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Levy's doing a good job, says previously critical school board

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Despite criticizing him in the past, the Board of Education gave Schools Chancellor Harold Levy a good review for his first full school year in office — a sign the board will leave it to the next mayor to decide who should run city schools.

In a report dated Sept. 21 and obtained by the Daily News yesterday, the board credited Levy with managerial successes that range from running an enormous summer school program to crafting a plan to shrink the central bureaucracy and finding new ways to recruit city teachers.

"Facts are facts. He has improved the system. He takes responsibility and doesn't point fingers," said Queens board member and Levy supporter Terri Thomson. "Let there be no doubt, Harold is in charge."

The former Citigroup lawyer was hired in January 2000 to bring corporate know-how to an unwieldy system.

His biggest successes, board members said, were running the nation's largest summer school program and crafting a plan to streamline administration by eliminating 1,500 jobs over three years.

Absent from the review was any direct criticism. The board has previously blamed Levy for botching an effort to privatize low-performing schools and cutting the budget at the district level.

Levy, a voting member of the School Construction Authority, was not held to task for the authority's $2.8 billion projected deficit, a gap that could shelve dozens of new schools and repair projects across the city.

Instead, the review says the chancellor needs to improve "oversight, management and tracking of the capital plan."

The report did note that less than half of city elementary and middle school students pass the state reading test and less than a third pass the state math exam.

"We bit him so that it will hurt, but not show a scar," Staten Island board member Jerry Cammarata said.

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TERRI THOMSON

Levy yesterday called the review "a fair and balanced evaluation."

But insiders said the positive tone had less to do with Levy's performance than the upcoming power shift at the board and City Hall.

A new mayor is to take office in January.

The seven members of the Board of Education — Levy's direct bosses — serve until June, when the chancellor's contract ends.

While the mayor does not appoint a chancellor, he can have a great deal of influence in the selection.

And many board members have said they will not give Levy a one-year contract extension because that decision should be left to the next board.

Mark Green, the Democratic nominee for mayor, has been complimentary of Levy.

But spokesman Joe DePlasco said Green will not discuss whom he would support as chancellor.

Michael Bloomberg, the Republican contender, also gave mixed signals. His spokesman, Edward Skyler, said while Levy had good intentions, significant change had not occurred.

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