

Profiles in Education: Jerry Cammarata, **Commissioner of Youth & Community Development**

by Sybil Maimin



**Dr. Jerry
Cammarata**

Only a couple of months into his new job as commissioner of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), Jerry Cammarata is off and running. He brings a can-do enthusiasm and broad experience to this \$140 million dollar agency. DYCD empowers community-based organizations wanting to grow and benefit their constituencies with department funds, as well as technical assistance, guidance through the bidding process, and follow-up monitoring. Contracts (generally for three years) are performance-based, and Commissioner Cammarata advises groups to develop a broad portfolio of funding sources and not become dependent on any one. Within the DYCD, he likes to "find existing money and work intelligently with it."

Ideas and goals funded are as diverse as the 1300-1500 contractors served, and include beacon schools, citizenship test training for legal immigrants, job placement, and numerous youth programs. Religious institutions, Y's, cultural organizations, ethnic groups, and a myriad of others participate. The process starts with an idea that is sent to the DYCD, which then helps structure a Request For Proposal (RFP) that, under our democratic system, is open to the community-at-large for bidding. It is possible for the initiator of an idea to lose out to a more able competitor in the bidding process. The proposal is evaluated by a panel of three people from a district's Neighborhood Advisory Board and three from the DYCD. A choice is made and a contract awarded. The DYCD provides continuous follow-up monitor-

ing, assistance, and auditing. The diversity of contractors and frequent inclusion of first-time applicants benefit the city with fresh ideas and innovative ways of helping people.

Money is available, advised the commissioner, for sound, imaginative projects that benefit many people will find support. DYCD resources come from state and federal tax levies, the mayor's budget, and city council and borough presidents' discretionary funds. The 81 beacon schools in the city (schools open after hours with a variety of academic, recreational, and counseling programs in a safe, secure setting) are a particular source of pride to the department. A current goal is making city council members aware of the programs in their districts that DYCD funds.

Commissioner Cammarata's approach is global; he tries to put people together to solve common problems. In a phone conversation with the ambassador from the Bahamas, during this interview, he promised assistance in setting up a much-needed after-school program that would be linked to that in New York City. He is speaking to several high-tech companies about donating computers. The DYCD is also helping seven sister-cities around the world to establish after-school programs.

Appointed by his mentor, Mayor Giuliani, Commissioner Cammarata continues to hold his seat and vote on the Board of Education, allowing him to keep in touch with important issues. In his position with the DYCD, he helps achieve the mayor's goals, with "freedom to think and challenge, but always in the structure of colleagues." Holding a Ph.D. in speech therapy, Dr. Cammarata makes time to see patients on weekends. "The practice has taught me compassion and work with the city has convinced me that "compassion must be tempered with outcomes and performances." #