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## Ed Board's cultural awakening

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Highbrow culture at the Board of Education?

Don't laugh. Interim Schools Chancellor Harold Levy, who has been shaking up 110 Livingston St. with bureaucratic reforms, has set his sights on expanding intellectual horizons — starting with board members.

Since he took office in January, Levy has hired a \$106,568-a-year cultural adviser, slipped poems into board members' mailboxes and recommended books to them — anything to get the discussion flowing. He has invited board members to a lecture tonight at the Hayden Planetarium.

Levy's supporters applaud his attempt to invigorate the board's intellectual discourse. Others say it's a wasteful diversion from more urgent concerns.

"This is a way for us to get together, as a group, on stimulating topics," said Queens

board member Terri Thomson, who is reading one of Levy's recommended books, Jonathan Kozol's "Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope."

But mayoral appointee Ninfa Segarra said the board doesn't need more poetry. More important, she said, is a summer school that runs smoothly.

"That's what we need," said Segarra, whose own taste runs from novels about serial killers — specifically, "American Psycho" — to the poetry of Julia de Burgos. "He can save the poetry and roses for later."

Board member Jerry Cammarata of Staten Island said he, too, is reading the Kozol book recommended by Levy. Nonetheless, he thinks Levy's timing is off.

"It's a stupid management decision," said Cammarata, whose cultural loves include George Gershwin and the poetry of Dante. Levy "should wait until after a permanent chancellor is chosen, after summer school. Then spend time on things like this."

Levy did not return calls for comment yesterday.

Even the critics, though, praised his selection of Jonathan Levi, a jazz violinist and the founder of the literary journal *Granta*, as the system's highly paid culture maven. Levi, whose title is executive assistant, is charged with forging ties between cultural institutions and the board.

He said the system has welcomed his ideas for using the arts as a teaching tool.

District 26 Superintendent Claire McIntee said she can't wait for a special field trip to Carnegie Hall — including a violin lesson with virtuoso Isaac Stern — arranged by Levy for the system's 43 superintendents.

"My hands don't work, so I'll probably squeak the loudest, but I'm very excited," McIntee said.

Parents also liked the idea of Levy sharing ideas with board members.

"A little kulcha never hurt anyone," said Manhattan parent Cynthia Lowes.