plans, he has courted them and their borough-president patrons in private meetings since his January appointment.

He also has developed increasingly closer ties to administrators.

Friday, at a luncheon for more than 100 Queens principals, Levy said he expects "painful" changes at the Board of Education, hinting at layoffs in an agency he described as "quite fat." "We're going to break a lot of glass," Levy said.

"We will look internally and we will squeeze and squeeze," he added, comparing the board's future to layoffs following the corporate mergers that formed Citigroup.

He also pledged to trim school regulations by 30 percent and to limit paperwork and memos by putting more information on the Internet. The principals applauded him.

Unlike past interim chancellors, Levy has not acted like a seat-warmer since he was appointed to the post in January with a six-month contract. A corporate attorney, Levy has traveled the city to tout his efforts to bring a businesslike approach to the school board.

Taking steps his predecessor Rudy Crew refused, Levy recently met with officials from the city's private and parochial schools and with Catholic teachers from the Diocese of Brooklyn. He has also instituted a weekly conference call with all superintendents.

Said a board official who believes Levy wants to stay, "If I had to bet, I'd say he's going to do it. He's just loving it."

City Hall, which strongly opposed Levy's temporary appointment, also toned down its stand on the next chancellor yesterday, signaling that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani might prefer to avoid a new fight about the schools chief during his campaign for U.S. Senate.

Giuliani, who in January described Levy as a puppet of the city teachers union, said yesterday it would be "premature" to comment on Levy's future.

In the past, Giuliani insisted that he would judge the interim chancellor solely on the schools' ambitious summer program for up to 250,000 failing students. Just last week, after City Hall and the United Federation of Teachers could not agree on contract incentives to attract enough summer school teachers, mayoral aides criticized Levy's decision to cut out 70,000 children who would have attended voluntarily.

Giuliani met with his two board appointees, Ninfa Segarra and Irene Impellizzeri, yesterday, he said at a news conference.

In another signal that City Hall may be backing away from a fight about the next schools chief, Staten Island boardmember Jerry Cammarata, a staunch ally of the mayor, suggested yesterday that he might be open to keeping Levy.

"I think he is trying to work toward bringing to closure some of the problems that we have here," Cammarata said. "When his resume comes up, if in fact it does, I will do my very best to evaluate it."

Whatever the mayor's appointees and Cammarata do, it appears likely that the four members from Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan who voted to appoint Levy continue to support him, board officials said.

Terri Thomson, the Queens board member, said in an interview that Levy "has done a fabulous job" and "he's really making things happen."

Board President William Thompson, in a statement, said it would be "premature" to discuss Levy's status, but he, too, has praised Levy's three-month tenure.

Levy has taken a leave of absence from his position as Citigroup's director of global compliance. That company has a history of high-level employees getting involved with the school board — as when now-state Comptroller Carl McCall was a Citicorp official and president of the Board of Education — and board officials expect that Levy could probably extend his leave of absence.

Man Charged in Robbery, Assault on Driver

An East Elmhurst man was indicted yesterday in an attack on a livery cab driver last month, the Queens District Attorney's office said.

Robert McLennan, 48, was charged with robbery and assault after he flagged down a livery cab in Elmhurst on March 30, displayed a knife, demanded the driver's money and stabbed him in the chest, said Sherry Hunter, a spokeswoman for the Queens district attorney's office.

After McLennan allegedly fled the cab with a fistful of money, the driver, Jagmail Singh, 43, followed

him while dialing 911 on his cell phone.

The police responded, the driver pointed out the direction of his attacker and McLennan was arrested a few minutes later, still carrying the knife and the crumpled money, the Queens district attorney said.

The victim was treated and released from Elmhurst Hospital Center, according to Hunter. His wound was superficial, she said.

McLennan faces up to 25 years in prison if convicted.

— Karen Freifeld