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# Mike'll get a quick lesson in dealing with school crises

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Mike Bloomberg will be confronted with pressing education issues when he takes office in January — including whether to try to replace Schools Chancellor Harold Levy and settling a teachers-union contract amid a fiscal crisis.

Levy's contract is up July 1, and the terms of all seven members of the Board of Education, which selects the chancellor, expire in July. The mayor appoints two members.

These challenges come at a time when high-school students must pass tougher Regents exams to graduate.

Bloomberg spokesman Ed Skyler stressed yesterday that education reform remains a top priority after the World Trade Center disaster.

One of Bloomberg's goals is to abolish the Board of Education, and have an education commissioner report directly to him — but he has to persuade the state Legislature to agree.

The mayor-elect has called for bonuses for all teachers in schools where student test scores go up, and supports letting private firms take over failing schools.

He also wants all students to wear school uniforms.

Both Bloomberg and Levy come from the business world and have traveled in similar circles.

The mayor-elect built his own business-media empire, and Levy is a former top lawyer at Citigroup. Both worked at Salomon Brothers at different times and have crossed paths socially.

Bloomberg had been lukewarm to Levy on the campaign trail, but stopped short of saying he would replace him.

"I think he [Levy] cares very much. The fact of the matter is the school system has not gotten better," Bloomberg said in a July radio interview.

Levy spokeswoman Karen Finney said the chancellor was "looking forward" to meeting with the mayor-elect.

The chancellor publicly stayed out of the mayoral race, but last month Democratic candidate Mark Green tapped Levy's deputy chancellor, Tony Shorris, to serve on a finance committee, if Green were elected.

Sources said Shorris would not have taken the job without Levy's blessing.

Some of Mayor Giuliani's top education advisers — including Board of Ed President Nlufa Segarra — backed Bloomberg.

Meanwhile, public-school teachers have been without a contract since last November.

Bloomberg met with United Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten at union headquarters yesterday to discuss education and labor issues.

Before Sept. 11, he spoke about the need to raise teacher salaries — but now the money isn't there to offer a generous contract.

Some education advocates — from the left and right — are wary of Bloomberg.

Sol Stern, who tracks school issues for the conservative-minded Manhattan Institute, worries that Bloomberg wouldn't be as aggressive as Giuliani in reforming the school system.

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