

Community District Education Council District 26

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MINUTES OF A PUBLIC/FORUM MEETING

Date: Wednesday, December 16, 2009

Time: – 6:30 P.M.

Location: PS/IS 266 – 74-10 Commonwealth Blvd., Glen Oaks-Auditorium

The meeting of the Community District Education Council of District 26 (CDEC26) was called to order and chaired by Rob Caloras, President at 6:30 p.m.

Attendees: Rob Caloras, Pia Alexander, Irene Fennell, Ismael Fuentes, Esther Jung, Marie Pollicino, Jeannette Segal & Irene Cheung

Attendees – Anita Saunders, Community Superintendent & Lori Butera, District Family Advocate

Late: Susan Shiroma,

Elected Officials - Councilman Dan Halloran – Assemblyman Mark Weprin – Senator Padavan
Representative – Anne Krzyanowski (Assemblywoman Nolan)

Rob Caloras, President of the CDEC started off by informing the attendees of the procedure regarding the Chancellor's visit. He proceeded to inform the audience that the Chancellor would be doing an overview presentation of Student Achievement and Performance followed by questions and answers.

The Chancellor welcomed everyone out and stated that Senator Padavan and Councilman Mark Weprin were present in the audience and stated that reports would have to be made at the CDEC meetings.

He started presenting stating that the first slide was on student achievement and progress and where they started in 2002 over the seven years. He then proceed to talk about District 26.

1. **New York Counties Have Improved Dramatically Compared to other Counties in New York State**
 - Year 2002- 62 counties
 - Five counties (Richmond, Queens, Brooklyn, Manhattan & Bronx) were in the bottom five in all grades in ELA and Math. Queens was number 59. The only county not in the bottom five was Staten Island. Steady progress was made and Queens became number 15 in 2006.
2. **Grade 4th Math, NYC Counties Are Racing to the Top**
 - Queens became number 15 in 2006 and number 4 in 2008.
3. **Results by District: Math – All Tested Grades (Students, Avg. Scale Score)**
 - District 26 moved up to number 4 in 2004 and remained there for 3 years. District 26 is literally 10 points ahead of everyone else. Tribute to teachers and principals.
4. **Results by District: 4th Grade Math (Students, Avg. Scale Score)**
 - District 26 is literally 10 points ahead of everyone else. Tribute to teachers and principals.

5. Student Achievement and Performance

- Queens – largest number of “A”s in the city, very few “C”s, no “F”s, including high schools.

6. School Finance

a. Bottom line – \$22,296,184; Operating budget – \$18,381,072

- Of this \$22, 296,184, half comes from the city, state gives 8 million outside of their contracts for excellence mostly focused on high quality schools, million in stimulus, federal government without the stimulus is 2 million.

b. C4E Allocations

- \$645,359 (Title 1 money) some goes to public schools

- \$334,726 – Title 1

- \$157,697 – Special Education (IDEA) some to non public – related services

- \$523,449 – stimulus money – goes to the schools

c. District 26 – pupil expenditure – varies (SE pupils, eligibility for federal & state funds, ELLs, poverty, academic performance & number of schools & overall enrollment)

District 26 spending 14,121

Citywide spending – 16,530

Contract for Excellence – NYS requires that 75% of funds be allocated to the 50% to needy schools (# SE pupils, ELLs & academic needs) and the balance to all other schools.

Title 1 – get less funds – based upon county’s number of children in poverty.

7. Capital Investment

- 23 new schools providing 13, 881 seats

- 30,377 seats funded in FY 2010-2014

- 11 billion dollar investment coming from Albany and the City.

- PS 188 annex opening in September 2009 which provided 211 seats

- 416 seats funded the FY 2010-2014 (sites in Bayside/Auburndale area)

- 18 billion for capital improvement projects

8. Student Safety

- 2008-2009 crime down 20%

- Major crimes down 13.4 over the prior school year

- District 26: Total crime down 35%; Major crimes down 27.3%

Chancellor stated that there are big challenges ahead in working together & figuring out how they will address the budget shortage and cuts.

District 26 per pupil number is lower than other school districts not just within the city but throughout the State and out performing others.

Rob reminded the audience that only questions will considered.

Speakers were called to voice their opinion:

1. Dionigios Bastas, – has children in district. Parent coordinators, should be looked at, what they’re getting paid to do and what can be cut and used elsewhere. His child is in a 12-1-1 setting (12 Students, 1 Teacher, 1 Assistant) & why are there mixed grades? They are learning ABC’s, XYZ’ and doesn’t feel its right.

Chancellor – will take a look into the first comment – will take a hard look into it. Different schools have had different reactions due to budget cuts. Second part of question - doesn’t know. It’s possible the levels are similar – will have someone look into it.

2. Elaine Miller – what is your prior teaching experience which enables you to become a leader of the NYC school system?

Chancellor – taught 6th grade and in a high school. He and his cabinet collectively have an overall of 100 years of experience. He was chosen because the system needed to be managed in a very different way to ensure that children all over the city, of every color, neighborhood and under every circumstance achieve. He surrounded himself with people of expertise. Feels that every child in every community should get a chance at the American dream.

3. Cathy Cahn – PTA – PS 205 – As we are all well aware, District 26 schools have taken terrible cuts in their budgets over the past years. In fact being a PTA president for several years and being a part of my schools SLT, I know how it is impossible to effectively give our children a well rounded education that includes enrichment programs, with the budgets that are allocated. Our schools depend on the generosity of parents and PTA fundraising to not only buy workbooks for our kids and bring in talented and gifted programs but to also purchase office supplies like copy paper and pencils. Your regulations on PTA's limit the fundraising that we can do to help fund the schools that are working on a bare bones budget. Your regulation A-812 is further tying our hands in how we can fundraise for our schools by limiting bake sales to once per month as long as the sale of the non-approved food items does not occur from the beginning of the school day until after the last lunch period. You know that PTA's are limited to 2 fundraisers that take the students out during instructional time, so therefore it would be impossible to have a monthly bake sale after lunch periods.

While I do agree that our children need to make healthy choices and we all want our kids to have good nutrition, I find it interesting that Linden cookies are on the approved food list...I guess good nutrition means having a contract with the Department of Education.

While you and the department of education continue to limit fundraising efforts and further continue to cut school budgets how do you propose we continue to give our children the education they deserve without the funding to ensure all the necessary teachers and tools are available?

Chancellor – stated he does not cut budgets he gives cuts to his budget. Looking at the fundraising regulation and considering appropriate changes and will have more information on that at a later date.

Stated that obesity is a massive problem in the city because children are eating sweets before lunch and this is a big concern. The Chancellor has heard the concerns of parents and will figure out a way to meet those concerns.

4. Thomas Diama – regarding registration- his concern is that people are coming in from other neighborhoods with paperwork (cable bills, etc) saying they live in the neighborhood/community and registering their children for Pre K & kindergarten and that when its time to register his children and he lives across the street from the school, there will be no seats. Would like for those registering to have more detailed documentation (driver's license, deed, etc)

Chancellor – will address the issue and if Mr. Diama knows of something he should send the information to him and it will be handled.

5. Suzanne Windland – mentioned rally regarding the closing of Jamaica HS. Once the school closes where will the children go? Francis Lewis, Cardozo & Martin Van Buren are already at its capacity.

Chancellor – they are working on it to make sure there are good schools outside of their district (new school opening up on Metropolitan Avenue).

6. Linda December – capping a class at 32, is that productive & successful?

7. Bob Friedrich – talked about accessibility to the high schools not available to community and children are being bused out of their district. Mr. Friedrich is asking that a two mile radius around the school be designated to the rights of our students so they are able to go to the Queens High School of Teaching. Will the Chancellor help them accomplish that?

Chancellor – he will look at it – there are lots of people in the community who choose to go to schools outside. Doesn't know who made the promises because he was not involved. There were political deals made. There are two schools on that campus (D26 & D29). Will look into it.

7. Walter Pukalski – why hasn't the DOE created more specialized high schools for gifted students?
Chancellor – there were three and now there are eight with more to come.

8. April Cherry – Why would a new teacher choose to work in an area that's disadvantage if they knew that their job security was going to be heavily influenced by circumstances beyond their control and influence for anything that happened after 3 p.m.

Chancellor – thousand of teachers each year applying to teach in a challenged community because they are trying to change the world & kids. They're concerned about children who grow up in disadvantage circumstances. They think the schools are making progress and they want to be part of it. Job security is not based on the children; it's based on the progress that the children make. Every teacher should be making progress with their children.

9. Ella Trotta – in the business world where there's checks and balances they have individuals to investigate corruption at the DOE how do they investigate corruption especially when their data is showing that they are making progress and how do you address teachers and principals. Teachers are being asked to go into the principal's office and being coerced into changing grades of failing students because it doesn't look good on the teacher and the next progress report that's given out. How do you deal with it?

Chancellor – there are two teams (Inside Investigating Unit and an Outside Investigating Unit) run by Candace McLaren who investigates all the allegations. Chancellor states that if the principal asks that a grade be changed & the teacher feels it's wrong they should file a complaint immediately. Pretending that a child succeeds is not going to help anyone; helping them to succeed is what teacher's are all about.

10. Kitty Azhar – contributes a lot to her child's education – some of the support network is being taken away with the budget cuts. How can the DOE provide D26 with more support and show that more resources are coming in?

Chancellor – can only send the resources that the city, state and federal government give the DOE. Chancellor believes that that education is underfunded and should be spending more. It depends on parents who are willing to go above and beyond their duty. It takes helpful parents and communities who are willing to do more.

11. Jodi Nath – feels that D26 children should not have to suffer. Feels that the Chancellor should look at the Title 1 & federal money; analyze and reconfigure so that D26 can get the money they need to educate their children properly.

Chancellor - Title 1 was lowered to its threshold so that some schools in the district are getting it (cannot lower it below a certain number due to federal law). One of questions under federal law is whether Title 1 should be reallocated in a different way.

12. Susan Sutura (Jamaica High School Teacher) stated that in 2005 graduation rate 38%, now it's up over 50%. Report cards come out and are given lower grades. There is improvement in graduation rates and still there is the proposal to be closed down. How is that?

Chancellor – Closing schools is about children, not statistics. About 1 in 4 students get a regents diploma. Have spoken to parents in the community & elected officials. Trying to create new opportunities such as smaller schools where people know the children which will work better. No parent would send their child to a school whose graduation rate is under 50%. Every child is entitled to an education and a lower than 50% graduation rate means that 20% are getting local diplomas which are not worth the paper it's printed on. The President of the United States & the Secretary of Education they have called for closing the lowest 5% of performing schools.

13. Linda Courtney – regarding money – surveys were sent home (received 3). How does the DOE spend the money on things that are needed?

Chancellor – surveys cost a million an a half a year. Surveys provide a lot of information that the DOE needs. Parents provide information in which steps are taken to correct that problem. Students were also surveyed.

14. Dermot Smith – spoke about accountability – 9 of the 20 schools being closed, the DOE created (risk management).

Chancellor – stated he is held accountable – Mayoral control - do not want to send children into the 21st century without a high school diploma. So if a school is opened and it doesn't work, it will be closed.

15. Mike Finer- how could the public ascertain that principals are appropriately disbursing their allocated budget when all the information is not made public? Is it true that some principals hide expenditures and or use funds for purposes other than those in which it is intended? Some principals are putting teachers in tough assignments forcing them out.

Chancellor – the data on how money is spent is online. If there are incidents where this is happening, send information to him and his staff will look into it.

16. Kim D'Angelo – regarding arts program

Chancellor – recent report shows that the number of art teachers & expenditures on the arts have increased in NYC public schools. There is a budget of 22 billion as of now. ARIS is 3-4 million dollars.

Very concerned about the budget cuts and hope everyone can figure out ways to work more effectively on behalf of the children.

Public meeting ended at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Marian Mason, Administrative Assistant, CDEC 26.