

# Expel the Board of Ed

What costs New York City taxpayers \$4,066,539 — or \$580,934 apiece? The city's seven Board of Education members.

Are we getting the most bang for our buck?

I don't think so. Add my name to the list of those who believe the Board of Education should pass into history and the mayor should be given complete control over all things educational for the city's children.

I am a new convert and what pushed me over the edge of decision was a recent special report in a New York tabloid that revealed the big-buck perks that board members enjoy at a time when after-school reading and math programs have been slashed to the bone, music and physical education programs have been eliminated and frankly, no one seems overly concerned that Little Johnny and his sister Sue can't spell.

Even the school nurse program is on life-support. Yet each Board member has an office on the 11th floor of 110 Livingston St., staffed with a \$106,569-a-year assistant and a secretary who earns between \$42,000 and \$60,000 a year.

Board President Nimfa Segarra — a political animal with lofty ambitions if ever there was one — has two personal assistants, two secretaries and recently hired yet another assistant. While the city's school districts are once again trying to do more with less and comply with schools Chancellor Harold Levy order to cut \$180 million from their budgets, Ms. Segarra's extensive personal staff costs the taxpayers megabucks.

And that is not the end of it. Aside from personal staff, board members share a secretary and a lawyers totaling close to \$300,000 in combined salaries.

The cost of staff and supplies for the board comes to a hefty total of \$3,738,992 a year. Yet, no money can be found to supply students with the bare educational necessities, such as toilet paper, writing paper and up-to-date textbooks. The central board can't get broken classroom windows fixed or have air-conditioned school buildings, new chemistry and biology lab equipment, or re-wire classrooms for computers, especially in buildings on the North Shore, but there seems to be plenty of dollar bills for anything that makes the very pampered lives of board members a tad easier.

At a time when the parents of



STEVIE LACY-PENDLETON

---

*It is time to get back to educating children — clearly a mission for which the Board of Education has earned an 'F.'*

---

many of the children in the school system are forced to take public transportation, board members — are you ready for this? — have the use of *luxury* city sedans and *drivers* who also serve as bodyguards at a cost of \$327,547 this school year.

Not wanting to be out of touch, board members have cell phones and top-of-the-line pagers that are equipped to read and send e-mails. Those little high-tech toys cost us another \$20,000 a year.

Add to all those cushy perks a salary of \$15,000 a year for what is described as a part-time job.

And for all this moolah, what do we, the taxpayers, get in return? Well, the seven-member board, which includes Jerry Cammarate, representing Staten Island's District 31, are responsible for hiring chancellors (something they have had a lot of practice doing in recent years), setting education policy, adopting budgets, selecting school sites and disciplining staff.

Not part of the job description is politics. It isn't supposed to be. But there's a lot of politicking on and by the board, especially in the case of Ms. Segarra.

The City Council has been holding hearings this week on the future of the Board of Education. Everyone from business leaders to

politicians to education experts have put in their two cents. Interestingly, many of those in high-powered positions, who have a lot to say about public education, send their children to private schools, but that is a column for another day. Tomorrow, parents will have an opportunity to voice their ideas.

As quiet as the Council would like this little fact to be kept, the truth is that it has absolutely no say in whether the board gets thrown on the ash heap. The Council's only responsibility is to sign off on funding matters. But hey, why miss an opportunity to showboat in front of television cameras and field questions from reporters for the next day's front page?

It is difficult to argue with any parent who is angered by the laundry list of perks these board members receive, especially those parents whose children are trapped in below-standard schools. It is easy for many to point the finger at teachers for the dismal state of affairs in our schools. But it is the Board of Education that is mandated to manage the school system and insure that it is properly serving the students. Instead, each year, the learning picture grows a little more tattered; higher and higher percentages of our children fail to learn; the infrastructure crumbles a little more.

If the board members were employed in private industry and had the same unsuccessful track record, they would be looking for new jobs.

I say we fire the whole lot of them, and put the mayor in charge. It's been done successfully in Chicago and although nothing is perfect, there is accountability and test scores have been edging upward. The teachers' union has reached a fair agreement with the mayor, and overall infrastructure repairs are being completed within budget. And no, Chicago is not New York (no place is), but it is time to get back to educating children — clearly a mission for which the Board of Education has earned an "F."

Let's try a new approach. If nothing else results, the money being spent to pamper our Board of Education members could then be used to buy some new books for our kids.

---

Stevie Lacy-Pendleton is the Sunday Advance Perspective editor. Her column appears each Wednesday and Friday on the Advance editorial pages.