

Praise for Levy in a Review That Also Points to Failings

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

In its first review of Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy's job performance, the Board of Education praised Mr. Levy's efforts over the last 22 months to recruit teachers, slash the board bureaucracy and use data to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses throughout the school system.

But the seven board members also warned in the written evaluation that "critical deficiencies remain" under his leadership, particularly the \$2.8 billion shortfall in the school construction budget. They also urged him to focus more intensely on improving instruction.

The evaluation, which was written last month, was generally positive. Its measured tone contrasts sharply with the harsh criticism that Ninfa Segarra, the board president, had leveled at Mr. Levy during the spring and summer.

While the review urges Mr. Levy to focus on the school construction budget and instruction, it does not particularly fault him for the problems in those areas.

"Serious shortcomings in student performance were pervasive in our school system when you became chancellor in January 2000," Ms. Segarra and the other board members wrote in the evaluation, which was dated Sept. 21. "Without minimizing the progress that has been made since then, it is fair to say that critical deficiencies remain and that it is our shared challenge to address them."

The evaluation included 10 recommendations for Mr. Levy, including improving middle schools; simplifying the high school admissions process; ensuring that teacher training programs are effective, and seeking additional funds to compensate for the shortfall in the school construction budget.

Mr. Levy who was out of town yesterday, said through a spokeswoman that the evaluation was "fair and balanced."

The evaluation was a summary of comments submitted by all seven board members after he gave them a six-hour presentation in August about his accomplishments and goals. The review has not been publicly released, but The New York Times obtained a copy yesterday.

Ms. Segarra did not return a call seeking comment on the evaluation.

But Jerry Cammarata, the board member from Staten Island and one of Ms. Segarra's allies, said there was more disappointment about Mr. Levy's performance than the evaluation suggested. In particular, Mr. Cammarata said he was outraged at Mr. Levy's decision in late August to cut \$150 million from school spending, affecting afterschool programs, sports and arts programs, teacher training and other areas. Mr. Levy has said he made the cuts in desperation because the city and state had not provided enough funds.

But Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and his allies, including Mr. Cammarata, have maintained that the cuts to school programs were unnecessary, and that Mr. Levy could have instead trimmed his administrative budget. Mr. Levy had already planned administrative cuts that would save \$300 million over three years.

Earlier this month, Mr. Giuliani ordered the Board of Education to cut its nearly \$12 billion budget by an additional 2.5 percent. The new cuts are part of a citywide spending freeze in the wake of the World Trade Center attack.

"The chancellor has demonstrated a level of arrogance at the expense of the children that has not only demoralized his chief advisors at the central board but has disenfranchised him from the mainstay of government," Mr. Cammarata said yesterday. "The mayor would have provided the necessary funding needed for the BOE if he only heeded advice and made appropriate cuts."

Karen Finney, the spokeswoman for Mr. Levy, declined to comment on Mr. Cammarata's charges.

Judith Rizzo, the deputy chancellor for instruction, said she was surprised at Mr. Cammarata's claim that Mr. Levy's top advisors were demoralized, since it was not cited as a problem in the evaluation. She said that if some board or school officials were annoyed with Mr. Levy, it was only because he had such high expectations.

"Harold is a tough manager," she said. "It wouldn't surprise me if there were someone out there who thought he was being too hard on them."