

Senior planner of school construction is fired

■ **The dismissal of Patricia Zedalis by Chancellor Harold Levy brings an outraged reaction from Borough President Guy Molinari**

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Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy has dismissed the senior official in charge of planning construction, an influential figure whom Borough President Guy V. Molinari frequently telephoned.

Patricia Zedalis, chief executive of the Board of Education's Division of School Facilities, was apparently fired after she was accused by an investigative state commission of ignoring a projected \$2 billion-plus shortfall.

The news broke yesterday at a meeting in Board of Education headquarters, 110 Livingston St., Brooklyn, convened by Board of Ed president Ninfa Segarra and attended by the other Board members and appointees of the so-called Moreland Commission. The group met behind closed doors to discuss the details of the commission's July 26 report, which recommended the Board of Education get out of the construction business.

"We all recognize that what we need to do in this area is extensive reform," said Ms. Segarra. "Getting rid of one person doesn't make any real change in this institution."

If Ms. Zedalis' departure is the only thing that changes, Ms. Segarra added, then the ex-chief can be considered a scapegoat.

Molinari said he was outraged by her dismissal. "I've worked closely with Patricia Zedalis for years and she was, in my judgment, the consummate professional," he said. "There were times when I would call her five or six times in a given week."

Ms. Zedalis played a key role in the planning process for Staten Island's two newest schools, PS 56 in Rossville and PS 6 in Richmond Valley and, more recently, PS 58, the 985-seat school under construction in New Springville and IS 43, the middle school in design for the same site, according to Molinari.

The borough president said he hoped Ms. Zedalis' absence would not jeopardize IS 43. "I don't know what's going to happen," said Molinari. "There is a great deal of uncertainty. Part of it is political. The mayor is leaving and so am I. We don't know who the next generation of leaders will be."

The senior official's exit could coincide with a structural change at the Board of Education. In a statement delivered to Board members at the same time it was released to the press, Chancellor

Levy recommenced putting the School Construction Authority (SCA) in charge of running the board's Division of School Facilities, the department that now decides what gets built and where. The SCA is composed of three trustees, a mayoral appointee, a gubernatorial appointee and the chancellor himself.

"This will ensure that projects are developed, executed and managed in a most effective manner," his statement read. The chancellor was not invited to the closed-door meeting so the group could freely discuss the Moreland Commission's report, said Ms. Segarra.

Board members said they were not sure how to interpret the chancellor's statement. "It's unclear to me what's being moved to SCA," said Ms. Segarra. "The details of this page are confusing."

From the outset, the proposal seemed agreeable, added Ms. Segarra; however, she was disappointed board members were not involved in possible restructuring talks.

After the meeting, Staten Island's representative to the Board of Education said he was furious

with Levy.

"To unilaterally exercise his power as chancellor and CEO is exactly what seems to be wrong at the Board of Ed," said Jerry Cammarata. "and that is him, the chancellor making decisions from the hip without consulting the board [members] who understand the implications of decisions being made."

The chancellor's statement concluded by stating revised cost estimates for construction projects still in the pipeline may be back as early as next week. With those new numbers, he will recommend which jobs are prioritized based on which districts are most overcrowded. Cammarata said he was cautiously optimistic about IS 43's future.

Also news to board members was an updated estimate of the shortfall. The debt was originally reported at between \$1.5 billion and \$1.9 billion, but yesterday Levy's statement pegged it as \$2.8 billion. Board members could not explain the difference.