

Summer school may get ax

Despairing board weighs return to social promotion

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The Board of Education may scrap its requirement that failing students attend summer school because too many of them still are not making the grade, members said yesterday.

In fact, board members suggested it may be time to rethink their landmark 1999 order ending the policy of promoting failing students to the next grade — known as social promotion — because the city's \$250 million summer school program apparently isn't helping the students.

"We're not cutting it," said Brooklyn board member Edison Jackson, after a report found that less than half of last year's summer school class scored high enough to advance to the

next grade.

Even worse, according to the \$161,000 board-ordered report, 68.6% of ninth-graders required to attend summer school in 2000 were back again in 2001.

Board members blasted a consultant from Metis Associates Inc., which produced the report, for highlighting questionable gains with colorful charts that played down dismal results.

For example, one bar graph showed that the number of students in grades 3 to 8 who

passed reading rose by 6.8 percentage points compared with the summer before — although 52% still failed.

In math, there was a 2-percentage-point gain — but more than 60% still flunked.

Staten Island board member Jerry Cammarata denounced the presentation as "very false," adding, "This is a very, very sad day for all of us."

Higher standards

With much fanfare, the board ended social promotion three years ago in a push to increase academic standards. The new policy requires failing students to either attend summer school or be held back a grade.

Several board members, led by Manhattan's Irving Hamer,

suggested it might be time to re-examine the end of social promotion.

"Do we need to change this policy?" asked Board President Ninfa Segarra.

Still, she stressed the importance of promoting students based on achievement.

"If we leave behind a legacy as a Board of Education it is this," she said.

Most board members seemed to agree that summer school, a favorite program of Schools Chancellor Harold Levy, might not be worth the cost. Levy was on a family vacation in Italy yesterday.

Jackson and Bronx member Sandra Lerner wondered whether the summer school tab might

be better spent improving instruction during the school year.

Meanwhile, Mayor Bloomberg continued to pound away at his push for mayoral control of city schools, telling former Mayor David Dinkins on WLIR radio that "something has to change."

In contrast to his more conciliatory tone Tuesday, Bloomberg also firmly rejected a City Council proposal that would expand the board to 11 members and allow the mayor to pick the chancellor with approval from a majority of the 51-member Council.

"I don't agree with them at all and I could never live with their proposal," Bloomberg said. "Instead of a seven-member board, they want a 51-member board."

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