

JANUARY 2016

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education



Celebrating College Awareness Day Jan. 27

There has never been a more important time for New York City public school students to consider and discuss attending college with their families. On January 27, City schools will celebrate College Awareness Day, a new citywide public schools event meant to encourage families to talk with their children about college and other postsecondary opportunities. College Awareness Day seeks to help students of all ages understand that attending

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College Awareness Day Jan. 27



college is attainable, affordable, and can help them achieve successful and fulfilling careers and lives. Research shows that college degree recipients are healthier, earn higher salaries, have better financial security, and serve their communities more often than their less educated peers.

To celebrate the occasion, teachers and other Department of Education staff members throughout the City are being encouraged to wear apparel

from their former/favorite colleges and share details about their college experiences with current students. Teachers and school administrators at some schools will also arrange class presentations from current college professors and alumni, while others will offer financial aid/college financing workshops.

“Students and families must understand that their dreams of college are attainable and need not be compromised by financial considerations, geographical barriers, or other obstacles, and

this groundwork must be laid early,” said Chancellor Carmen Fariña when announcing the citywide celebration. “College readiness is not simply just an academic endeavor, but it is also a socio-emotional one; our students need confidence, vision, and drive to carry them towards a college degree.”

To learn more about how your local school will celebrate College Awareness Day, please contact your school’s parent coordinator or Parent-Teacher Association.

Get informed about all of the latest school news, events, and programs.

Visit schools.nyc.gov/subscribe to sign up to

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

SIGN UP!

Parent to Parent with Yolanda Torres

Executive Superintendent of the Division of Family and Community Engagement

Dear Parents:

With College Awareness Day, you have an excellent opportunity to play a more active role in your child's future. Whether your children are in pre-k or high school, it is never too early or too late to start thinking about their college and career readiness, nor to engage in conversations about their academic future.

As your children's first teachers, you each have the ability to set the tone regarding college and career interests. Your enthusiasm about setting goals and being your children's lifelong cheerleaders will help create an "I can do this" attitude that will lead to positive expectations.

Money is understandably a major concern for parents. To address your questions, we have included important information on financial considerations for college in our parent guide, [Achieve NYC \(schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/AchieveNYC\)](https://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/AchieveNYC). If your children are not yet in high school, please review the "Financial Aid Awareness Month" section in this *Public School Press* and look for the brief details we have included about New York State's [529 College Savings Program](#). Small amounts of money you save today could really add up over the years.

In addition, there are certain things you can do now and over time that are practically guaranteed to pay off. One important factor is the idea of schoolwork being a ritual guided by a love for learning. Setting special spaces in your homes for your children to work in, establishing regular timeframes, and discussing school and the future with your children during mealtimes can ensure a sense of consistency in their lives while encouraging them to stay on task, stay in touch with *you*, and work towards a better future.

In that same spirit, please reach out to your children's schools to find the help and support you need. The more school staff members – which include your child's teachers, parent coordinator, principal, guidance counselor, and librarians – understand your families' interests, needs, and cultural background, the better they can ensure personalized support. Education is a two-way street, and as parents, you have the power to educate your children's schools about your families.

Your communities are also great resources to tap into. Plan potluck dinners with other parents or suggest informal parent gatherings at your children's schools to your Parent Associations and parent coordinators. Collaboratively, you can offer and learn strategies for putting your children on the path to college. One approach that has been particularly effective is to invite former students to talk about their college experiences with current students. It is remarkable to see how meaningful it is when children see themselves reflected in graduates.

Let college become a part of your families' daily conversations and collective missions. Everyone has the right to dream and set goals in life. Help your children see that, with your belief and support, their dreams will come true.

Let's keep the conversation going.

All the best,

Yolanda Torres



City's High School Graduation Rate Reaches All-Time High



*Four-Year Grad Rate Hits **70.5%** for First Time Ever; City's Dropout Rate Decreases to All-Time Low of **9%***

Earlier this month, Chancellor Carmen Fariña [announced](#) that New York City's four-year high school graduation rate for the 2014-15 school year rose two percentage points over last year's rate to reach 70.5%, the highest graduation rate ever recorded in City public schools history. Additionally, the Chancellor announced that the City's dropout rate during the 2014-15 school year fell 0.7 points since last year to an all-time low of 9%, and that the Class of 2015's overall college readiness rate increased over the rates recorded for last year's graduating class.

[City students' graduation rates](#) increased across all racial/ethnic categories, including Latino, Asian, and black students. Similarly, high school dropout

rates fell among all ethnicities.

"The City's increases in graduation and college/career readiness rates represent important progress. However, there is so much more to do to ensure equity and excellence in classrooms across all five boroughs," said Chancellor Fariña during her announcement. "I look forward to the continued work of strengthening instruction, expanding opportunities for all students, and engaging families as we work to make New York City the best urban school district in the nation."

These gains build upon progress that the Department of Education has already made with regards to college/vocational program access. Earlier this year, Chancellor Fariña announced

that 53% of the Class of 2014 enrolled in two-or-four year colleges, vocational programs, or public service programs after graduation, the highest percentage ever recorded in the City. In addition, the DOE announced increases in students' participation and overall performance across all ethnic groups on Advanced Placement (AP) and SAT exams.

Given these outcomes, as well as Mayor Bill de Blasio's agenda for equity and access across all City schools with his recently announced [College Access for All, AP for All, and SAT School Day initiatives](#), it is clear that the DOE is redoubling its efforts to improve college readiness and access for all students. <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/618-15/equity-excellence-mayor-de-blasio-reforms-raise-achievement-across-all-public>

APPLICATION
PERIOD IS
NOW OPEN



PRE-K FOR ALL

With over a record 68,547 children now enrolled in free, full-day, high quality pre-kindergarten programs in schools across the five boroughs, it is clear that New York City's parents have welcomed the City's Pre-K for All program with open arms. Given the demand we have seen for pre-k in City school, the Department of Education has opened the pre-k application period more than a month earlier

than last year. Starting January 25, families with children born in 2012 will be able to apply for free pre-kindergarten programs in schools across the five boroughs.

"The historic number of students enrolled in free, full-day, high-quality pre-k means that more than 68,500 students are getting a crucial year of problem solving and vocabulary building that will

put them on the path to long term success," said Chancellor Carmen Fariña. "Families should know that quality is key to our efforts, and I am committed to ensuring that every pre-k program throughout the city provides an important foundation for academic achievement."

The application period will be open from January 25 through March 4. Families who have applied for pre-k seats will receive their offer letters at the beginning of May 2016, which is also a month earlier than last year. Families seeking more information about pre-k enrollment, including details about pre-k programs near you and information sessions regarding the admissions process, should [visit our website \(http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/PreK\)](http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/PreK).

Children born in 2012 are eligible to apply for free, full-day, high-quality pre-k.
Visit nyc.gov/prek | Call 311 | Text "prek" to 877-877

#OpportunityStartsNow

DOE Expands Language Access Services for Parents

This month, Chancellor Carmen Fariña [announced](#) that the DOE has expanded language access services across all City public schools. The DOE is hiring nine new Field Language Access Coordinators (FLACs) who will work at the DOE's Borough Field Support Centers and Affinity Groups to ensure that schools are providing parents with limited English proficiency with full access to translation and interpretation services.

Additionally, schools will now have direct access to over-the-phone interpreters available to them after 5 p.m. for the first time, and there will be a substantial increase in the translation and interpretation supports that the DOE provides to Citywide and Community Education Councils.



"New York City represents a wealth of different cultures, languages, traditions, and beliefs," said Chancellor Fariña during the announcement. "This is an important step forward, and I want to thank all of the advocates, community members, and elected officials who continue to work closely with us to ensure that there are no language barriers between students and families and a great education."

Dates to Remember

January 26-29

High Schools Closed for January Regents Examinations

January 27

College Awareness Day

February 1

High School Chancellor's Conference Day
(No Classes for Non-D75 H.S. students)

February 2

Spring Term Begins for H.S. Students

February 8

Lunar New Year: All Public Schools Are Closed

February 15-19

Mid-winter Recess

Financial Aid awareness Month

Saving and Paying for College 101



Over the next month, the DOE will be celebrating Financial Aid Awareness Month, a month-long campaign to encourage families of high school students across the State to complete the most important tool in securing financial aid for college-bound students, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or **FAFSA**. Filling out a FAFSA form is one of the most crucial things that parents and students can do to ensure college attendance, as **it is required to be eligible for any type of financial aid for college**. Additionally, New York State residents who fill out FAFSAs can

seek grants (i.e. financial aid that does not have to be paid back) as high as \$5,165 on an annual basis from the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) towards full-time and part-time study in a State-based college or university.

FAFSA forms can be completed and submitted beginning on January 1 of each year. Many colleges (including CUNY) allocate their financial aid to students on a first-come/first-served basis, so it is important that students complete their FAFSAs early. Please

visit the State's [FAFSA website \(http://www.startheregetthere.org\)](http://www.startheregetthere.org) for more information about FAFSAs and the State TAP program.

Still not convinced that you should fill out a FAFSA? Heard something that makes you second guess your need to submit a form? Need assistance with completing it? We hope the following sections will help you throughout the financial aid process.

Please contact your child's school with any questions you may have.



5

Things Parents Can Do When Completing FAFSAs

- 1 Complete the FAFSA as soon as possible.** Beginning January 1, families can complete the 2016-2017 FAFSA at the FAFSA website (<http://fafsa.gov>) on their children's behalf using 2014 tax returns. Once you have filed your 2015 taxes, you can then go back to your application and update your FAFSA accordingly. Use the IRS' Data Retrieval Tool to update your tax information, which will be available beginning February 7, 2016.
- 2 Create a Federal Student Aid ID (FSA ID) on the [U.S. Department of Education's \(USDOE\) website \(www.fsaed.gov\)](http://www.fsaed.gov) a couple of days before completing your child's FAFSA (and encourage your child to create one, too).** FSA IDs are personal usernames and passwords that provide individuals with access to the FSA website and can be used as a legal signature on FAFSAs. Students and parents will need their FSA IDs to submit their FAFSAs online, and it may take up to three days before they can use their FSA IDs. Once you and your child have signed up for FSA IDs, remember to keep a record of both new usernames and passwords, and record them in a safe place for future reference.
- 3 Attend a FAFSA completion event at your child's school, or find a FAFSA completion event in your neighborhood.** Parents may learn about upcoming FAFSA events [here: \(https://collegegoalny.org/event-locations\)](https://collegegoalny.org/event-locations). To be as prepared as possible, parents should review the list of documents needed to complete the FAFSA at the USDOE's [FAFSA website: \(https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out\)](https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out).
- 4 Carefully read all questions, and pay attention to details when entering your information on your child's FAFSA.** In particular, double-check the accuracy of Social Security Numbers, Dates of Birth, and Names. Errors can delay FAFSA processing times. Keep in mind that if you are unsure about how to answer a question, review the "Help and Hints" sections that are located on the right side of each FAFSA entry page, as they provide useful information.
- 5 If you are divorced, remarried, or your child lives with another family member, talk with your child and decide which parent/guardian's documentation and information will be used to complete the FAFSA.** If you or your child is unsure about which information to include on the FAFSA, visit the [USDOE's Homeroom blog \(http://blog.ed.gov/2015/12/guide-reporting-parent-info-on-fafsa\)](http://blog.ed.gov/2015/12/guide-reporting-parent-info-on-fafsa) for more information.

Remember: Students cannot receive financial aid for college until a completed FAFSA is submitted on their behalf.

Top Myths

Top 'Myths' that Prevent Parents and Students from Submitting Completed FAFSAs

Myth #1: My family makes too much money for my student to qualify for aid.

There is no income cut-off for federal student aid. Your child's [eligibility for financial aid](#) is based on a number of factors and not just your family's income. Plus, many states and schools use your FAFSA data to determine your child's eligibility for their aid. If you are not sure what your child will get, the best way to know for sure is to complete the application.

Myth #2: I need to file taxes before completing the FAFSA.

You can use [estimated information](#) on your child's FAFSA before you file your 2015 taxes. In fact, many states and schools have financial aid deadlines that come up well before the tax deadline, so completing your child's FAFSA earlier is a good idea. You might want to base your estimates on last year's tax return, and once you file your 2015 taxes, you can go back to your FAFSA and update your financial information accordingly. You may even be able to use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to import your tax information automatically into your FAFSA.

Myth #3: The FAFSA is too hard to fill out.

This is a very common misconception, as it is easier than ever to complete online. The form uses "skip logic,"

so you are only asked the questions that are relevant to you. Additionally, if you have already filed your taxes for 2015, you can transfer your tax return data into your FAFSA automatically. As a result of improvements like these, the average time to complete FAFSAs is now less than 21 minutes. If you do get stuck, help is available by webchat, e-mail, and phone.

Myth #4: My students' grades are not good enough to get aid.

Eligibility for most federal student aid programs is not linked to your child's academic performance. Keep in mind, however, that your child will need to [maintain grades](#) that their college considers satisfactory in order to continue receiving financial aid throughout their time in college.

Myth #5: My child's ethnicity or age makes me ineligible for aid.

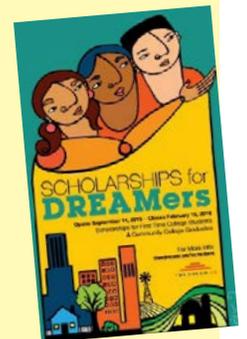
While there are [basic eligibility requirements](#), please understand that ethnicity and age are not considered.

Want more details about these "myths?" Have more concerns about the FAFSA? Visit the USDOE's Federal Student Aid website (<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/>) for more information

Financial Aid for Undocumented Students

While undocumented students [are not eligible for federal student aid](#), they may be eligible for state or college-based financial aid. Most states and colleges determine undocumented students' eligibility for financial aid by referring to the information they submitted on their [FAFSAs](#).

There are also resources that are available to help undocumented students find the financial support they need to pursue postsecondary education, including scholarships such as [TheDream.US](#) program. The Dream.US Scholarship partners with several higher education institutions, including CUNY, to provide college scholarships to highly motivated DREAMers (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals [DACA] or Temporary Protected Status [TPS]-eligible students) who want to get a college education but cannot afford it. The Dream.US Scholarship application process closes on February 15, 2016. To obtain more information about the scholarship in several languages and to apply, visit TheDream.US program's [website](http://www.thedream.us/scholars) (<http://www.thedream.us/scholars>).





Searching and Applying for Scholarships

When planning for your child's postsecondary education, it is important that they apply for a variety of different types of financial aid, including scholarships. A scholarship is a financial award given to help students pursue education that does not need to be paid back. Encourage your student to search and apply for scholarships for which they are eligible.

Below are some resources to help students apply for scholarships:

Scholarship Search: There are several scholarship database websites available that students can utilize, including [Fastweb Scholarship Search](http://www.fastweb.com) (<http://www.fastweb.com>), [Scholarships.com](https://www.scholarships.com) (<https://www.scholarships.com>), and the [CollegeBoard Scholarship Search](https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search) (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search>). For more information about scholarship databases and a list of search sites, visit [Finaid](http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/other.phtml) (<http://www.finaid.org/scholarships/other.phtml>).

Scholarship Applications: To make applying easier, consider using [Scholar Snapp](https://www.scholarsnapp.org) (<https://www.scholarsnapp.org>), a website that allows students to create a profile that can be used to submit multiple scholarship applications.

Scholarship Essays: Students can use Story2's award-winning writing platform, [EssayBuilder](https://www.story2.com/essaybuilder) (<https://www.story2.com/essaybuilder>), for help writing scholarship essays. Using a step-by-step online process, students using EssayBuilder can transform their spoken stories into authentic admissions and scholarship essays. Normally a paid service, Story2 is providing free access for all City public school students. More details can be found on [Story2's website](https://www.story2.com) (<https://www.story2.com>).

Not Old Enough for College? Start Getting Ready with NY State's 529 Savings Program

It's never too soon to start saving up for college and other postsecondary programs, and with New York State's 529 College Savings Program (Direct Plan), parents/guardians, grandparents, friends, and family members can contribute money over time to support a student's future. Direct Plan is a savings account that is specifically used to pay for classes, room and board expenses, books, and other supplies at eligible two- or-four year colleges, vocational/technical schools, or graduate schools anywhere in the U.S. Money that is contributed to a Direct Plan account earns federally tax deferred interest, and qualified withdrawals are federally tax-free. Additionally, New York taxpayers can deduct up to \$5,000 of their contributions (\$10,000 for married couples) to Direct Plan accounts from their State income tax returns. If the money saved in a Direct Plan account is not used for college, the account holder can change the beneficiary on the account to an eligible member of the student's family without paying a penalty.

More information can be found on [NY 529's website](http://www.nysaves.org) (<http://www.nysaves.org>).

BOOK of the Month

The Invisible Boy

By Trudy Ludwig

Illustrated by Patrice Barton

(Alfred A. Knopf, 2013)

The *Invisible Boy* is a warm story about a shy and good-natured young boy named Brian who never gets any attention paid to him while he is in school. Quiet and well-behaved almost to a fault, Brian's classmates barely notice him inside—or outside—class. When his classmates play kickball during recess, they don't select Brian for either of the two teams. His classmate, Madison, invites everyone but Brian to her birthday party. Even Brian's teacher, Mrs. Carlotti, is too busy chasing after restless students to notice him. Through perseverance, and an unexpectedly, Brian sheds his cloak of invisibility and takes his place as a valued member of his class.

Brian owes his transformation to a new student named Justin, who he quickly recognizes as a kindred spirit. During lunch, to everyone's astonishment, Justin takes out a bowl of bulgogi and eats it with chopsticks. "Bul-what," they ask, as they have no idea what bulgogi is. Justin explains that bulgogi is Korean barbequed beef, and that his grandmother made it for him. All the kids snicker and laugh

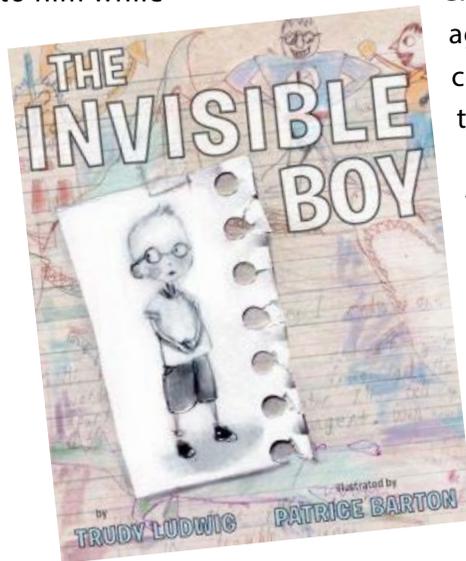
at Justin's lunch—except, of course, for Brian.

The next day, when Justin goes to his cubby in class to put away his backpack, he finds a note from Brian saying, "the bulgogi looked good," along with a drawing of Brian enjoying the very same bulgogi that the other students had ridiculed. Justin loves the gesture, and thanks Brian during morning recess.

But Brian's trials aren't over. In class, Mrs. Carlotti asks students to form teams of two or three students for a school project. Before Brian can approach Justin, a student named Emilio claims Justin for himself and tells Brian to look elsewhere. Before Brian once again becomes invisible, Justin convinces Emilio to let Brian into their team.

As the story concludes, we see that Brian, Emilio, and Justin have become a great project team and even better friends. Thanks to Emilio and Justin's friendship, Brian no longer sits by himself during lunchtime or stays on the sideline during recess. Brian is no longer "invisible." Now, he is just another student in Mrs. Carlotti's classroom.

This inspiring story reminds us to think about whether our children are "invisible" in their classrooms. Speak with teachers to find out whether your children are a bit, "under the radar," socially. If so, work with your children's teachers to help them provide encouragement and support as your children seek to make friends with their classmates. Together, you and your children's teachers can ensure that all students feel as though their thoughts, work, or presence are valued—and visible.



Parent Leader Corner

Parent Associations (PA)/

Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)

Financial Report Deadline:

January 31 – Prepare Now!

PA/PTAs are required to submit an Interim PA/PTA Financial Report to their schools' principals by January 31 of every year. Interim reports should give an accounting of a PA/PTA's finances from July 1 to January 31 of each fiscal year (which begins July 1 and ends June 30). The report must include the following: PA/PTA budget's starting balance, income, expenses, and ending balance. A tutorial can be found on the Division of Family and Community Engagement's (FACE) [webpage \(http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/FACE/ParentLeader/PAPTA+Info.htm\)](http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/FACE/ParentLeader/PAPTA+Info.htm).

DID YOU KNOW?

- Quorum – Do you have it? Quorum, which is the minimum number of members required to be present for a PA/PTA meeting to conduct business, must consist of at least eight PA/PTA members. These must include a minimum of two executive board officers and six parent members. What does this mean for you? If you do not reach quorum at a meeting, your PA/PTA can still meet. However, your PA/PTA cannot vote on any business, per [Chancellor's Regulation A-660, Section G4 \(a\)](#)
- Have you wondered how much time your PA/PTA has to use school property outside of school hours? PA/PTAs are entitled to free use of school buildings, including school safety or security coverage, for 110 hours per year outside of school hours. These hours apply 12 months a year. Unused hours may be rolled over from one month to the next, but expire at the end of each school year, per [Chancellor's Regulations A-660, Section G5 \(a\)](#)

- Need to create an email newsletter or post to your PA/PTA's social media account? A little known fact is that your school must provide the executive board with internet access, if available, per [Chancellor's Regulations A-660, Section G5 \(c\)](#). Make sure to ask for it.

Community/Citywide Education Councils (CCECs)

FY 2017 Fair Student Funding School Budget Presentations

In advance of the Panel for Educational Policy's vote on the 2016-2017 DOE budget, the DOE will be presenting its proposed FY 2017 budget allocations for each district to all CCECs between February 22 and April 1, 2016. Each presentation will last approximately 15 minutes, and will include district-specific data related to the DOE's FY 2017 budget, as well as the Fair Student Funding school allocation formula.

If your council has not already done so, please contact your FACE liaison to schedule a time for this presentation.

Capital Plan Presentation

FACE has received a number of questions regarding the timing of the School Construction Authority's presentations regarding possible amendments to the [FY2015-2019 Capital Plan](#). Community Education Councils (CECs) should refer to the recent letter from Deputy Chancellor Rose, as it includes details concerning the scheduling process. CECs should continue gathering a list of priorities from schools in their districts.

DID YOU KNOW?

FACE is committed to providing training opportunities for CCEC members on a monthly basis. For more information about these trainings, view our [online Training Calendar](#)

Parent Leader Corner (continued)

(<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/F636ADA0-BEA9-46EC-99FF-0F98535B7BBB/0/EducationCouncilTrainings20152016.pdf>).

CCEC Resources

Are you looking for CCEC meeting templates, the CCEC Orientation Guide or translated meeting notices? Please visit the [2015 CCEC Resource Materials](http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/CEC/RolesandResponsibilities/EducationCouncilResourcePage) page to find everything you need (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/CEC/RolesandResponsibilities/EducationCouncilResourcePage>).

CCEC Meetings

To learn when your district's Community or Citywide Education Council meets, call (212) 374-4118 or email CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov.

PARENT LEADER PROFILES

Do you have a parent in your PA/PTA or on your CCEC who is an exceptional leader who not only volunteers their time and talent to their school, but also shares knowledge and gives encouragement to other leaders? If so, we would like to share profiles of these inspiring parent leaders in upcoming issues. Please email CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov with a brief summary of your parent leader's work and achievements, and include your contact information so that we can follow up with you.

Parent Council Leadership Institute

FACE is pleased to host the Parent Council Leadership Institute (the Institute) for a second year. The fall 2015 cohorts of CCEC officers and Presidents' Council Presidents just completed five monthly sessions of the Institute, a professional development training program designed to build their leadership capacity and peer support. Combining advanced training with professional coaching, the Institute provides practical

and long-lasting solutions to the most common council challenges, such as conflict resolution, empowering volunteer leaders, and team building.

Interested in participating in the Institute? Spring cohorts begin next month, so [apply today](#). Applications will be accepted through **Wednesday, February 10**. (http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/98089546-17BF-40D1-8E0E-A7427C5972C8/0/BlankPCLIAApplication2016C3_4.pdf)

Here is what recent participants are saying about the Institute, which is facilitated by leadership trainer David Mensah:

"Whether it was learning about bylaws, conflict resolution, or building leadership skills in others, these training sessions were all really effective."
– David Goldsmith, CEC 13.

"Even for someone who believes they have been in the trenches, this training will help enhance what you already know." – Nequan McLean, D16 Presidents' Council and CEC 16

"It was great getting to meet members from different districts and learning that they go through the same issues as I do. We work as a group to learn different strategies." – Catherine Baez, CEC 12

IDEAS NEEDED

Are you a member of a PA/PTA, School Leadership Team, or CCEC who has a content idea for future Parent Leader Corner segments? We would like to hear from you. Please send an email to CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov detailing your idea.