

SCHOOLS CHANCELLOR'S BOTTOM LINE:

Everything hinges on \$\$



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Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy addresses a town hall meeting at Susan Wagner High School.

■ Harold Levy tells Island town hall meeting that he can't launch reforms or new programs without funding

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The equation is simple: If the city schools chief doesn't get more money, the mayor gets no reform and parents get no new programs.

Backed by his Board of Education entourage, Chancellor Harold Levy outlined the funding formula for Staten Island parents and educators last night during his second town hall meeting in the borough. While almost 300 people turned out for the December visit, about 100 seats were filled in Susan Wagner High School last night.

Levy argued that the mayor's proposed city budget would slice off more than \$400 million and handcuff the Board of Education.

Despite a modest 2-percent bump to the Board of Education's nearly \$12 billion budget, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani mandated that money go to specific programs, Levy explained. For example, \$80 million is banked for privatizing schools, an initiative parents at five low-performing schools recently rejected. Essentially, Levy said, the system would lose that money temporarily.

"I believe in privatization, but pursuing that is counterproductive. We need to restore these funds to community schools," said



Children, parents and teachers listen to the chancellor's remarks.

Levy, reiterating testimony he gave before the City Council earlier in the day.

The budget also requires the Board of Education to cough up 40 percent of teacher's pay raises, which would further deplete funds. Already, Levy is searching for money to recruit quality teachers, as crops of seasoned veterans leave city schools and the country copes with a national teacher shortage.

"I can't compete. I'm losing teachers every day. We have become the farm team for the suburbs and it's just not right," Levy said.

In the face of new standards and a state order that only certified teachers staff schools within the next three years, teacher recruitment must be a top priority, he said. Without better teachers and expanded programs, Levy

predicted that the numbers of kids not meeting the standards will increase.

Furthermore, he worries that withdrawing city dollars may discourage the state from increasing fiscal support to the city. Currently, the state is fighting a ruling — based on the lawsuit filed by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity — that concluded city schools are cheated out of \$1 billion a year.

Giuliani, a longtime foe of the Board of Education, maintains more money won't better manage the system. "If this system can't work right on \$12 billion, it's not going to work right on \$13 billion or \$14 billion," he said to reporters during the day.

As parents requested adding programs for the gifted, updating textbooks and science labs, better pay for clinicians and surveillance cameras, Levy just smiled and said all were dependent on funding.

North Shore leaders repeated the call for a new school on the North Shore. Though \$30 million is earmarked for a Staten Island school, a site hasn't been determined. Elected officials have suggested spots in Charleston and Mariners Harbor.

At the last meeting, much of the turnout was by parents with children in District 75, the city-wide district that serves severely disabled kids. With no Island point person, many parents felt they had no voice in their child's education. Since then, Levy appointed a supervisor housed in PS 37, Great Kills, to communicate with parents.



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Jerry Cammarata, Staten Island's Board of Education member, listens as city Schools Chancellor Harold Levy speaks.