

**Community District Education Council District 26**  
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**MINUTES FROM BUSINESS /CALENDER/ PUBLIC MEETINGS**

**Date:** Thursday, October 30, 2014  
**Time:** Public Meeting - 7:00 P.M. - Business Meeting – 8 p.m.  
**Location:** MS 67 – 51-60 Marathon Parkway, Little Neck, NY – Auditorium

The meeting of the Community District Education Council of District 26 (CDEC26) was called to order by Jeannette Segal, President at 7: 10 p.m.

**PUBLIC MEETING**

Roll Call - Jeannette Segal, Susan Shiroma (Borough Appointee), Alan Ong (Borough Appointee), Leslie Rubenstein, Anastasio Politidis, Ricky Chan

Excused - Roy Menendez (military leave) & Aman Luthra (student)

Resigned – Lucy Vieco

Also present: Danielle Giunta, Community Superintendent & Lori Stein-Butera, District Family Advocate

Jeanette called the meeting to order and acknowledged the attendance of council members: Alan Ong (Borough Appointee), Susan Shiroma (Borough Appointee), Leslie Rubenstein, Anastasio Politidis and Roy Menendez on military leave.

Jeanette introduced Danielle Giunta as the new Superintendent of District 26. She described her as a product of District 26 and reviewed educational and professional experience.

Superintendent Giunta thanked the audience for attending and acknowledged the excellent work that Anita Saunders had done over her tenure District 26. She encouraged those in the audience to contact her for any questions or concerns. Superintendent Giunta presented the Contracts for Excellence Proposed Plan for FY15 in a PowerPoint presentation. She briefly reviewed each slide. (The presentation is attached.) There were no changes in the amount of funds allocated for C4E for the FY2015. Superintendent Giunta explained that ICT/CTT funds helped to decrease the student/teacher ratio for general education students. She apprised the audience of a link to visit to see the specific allocations for individual schools.

She explained that class size reduction remained a top priority in 2014-2015. However, the State has not provided the necessary funds to achieve the goal that was established in 2007.

Superintendent Giunta informed the audience that public feedback on the plan would be taken into account and that a deadline for public comment would be posted on the website provided.

Jeanette introduced the speakers on the panel to discuss proposed changes to the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT). Jeanette explained that each speaker will have five minutes to present and then the audience would be able to ask questions. She also explained that speakers would be allowed according to the list for public speakers. Jeanette introduced Susan Shiroma as the facilitator of the forum.

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Susan offered a brief introduction by asking how many in the room went to a specialized high school or has a child in a specialized high school. She explained that Queens sends a large number of students to the specialized science high schools. She explained that bills had been introduced in the State Legislature. She also explained the City Council has several members who are calling for changes to the admissions tests for the specialized high schools. She told the audience that they would have to advocate for themselves with politicians because the admissions criteria could change as early as 2015.

Susan explained that David Lee and Melanee Farrah, speaking in support of the current criteria for admissions would speak first.

David Lee described the SHST as an appropriate way to admit students to schools. He maintained that the specialized schools are primarily math/science oriented and that the tests were the best way to select students. He said that only 35% of NYC students could pass the ELA exam and that explains the concern regarding the specialized high school exams. He explained that some parents send their students to Charter Schools. He further claimed that the “test-prep” programs were wrongly disparaged. His organization is trying to increase diversity in the specialized high schools through two programs. He said that the bill was a problem because it was taking the power away from the State Legislature and giving it to the mayor, who may have a political agenda. He also said that additional criteria could include residence, essays, leadership skills and other factors. He said that those are all subjectively evaluated and take away from the rigor of the selection process. We would lose rigor, transparency and objectivity. Queens’s students represent 36% of students in the specialized high schools, if the mayor decided to distribute the seats among all five boroughs, 900 Queens’s students would lose their seats and it would lead to more overcrowding in already Queens high schools.

Melanee Farrah, a graduate of Bronx High School of Science, spoke next. She explained that there were more minority students at the time she attended but is still concerned about the proposed changes. She explained that the “band aid” approach was not a good solution. She said that the proposed criteria for admissions (attendance, etc.) would lead to students who are unprepared would be pushed into schools where they could not perform well instead of addressing the needs in the schools where those students attend and currently underperform. She said that the RFP’s focus on attendance does not address the issue of why minority students have higher absence rates, the near elimination of G&T programs from schools that minority students attend. She also said that Charter schools do not inform students of the opportunity to take tests because it would reflect poorly on them.

Susan and Jeannette reminded members of the audience to sign the speaker sheet if they wish to make comments and then introduced Janella Hinds and Ken Cohen.

Janella Hinds, a UFT Representative, explained that about one and a half years ago members of the staff in specialized high schools met over concerns regarding the student body in their schools, how they are comprised and how they are selected. She explained that the suggested reforms include the SHST but that they would like to see changes made in the exams, provide free test prep, and expand the Discovery Program and the Dream Program. She explained that the UFT is NOT proposed a specific number of students from specific areas or specific demographics. She said that the UFT supports the same kinds of measures used by elite colleges which rely more on GPA than standardized test scores. She explained that the tests have quirks.

She explained that making a correlation that minority students will not be successful in specialized schools based on their performance on the SHST is wrong.

Ken Cohen, the Regional Director of the NAACP spoke next. Mr. Cohen acknowledged that there are both successful and unsuccessful schools throughout NYC. He explained that the focus is about educating young people and having all students succeed. He said that for the last 20 years we've been fighting standardized tests. He said that we fought for changes in the SAT and it did change and it did not impact on the college admissions process. He would like to see NYC and New York State make changes so that all students can be successful and that communities would not be pitted against one another. He explained that the NAACP was associated with all peoples of color and all religious groups not just African Americans.

Phil Orenstein, representing Grant Lowry, read a statement:

I want to express my clear support for merit selection by keeping the specialized high school admissions test. Merit selection has created a good system that is not based on cronyism, racial quotas, etc. Through this system, NYC has developed some of the best schools in the country: Stuyvesant, Bronx Science. The "attack" on Asian children has no place in a civilized country. When Grant Lowry gets to Congress he will be a strong voice to educational reform.

Susan Shiroma acknowledged Phil Gim, a candidate for State Senator and Dennis Saffron, a local resident and community activist who has written several articles that provide a background on this issue.

Mr. Cohen responded to the speaker, asking that if the candidate makes it to Congress, he hopes that he will work to make all schools successful. He explained that when he went to school, the existence of specialized high schools did not take away from the quality education at other schools.

Mr. Lee explained that the world is different today and that the U.S. needs to keep up and we should not have to dilute any standards.

Ms. Hinds said that the UFT does not put forward a policy that is an attack on any group in the city or that it is racist in nature. She also said that understanding that quality, intelligence can be measured in different ways is not the same way as diluting the standards.

Ms. Farrah explained that the intent of the reform was not to be anti-Asian or to pit groups against each other. She said that both of those feelings are drawing attention away from the real issues.

The next speaker, Charlie Ross, said that he believes that each child should receive the appropriate education: gifted or not. He said that immigrants come here for education and that a system based on merit is the fairest system.

Mr. Cohen responded that he did not think that the goal was to lose the "merit" aspect but to make that aspect fairer. That seeing and following the records of a child from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade on would be more reflective of merit than performance of a single test; that students could simply not feel well on the day of the test, etc.

Ms. Farrah said that she is not against expanding the concept of merit but has a problem with eliminating the objectivity and that creating a portfolio for 13 year olds is not the same as creating a portfolio for 18 year olds.

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The single test method may have challenges but no one has proven it to be a barrier to access. Poor preparation in junior high schools is a barrier.

Ms. Hinds countered that the test has been a barrier to some students. She explained that because the test rewards certain parts of the exam more weight than other parts means that test prep for everyone would help to level the playing field.

Mr. Lee explained that features of the test – such as weighting - should be transparent. He said that there are other excellent schools in the city that use multi-criteria to admit students and that there is less representation of minorities in those schools.

Dennis Saffron said that this is not a question of black vs. white, that many of the specialized schools are 60-70% Asian. He said that what has to be stressed is that the proposal is not going to look much to address diversity. He made the same point as Mr. Lee that the schools using the holistic approach are far less diverse and a much more affluent student body. He said that this is not the way to achieve diversity.

Ms. Hinds stated that the UFT grappled with these issues and had many discussions about how to increase the opportunity for black and Hispanic students NOT limit opportunity for Asian students. She explained that the proposal was based on admissions criteria in elite schools around the country as well as colleges. She continued to say that the focus should be on schools throughout the city, not just the specialized high schools. She said that it is the UFT's goal to continue this conversation.

Mr. Lee said that the mere mention of Black and Hispanic students means that there is an issue of diversity. He gave the example of an elite high school in Washington D.C. (Thomas Jefferson) that shifted its criteria for admissions from a standardized test to multi-criteria and has a larger percentage of students who need academic support.

Ms. Farrah said that we all agree that leveling the playing field and address the needs of all students. She said that the task force that addressed these changes in a 30 day period was not long enough. She stated that changes in the SAT took far longer and that to make changes that would serve students require more thought and time. She further stated that there is no proof that the admissions test is biased.

Mr. Cohen replied that a ruling by a judge could take years. He gave the example of a bill passed in the legislature 17 years ago that called for more funding for NYC schools still hasn't led to more funding for NYC schools. He said that we've gone through 8 years of closing "failing" schools as a solution.

Jeanette closed the public meeting. Anastasio made a motion to close the public meeting. Alan seconded the motion. Council voted unanimously to adjourn.

## Business Meeting

Jeanette called the Business Meeting to order. Alan Ong (Borough Appointee), Susan Shiroma (Borough Appointee), Leslie Rubenstein, Anastasio Politidis were all present.

1. Minutes

Alan made a motion to approve the September 23, 2014 minutes and Ricky seconded the motion. Council voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

2. President's Report: Jeannette welcomed the new superintendent.

3. Old Business: Safety Pledge is final. Jeanette thanked Alan. Alan already sent it to Molly Wang, Principal of PS 173. Jeanette asks that we roll out the letter to the schools.

Jeffrey Slivko, Principal of MS 172 explained that he addressed it with parents and that he might not want to use the same letter. He also said that a lot of principals would be on board with it. Jeffrey said that he would write to the principals endorsing the letter.

Jeannette explained that the President's Council is on board with it. Jeannette asked Marian to send it out to all principals in D26 with a note that this is a recommendation from the CDEC and that the CDEC would like them to send it to all students and their parents.

4. New business:

Marian asked if it was okay to send the letter regarding the Capital Plan requesting principals to send in their five priorities needed for their school. Jeannette said "yes".

The next meeting is November 25th.

Lori Butera stated that the last 2 Fridays she had an excellent turnout for family Ping-Pong and that it was a really fun evening for all involved. She thanked the CDEC for making the program possible.

Susan Shiroma asked Jeffrey Slivko to speak at the next meeting regarding the new G&T programs.

Jeffrey responded that there is diversity in the classes that had not taken the test. That it's a continuing challenge to identify who is gifted and talented and materials to use in those classes. He explained that there is a concern that there was a lack of transparency from the DOE and that his school had lost students as a result of the process. He said that there was an appeals procedure but didn't know how it went. He was told to come up with a rubric for admission to his program but that he asked DOE to develop the rubric.

Leslie asked if the criterion was solely based on test scores. Jeffrey said that it was solely for this year but that multiple criteria would be used for this year onward. He expressed concern that parents did not know that there would be a different process or what the criteria would be.

Alan stated that page 13 of the Middle School directory does have an explanation of all the criteria but that his conversations with parents attest to the fact that most are unaware of the new process.

Susan asked if "page 13" provide the weight of each part of the criteria. Alan said no.

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Danielle explained that she participated in a committee meeting focusing on new procedures. Danielle read a letter from the DOE regarding a multi-criteria 35% State Exams, 35% 4<sup>th</sup> grade report card, 10% attendance 20% elementary school evaluations - work ethic from report cards.

Jeffrey clarified that elementary schools are entering the "work ethic" data on a new system. He asked who is entering the data for current grade 5.

Jeanette stated that this was done without any notice to the CDEC and that the CDEC needs to see the criteria and have an opportunity for parents to make public comment.

Lori clarified that District 30 had approved this plan and that it would be sent to us for review.

Susan made a motion to nominate Leslie as Secretary. Alan seconded and all approved.

Jeannette announced that Valerie Distant, a teacher at P.S. 98 passed away yesterday. Jeannette said that she would send flowers on behalf of the CDEC.

Jeannette thanked Danielle again.

Anastasio made a motion to adjourn the Business meeting. Ricky seconded. Council voted unanimously to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned 9:30 pm  
Minutes submitted by Leslie Rubenstein, Recording Secretary