

Community District Education Council District 26

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MINUTES OF BUSINESS & CALENDAR PUBLIC MEETINGS

Date: Thursday, September 27, 2007

Time: Calendar Meeting, 7:00 P.M.; Business Meeting, 8:00 P.M.

Location: MS 74, 61-15 Oceania Street, Bayside, NY 11364-Rm 128

The meeting of the Community District Education Council of District 26 (CDEC26) was called to order by Rob Caloras, President, CDEC at 7:05 pm in the Conference Room -128.

Roll Call: Rob Caloras, Jeannette Segal, Minkyung Lee, Marie Pollicino, Dr. Lana Zinger & Patrick McShane

Late – Irene Cheung

Also in attendance: Anita Saunders, Community Superintendent & Esteban Duran, Education Council Specialist

Business Meeting

President's Report

1. Welcomed new CDEC members to the council
2. Correspondence done by way of e-mails – asking council members to read & respond
3. Article in Courier Newspaper regarding the vacancies in D26
4. PS 94 Annex complaints – had a conversation with the PTA President & principal. Rob visited the school and walked around.
 - a. One problem is that the construction company did not finish its job on time leaving debris around the school by the time school began. Apparently when parents went to the school a couple of days before the school opened there was debris all around the school and the parents were concerned.
 - b. A full-time security guard is needed.
 - c. A playground is needed which falls under the School Construction Authority (SCA) project and they are working on it. Rob stated that he had made calls, sent out e-mails and is hoping to expedite the matter.
 - d. No Bus service – Rob placed a phone call to the OPT (Office of People Transportation). Marian contacted Mr. James Campbell, Asst. who in turn contacted MS 94 and spoke with the bus liaison (Peggy Roussinos). Marian also spoke to Peggy and asked that she follow up with her every week until the matter is rectified.
 - e. Asbestos Concern – extensive testing done – no substances found per DEP.
5. CDEC move put on HOLD – awaiting authorization from Central.
6. Forum – October 25 – 3 definite speakers (what goes into testing – what kind of tests – how do they make them - what are they suppose to do & are we getting the test designed to do what they are suppose to do.

Randi Weingarten – will speak from the Chancellor's point of view

Jane Hirschmann – (Time Out from Testing) – will represent the parent's point of view

Bob Tobias – expert in the testing field

Also invited was Jim Liebman from the DOE but no confirmation just yet. Esteban Duran will notify the CDEC of the representative.

- The flyers will be backpacked in which 17,000 will be printed.
7. Informed the council members to establish a relationship or a network of your own. Make yourself available to parents & schools. Attend PTA meetings & establish contact with the PTA president. If any problem arises, take it to the in-house staff first (Principal, PTA) and if we could be of assistance then we will try to help.
 8. Informed members of the UFT Dinner on October 10th at Trattoria Restaurant at 6:30 p.m. in which all parents are invited along with the teachers. CDEC invited also.
 9. Letter sent to Chancellor from CDEC regarding the SLT's changes (availability from consensus to majority vote). Patrick made a motion to adopt the letter & Marie seconded. The council voted unanimously to accept. (See attached letter)

To the Chancellor and the Commissioner of Education:

The Chancellor's proposed revision of A 655, the regulations governing School leadership teams, would take away the authority of these bodies to determine school budgets, as the regulations now currently state. If adopted, principals will only have to "consult" with SLTs before determining school budget unilaterally. Then the school's comprehensive education plan would be written afterwards, in alignment with the budget as already decided. To reduce the SLT role to mere consultation is unnecessary as no budget has ever been held hostage an SLT failing to approve one. Also, at a time when principals are being giving unprecedented autonomy over school policies, it is particularly worrisome to remove the one check in place that exists on the school level.

Also, rather than having consensus decision-making on other matters, as currently exists, in future SLTs could choose to decide issues by majority vote. This also would allow principal's to more readily ignore the opinions of members of the SLT, once a majority is assured for a vote. This is an unnecessary move away from active involvement of all members on the SLT and could possibly result in parents being ignored.

Similarly, the power of the District Leadership Team would be considerably diminished. In the future, the role of the DLT would be to develop and review the District Comprehensive Educational Plan (DCEP), including annual goals and objectives which must be aligned with the District's and Chancellor's goals – rather than deciding on those goals themselves.

All of these proposals would continue to erode the ability of parents to have real and substantive decision making power when it comes to their children's education. Such erosion is likely to exacerbate the current difficulties many schools have in attracting parents to participate in leadership positions.

There are also material issues as to whether the process used for revising these regulations is legal under state law. Commissioner's Regulation Section 100.11(f), which controls, any amendment to the New York City public schools' plan for school-based planning and shared decision-making, says that any amendment must be formally approved by the District Community Education Councils (DCECs), as required by Section 100.11(b), since the DCECs are the successors to "each board of education of each community school district," as described in that subsection. Not only have the DCECs not approved this change in the regulations, they were not even consulted. (See the section of the state law below.) Any variation from this process is subject to appeal to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to section 310 of the Education Law. Such an appeal may be instituted prior to final adoption of the DOE plan and must be instituted no later than 30 days after final adoption of the DOE plan by the Panel on Educational Policy, according to Commissioner's Regulation Section 100.11(e)(1),(2).

In sum, the proposed changes should not be adopted since they are an unwarranted elimination of the parent voice in school-based decision making and they also violate the procedures set out in state regulation. Accordingly, the Commissioner should revoke this regulation, until and unless the Community District Education Councils are brought into the process in a substantive way. Such would not be limited to commenting on regulations set to be put into place by the Chancellor, rather this would include Council members being a part of the process that formulate changes and approves their enactment.

Rob informed the attendees that Senator Nolan has also adopted the letter and has asked that some people meet with her to discuss these changes and other issues that might be coming up as the assembly approaches 2009. Susan Windland, Co-President of President's Council, two parent leaders from D30 and Rob will attend this meeting.

10. School Scheduling – Rob asked if the council wanted to visit their children’s schools plus another. The council agreed to cover their own schools which would not be conflicts of interest. The council member will have to go the PTA meetings plus have contact with the PTA president. Rob will assign the schools to the council members and advise them.

Mary Vaccaro informed the attendees that the UFT is providing training for the teachers, parents & administrators by the School Leadership Teams which will take place at PS 208 on October 18th at 3:45 p.m.

Rob informed the council members that they were given a list of all the schools in D26 and he will come up with the assignments.

Marian Mason asked the council members to kindly complete their Activity report for September and hand it in.

Rob spoke about the Scholarship Dinner that took place last year with the committee members, Cathy Cahn, Mary Vaccaro, Lori Butera & himself. This was the first D26 UFT/Parent Organization Scholarship Dinner/Dance. Awards were given out to the winners for the best essay & drawing pertaining to “What do you like about your school? Is there anything you would change about your school?” There will be another scholarship dinner on May 8, 2008 at Floral Terrace, Floral Pk. Teachers will be evaluating the work. This year, bonds would be given out.

Treasurers Report – Marian informed the council members that nothing has been subtracted as of yet since forms have just been submitted. Rob informed the council members to submit for gas, parking & tolls when going to DOE meetings and babysitting is deductible but receipts are needed. Informed the attendees that last year the CDEC allocated papers to the schools out of the CDEC budget.

Secretary’s Report – Patrick McShane

1. Patrick asked if everyone had a chance to read the August 30th minutes or make corrections. Rob made a motion to adopt the minutes as is and Jeannette seconded. Members voted unanimously to accept the minutes.

Superintendent’s Report – Anita Saunders

1. Learning Environment Survey – Presentation

There were 4 categories – Academic Expectations; Safety & Respect; Engagement & Communication. Principals will be sharing with the PTAs’. Not all teachers submitted nor did many parents submit. Hopefully next year more will respond.

Rob informed the attendees that he and other parents signed a boycott because the survey did not adequately allow for the interest expressed by the parents.

2. Progress Report – Chancellor Announcement expected Mid October

Will rate every school (A, B, C, D, or F) on several categories: School Environment-15% (5% Attendance & 10% Learning Environment Survey); Student Performance-30%; Student Progress-55% (minimum one year student progress).

3. Quality Review

Cambridge Group from England arrived in NY. They are educators who will be here for a couple of months depending on their job going from school to schools in all districts evaluating the school. They will be interviewing principals, students and teachers and rating the school either Outstanding (very rare), Well-developed, Proficient or Undeveloped.

4. PS 162 – Hosting UK Educators – October 18th

Visitors from UK observing the teaching & learning in the US. They also want to see what the schools are like.

5. MS 158 – American Heart Association – NFL Football Player - Eric Coleman, NY JETS. Kick-off site for the “Get Up and Move Campaign” for physical fitness of American students.

New Business – none

Council member Minkyung Lee informed the attendees about a problem that a parent was having their child’s school where children who bring lunch from home go into the auditorium to eat instead of in the cafeteria. Minkyung was asking for advice on how to proceed with this issue.

Rob informed Minkyung that she should have the person contact the PTA representative or the parent coordinator to inform them of this issue. If there is a language problem, the DOE will provide them with a translator. If the issue is not resolved after talking with the above individual, then the CDEC will write a letter for support.

Rob made a motion to adjourn, Patrick seconded. Council voted unanimously to adjourn at 8 p.m.

PUBLIC MEETING

Rob called public meeting to order at 8:10 and informed attendees that they would only be allowed up to three (3) minutes to speak if signed up.

Speakers

1. **Anna Shehas** – parent of PS 188 – spoke about the Magnet program class size went from 24 to 32 students. Met with principal, parent coordinator and other parents. Wanted to know why the increase and was told that Special Ed is being funded by the City. Ms. Shehas feels that the communication was not handled professionally at all because the parents knew nothing.
2. **Shakira Kirshnitz** – parent of PS 133 - spoke about the “Epi Pens” – parents must complete a form for the school to alert them of their child’s allergic reactions. Ms. Kirshnitz informed the attendees that the child or Para are not allowed to carry the Epi pens with them & feels that they should have them in case of an allergic reaction to food or etc. Feels that training should be done in all schools.

Rob informed the attendees that the CDEC will send a letter to all schools asking them what their procedures are and to see if they are aware of the new law. Elliot Spitzer signed a bill stating that the Epi Pen is to follow the child and that they must have an action plan.

Mary Vaccaro stated that the teachers have not been trained regarding the Epi Pens but the nurses should be knowledgeable. Shakira stated that the Para’s follow the students but have no training regarding the usage of the Epi Pens.

3. **Mel Meer** – wants the parents to lobby for a better system in 2009. Mel informed the attendees that the new structure has no authority over the principals and this is dangerous because they are wiping out roles of the SLT’s & giving it to the principals. Asking where do the parents go if there is a problem with a principal?

Rob informed the attendees that the council will be submitting a formal complaint to the Chancellor regarding the math tests and SLT’s.

Rob announced our guest speaker Angela Reformato who is the Guidance Counselor for the UFT who will be discussing the need for more full time guidance counselors in District 26 and in the city so that our children will receive necessary services. Ms. Reformato will also explain how other Districts were able to get more guidance counselors in their schools and outline how the CDEC and members of the District 26 community can help to get more counselors in our schools. Ms. Reformato informed the attendees that she is the Citywide Chapter Leader Guidance Counselor and she is working in Brooklyn. Has been a guidance counselor for 15 years but in the education system for 38 years.

1. D26 – district with fewer number of guidance counselors.
2. D26 elementary schools being cheated (D25 has guidance counselors)
3. Every child deserves emotional growth.
4. Counselors conducts staff & community workshops, facilitates crisis management & intervention.
5. Helps ensure the rights of students in temporary housing, enforces the mandates of child abuse & maltreatment.
6. Educates and upholds rules & regulations as stated in the Chancellor’s regulations.
7. Students and schools benefit from school guidance counselors & their programs.
8. School guidance counselors collaborate with all members of the school community to develop and deliver programs to support every student’s academic, career and personal/social development.
9. Provide students with knowledge and skills to be effective learners.

Counselor from D25 (Karen of PS 165-Flushing) gave an overview of her responsibilities and duties. Meet with students going through issues (divorces-bereavement-social, etc).

Counselor from D25 (Lisa of PS 214-Flushing) works 5 days a week & work closely with community boards and members. Help students on test preparation who have test anxiety issues. Handle safety & socialization issues. Counselors are there for parent support and to work with the parents.

All Guidance counselors must be certified (60 credits Masters-Internship-30 graduate credits in counseling).

Ms. Reformato spoke about trying to mandate that elementary schools have guidance counselors through legislation.

Rob asked about the parent coordinator doing the same job and Ms. Reformato stated that they are not qualified to meet with the students. Parent Coordinators are go between the parent and principal.

Jeannette asked, “Who supervises the guidance counselors “? She was told the principal supervises and it’s up to the principals to hire guidance counselors. Principals get funded based on a mandate which is 1 provider for 90 IEP students.

Ms. Reformato restated that parents should get involved with the school leadership teams and PTAs’ to try to educate principals and show them that this is valuable to their students and this would give them something to think about.

Rob asked “is there anything that you do that a Parent Coordinator does”? Ms Reformato stated that guidance counselors do not teach classes or perform lunch room duties.

Rob suggested doing a resolution and sending it to the DOE regarding the importance of guidance counselors. Rob made a motion and Patrick seconded. Council members voted unanimously to this resolution.

Mary Vaccaro informed the attendees that a program will roll out Monday for the training of school nurses on the Epi Pens.

Rob made a motion to adjourn and Patrick seconded. Council voted unanimously.

Meeting ended 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Marian Mason, Administrative Assistant.