

Public School Press

The latest news from the NYC Department of Education

APRIL 2014



The first 100 days of New York City's new mayoral administration have been a whirlwind—and one of those at the very center is new Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña. She comes armed with a personal mission: to make this an administration that will listen—and respond—to parents.

Mayor de Blasio raised this issue as one of his priorities at one of the Chancellor's first school visits (by now she has visited nearly 30). "Parents were held at arm's length," he said of the old system. "It's time to treat all members of the educational community like they matter again—and we need a leader who understands that."

The accomplishments of Fariña's first 100 days indicate that she plans to turn that under-

standing into action. In her first week on the job, the Chancellor changed the structure of the Department of Education (DOE) so that she could directly supervise the Division of Family and Community Engagement. She made it clear that connecting with students' families was at the forefront of her strategy, "Great schools foster emotional connections with students and their families."

Her next step was to identify parents' concerns. At one of the Chancellor's first public meetings, she circulated green index cards, asking parents to write down questions about the school system. She repeated this practice with the Community Education Councils as well, handing out color-coded cards at forums to identify issues critical to parents.

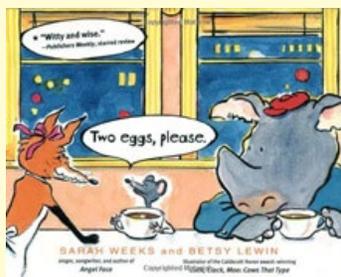
To alert families about the enrollment period for public school pre-k programs the Chancellor sent representatives directly into communities. Workers in every borough were phone-banking, leafletting, and encouraging parents to sign up and spread the word.

Recent statements from Chancellor Fariña describe additional efforts to engage families going forward. Over the course of the school year, parents will be invited to a number of citywide family-oriented conferences, workshops, and town hall meetings. Parent Academy workshops will provide families and parent leaders with information and resources to support them in helping their children thrive at school. "It's our goal not just to develop a parent-friendly system," said the Chancellor. "We also want to develop partners."

THE CHANCELLOR'S BOOK OF THE MONTH

TWO EGGS, PLEASE

(Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007) Written by Sarah Weeks, illustrated by Betsy Lewin



Dear Parents,

The book I've selected to highlight this month, *Two eggs, please*, is a wonderful reminder of how important it is to honor both

our differences and our similarities. In this delightful story, the patrons at a bustling diner all order the same thing—two eggs. Yet, the elephant prefers sunny-side up, the duck scrambled. The fox orders soft boiled, and

the alligator requests poached. While cracking an egg, the cook notes that each order is different, yet all the orders are made from the same stuff.

Each child comes to us with his or her own unique and special qualities. Each assimilates and processes knowledge—and transfers it onto paper and exams—differently. Yet, despite their differences, children also have much in common. Most enter the world with an innate joy and curiosity, eager to learn and experience new things.

This book is humorous in tone, but it's quite thought provoking and could even apply to the

different approaches to parenting and the variety of ways families are involved in their children's education. The goal, I always say, is not to judge but rather to improve your understanding of who you are and what you value.

Best,

Carmen

Q&A WITH CARMEN

The first 100 days of a new administration are a great opportunity to initiate change. What has been your goal during these first 100 days?

Just like the adage, 'it takes a village,' improving our kids' education depends on the collaborative effort of our schools, our educators and the ongoing support of the entire school's community. So since day one, I set out to establish transparency in the way this agency operates. Families must be made part of an open dialogue about school policy.

What have you enjoyed most about your first 100 days as Chancellor?

I have been an educator for over 40 years, and I always enjoyed learning new methods of instruction from my colleagues.

That remains true today—as Chancellor I want to visit as many schools as possible to learn from those who are working closest with our children.

I've already visited nearly 30 schools in 100 days, because it's what I love, and it's how we can all become better leaders for our students.

What is your vision for the City's public schools?

Four pillars have guided me since I took this position 100 days ago. First: teachers, principals, and school staff need to be honored and recognized, they are doing extraordinarily hard, on-the-ground work. Second, we must focus on improving student achievement. The Common Core will get us there, but it needs to be clearly explained, and carried out in a way that supports success. Third, we must engage with all of those who want to work with us—and that means you. And finally the last pillar: we need to innovate and partner with the entire community. We can vastly improve the quality of schools across the City through collaboration and partnership.

These four pillars are at the crux of how we will move our schools and students forward.

What kinds of changes have you introduced?

Statistics, numbers, data—they don't describe the picture of how your child is performing. I'm focused on the kind of learning



that will develop your whole child, academically, socially and emotionally.

We're simplifying school Progress Reports to better reflect the real work that's going on. Pre-k options and seats have expanded drastically in every borough—already by over 4,200 seats. Middle school is pivotal to a student's success, and will be another area where I'm focusing my attention.

We are currently replacing the State exam scores as the sole measure of whether students proceed to the next grade level. Our new promotion policy will create a more authentic, comprehensive review based on classroom work in addition to test scores.

Many other plans will debut in the coming weeks and months, and I am excited to share them with you.

As a parent, how will I be included in information about my child's education?

I want you to be an active and vocal participant in your child's education, and that means that this administration needs to listen. I have placed the Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) directly under my supervision, so that your concerns and comments are escalated and answered quickly. We're expanding the number of parent workshops and conferences that focus on critical topics like the Common Core and cyberbullying. We've sent representatives on the ground out into communities to share updates about enrollment deadlines and information.

I want to go far, and I want to go far together.

PARENT COORDINATOR PROFILE

Ines Gronda

Ines Gronda, an elementary teacher from Ecuador, didn't come to the United States until she was an adult. With two children in school, it was a natural step to become a Bilingual Family Assistant in New York, and eventually, a Parent Coordinator at P.S. 64Q.

How do you see your role as a Parent Coordinator?

Parent Coordinators need to create a friendly environment for parents so they will feel comfortable asking for information about their children's education. It doesn't matter what language they speak – we are here to help.

You've also returned to teaching. How does this influence your role as a Parent Coordinator?

In 2003 I started to teach an ELL class for adults. I was nervous, but in the end more people registered than I had room for! Now I have a wait list for future classes! I can identify with these parents who do not yet speak English. It is so hard for them to help their children with homework and participate in the school community. As a Parent Coordinator, I realize how important it is to make sure these non-English speaking parents become involved in their children's education.



How can these parents get involved?

Every year I organize 30 parent workshops based on parent surveys I send home: K-5 Homework Help, Reading Stories, Foundations, ELA and Math Workshops, ELL Parent Orientation, etc. Parents need to know what their children are learning, and how they can help them at home. I interpret in Spanish and I have a parent volunteer interpreting in Bengali.

What is the most important thing that parents need to know?

Being a parent these days is not easy, but becoming involved in the school community has a huge pay off for everyone involved. My workshops are designed to help parents help their children, but also to help them as individuals. If we can form a network where everyone contributes to helping each member, everyone benefits.

PARENT ACADEMY CORNER

Shona Gibson, Senior Director of Parent Academy and Family Services, spoke recently about the new focus on training and work-

shops being made available for parents through Parent Academy. "What we are doing now that is so exciting, is really listening to our Parent Leaders, and to you – the parents – and we are working hard to bring you the kind of events and services you really want."

As a result of parent feedback, at the 17 events that have

taken place since January, Parent Academy has offered workshops on such topics as the Common Core learning standards, Special Education, becoming a parent leader, cyberbullying, and how to help students defeat test anxiety.

If you, as parents, know of an area you'd like to become more educated about, please

contact the Division of Family and Community Engagement at 212-374-4118 or FACE@schools.nyc.gov and let us know. "Looking ahead," Ms. Gibson said, "our goal is to make sure every time you come to Parent Academy you leave more informed and empowered than you were the day before."

PARENT TO PARENT with Jesse Mojica

There is much to be excited about as we come to the end of the new administration's first 100 days. We are pleased that Chancellor Fariña has made family engagement such a high priority. Parents have more to juggle than ever, and the only thing better than a little support is A LOT of support! I know as a parent, I can't do it alone, and I don't want you to either.

I'm also happy to report that in these first 100 days, our Family Services team has provided 40 trainings, workshops, and media-tions along with 17 Parent Academy events. In addition, we are honoring the Chancellor's mission to re-define and re-invigorate the role of the Parent Coordinator. In that spirit we have a Professional Development Day planned for our Parent Coordinators on April 22.

In the upcoming months, the Department of Education, in



partnership with the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), will be hosting a series of Parent Conferences. These workshops will provide tangible tools for parents to forge partnerships inside and outside of their school community, and to create a space where parents can come together and learn more about ways to support their child's academic achievement.

We know how valuable it is to exchange ideas. Communication is a collaborative experience. In that spirit, our division has been publishing more family-focused communication including Public School Press, the new parent newsletter you are reading right now. We are also re-launching our Parent Academy Website. Your input is welcome. Please feel free to contact us at FACE@schools.nyc.gov or (212) 374-4118.

In these first 100 days we have offered increased support to Community Education Councils (CECs), citywide councils, and presidents' councils. This includes the facilitation of bi-monthly meetings of CEC presidents with the Chancellor. In addition, we have facilitated conversations between the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs, CECs and the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council around universal pre-k.

Finally, between myself and

staffers from the Division of Family and Community Engagement, we have visited 82 schools in these first 100 days of Chancellor Fariña's tenure. Working together is at the heart of every successful endeavor, and we are excited to connect and collaborate more with families and schools so that we are all working towards the same goals: a stellar education system for our children.

Let's keep the conversation going!

Yours,

Jesse Mojica
Executive Director
Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE)

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

NYC Parent Academy Schedule

Citywide Parent Academies provide families with information, support and resources through the combined efforts of our collaborators at Long Island University, our partner agencies, and community-based organizations. Events take place on Saturday mornings and weekday evenings throughout the year. Save the dates for the events listed below; additional details will be available soon.

- ✓ **Saturday, April 26**
11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Boys and Girls High School, District 16 - Brooklyn
- ✓ **Thursday, May 8**
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
P. S. 13, District 19 - Brooklyn
- ✓ **Wednesday, May 21**
8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.
P.S. 184, District 1 - Manhattan

For more information about the Parent Academy, visit www.nycparentacademy.org or contact FACE@schools.nyc.gov

School Survey Deadline

Friday, April 11
Search schools.nyc.gov for "School Survey"

Spring Recess

Monday, April 14 - Tuesday, April 22
School resumes Wednesday, April 23

Youth Summer Employment Opportunities

Deadline to Apply Friday, April 25
Visit NYC.gov and search "Summer Youth Employment"

NY State Math Exam

Wednesday, April 30 - Friday, May 2

Parent Conferences

The purpose of developing these Parent Conferences is so that DOE and CEJ can effectively empower parents as leaders and involve parents in their children's success.

The workshops that will be offered at the Parent Conferences will aim to provide tangible tools to parents to forge effective partnerships inside and outside of their school community, and to create a space where parents can come together and learn more about ways to support their child's academic achievement.

The DOE understands that there is no ex-

ample of a successful school without effective partnerships - these Parent Conferences are one way of exemplifying that this work will take all of our collective ideas and support in order to move the needle on the achievement gap. The DOE sees these conferences, and its partnership with CEJ, as an opportunity to reset the tone on how parents are to be welcomed in school communities and to reinforce the essential role of parents in their children's academic success.

- ✓ **High School Parent Conference**
Saturday May 3, 2014
8:30AM - 1:00PM
High School for Fashion Industries (Manhattan)
- ✓ **Elementary School Parent Conference**
Saturday, May 31, 2014
8:30AM - 1:00PM
Long Island City High School (Queens)
- ✓ **Middle School Parent Conference**
Saturday, June 7, 2014
8:30AM - 1:00PM
Van Sicken Community Middle School (Brooklyn)

Pre-Kindergarten: Opportunity Starts *Now*



All children born in 2010 who live in the City of New York are eligible for pre-kindergarten in public schools and community-based organizations starting in September 2014.

CALL: 311

VISIT: schools.nyc.gov/prek

Public school applications are due April 23, 2014.

To apply to a community-based organization pre-k, please contact the program directly.



Apply Now at: schools.nyc.gov/prek



Bill de Blasio
Mayor

Carmen Fariña
Chancellor



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