

# MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

## \$5M BOOST FOR WORST SCHOOLS

By YOAV GONEN

August 14, 2007 -- The city is pumping an extra \$5 million into its 50 worst middle schools, beefing up the number of guidance counselors, pitching free teacher training, and appointing a new director to oversee the reforms, officials said yesterday.

The moves come on the recommendation of a task force created to tackle what educators have described as a "crisis" of declining student achievement and escalating violence in middle schools. The initiatives are aimed at improving the learning and social environment for the schools' struggling students, officials said.

The reforms would add the guidance counselors and related social supports, providing free teacher training at high-need schools and introducing advanced-level courses to all city middle schools by 2010.

Speaking at Manhattan's JHS 44 yesterday, [Mayor Bloomberg](#) and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein also announced the appointment of former Brooklyn Region 8 instructional leader Lori Bennett to the newly created role of director of middle-school initiatives.

In the \$168,000-a-year position, Bennett will be responsible for implementing some of the nearly 40 recommendations of the City Council-convened task force - suggestions that city leaders and a number of educational groups hailed.

"This is a report that, if implemented faithfully, will turn around all of our middle schools," teachers-union President Randi Weingarten said.

The city's troubled middle schools drew attention last year, when state exams introduced for the first time in all grades between third and eighth showed a steady and significant decline in achievement.

In January, the parent group Coalition for Educational Justice released a scathing assessment of the middle schools that highlighted the inexperience of their teachers and called for a "Marshall Plan" of changes to turn things around.

Although test scores on state exams in the middle grades rose sharply this past school year, fewer than 50 percent of middle-school students met state English standards, and roughly 45 percent of eighth-graders met the standards in math.

"Our hope is that this report will not just sit on a desk somewhere and collect dust but really result in some lasting improvements and benefits," said task-force Chairman Dr. Pedro Noguera of New York University.

Although some groups credited the city with already moving on several of the recommendations, others were skeptical that certain measures, such as lowering class size, would be enacted.

And while Bloomberg said he would "take a look" at the panel's suggestion to revert oversight of school safety officers from the NYPD to the Department of Education, sources in City Hall later said such a move was highly unlikely.