

# PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education



After laying out her vision for New York City's schools, Chancellor Fariña speaks to Principal Fitzgerald of P.S. 503 in Brooklyn.

## Join Our Dream

Standing before a crowded school auditorium in Brooklyn last week, Carmen Fariña delivered one of her most powerful messages as Schools Chancellor:

“Whatever talent you have, whatever interest you have, whatever gift you have to give, I stand here today to invite you to join me and Mayor de Blasio in transforming our school system.”

This call to action was echoed throughout the **Chancellor's speech** at P.S. 503/P.S. 506 laying out her vision for New York City public schools, delivered to more than 500 families, educators, advocates, and

education experts. More than 6,000 people watched the speech online.

The centerpiece of the vision is **the Capacity Framework**, a new collaborative, research-based approach to partnering with schools. The Framework will focus on six transformative elements to see student




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**“Schools are not restaurants.”**

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improvement: rigorous instruction, a supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective leadership, strong family-community ties, and a culture of continuous learning and trust. The results are powerful: Schools with these six elements are ten times more likely to see rapid growth in reading, math, and attendance.

The Capacity Framework requires an investment from all corners of the city:

families, educators, advocates, labor leaders, and business and community partners.

The Chancellor also introduced the **School Quality Snapshot**, a report for families that will replace the Progress Report, the one-size-fits-all letter grade system that relied heavily on standardized test scores.

“Schools have unique qualities that cannot be captured in a letter grade. They are not restaurants,” Chancellor Fariña said.

The Snapshot will give an easy-to-understand and more concise measurement of the quality of learning

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schools using graduation rates, survey results, school environment, and curriculum strength. In line with a focus on collaboration, not competition, the Snapshot will compare a school's performance to all schools in the City serving the same grade levels—regardless of student population.

Beginning in January 2015, the School Survey will be updated to reflect the emphasis on the Capacity Framework and its six core elements. Other strategic polices, like enhanced professional development for teachers, expanded arts education and Community Schools, and new offices devoted to English Language Learners and school guidance counseling will help ensure the vision's success.

Chancellor Fariña emphasized that schools must “meet the needs of all of our students—from new immigrants learning English to students with disabilities to students in gifted and talented classrooms.”

With such diversity in New York City's classrooms and the communities surrounding them, there's no limit to the talents, interests, and gifts available to help secure the Chancellor's vision for public school education.

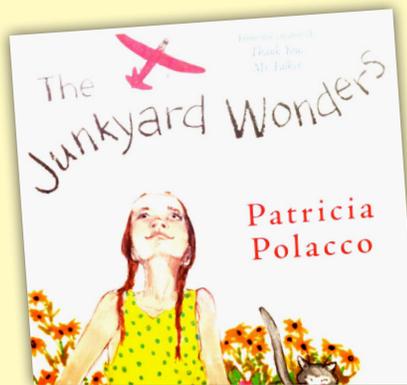


***The Junkyard Wonders***  
(Philomel, 2010) written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco

### Dear Parents,

In *The Junkyard Wonders*, our heroine Trisha is in a special education class in California, struggling with dyslexia. After much hard work, she finally learns how to read. To be free from the stigma of being in a “special” class, Trisha arranges to move out of state and start afresh in a new school.

But on the first day, Trisha is devastated to discover that she has been placed in the “junkyard,” a class of all misfits. But her teacher, Mrs. Peterson, doesn't see the kids that way. She greets the class by reading the definition of genius, as it describes each one of them: risking without fear of failure, understanding without research, ability without practice, imagination without



boundaries, and creativity without constraints. In a nutshell: extraordinary intelligence.

“What some see as bent and broken throwaways are actually amazing things waiting to be made into something new,” Mrs. Peterson says. And because the teacher sees her students this way and treats them as geniuses, Trisha and the class of misfits are transformed into a class of treasures.

This heartwarming story is based on the author's own experiences as a child with dyslexia; in fact, the author, Ms. Polacco, didn't learn how to read until she was almost 14 years old. Today, she is a highly regarded author and illustrator and real-life example of the difference a caring adult can make in a child's life.

All children will face obstacles and get discouraged. But as parents, we must commit every word and deed to making our children feel special and unique, as they are all “junkyard wonders.” As a parent, your special attention, care, and thoughtful ear can release your child's genius so he or she can make the most of every possibility.

Warmly,

Carmen

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**PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS**

**SIGN UP!**

# Q&A WITH CARMEN

## You recently spoke about how much you value conversation with your grandchildren. When do you find the time for catching up?

On the weekends, first and foremost I'm a grandmother. When my grandchildren visit, we always have a meal at my dining room table, a very positive setting to initiate an active dialogue with kids: calm, quiet and safe. Talking to kids on the run or while the TV or phone is on just doesn't get the same results. Kids need to feel that they will be listened to without judgment and that what they might share will be kept confidential. I also have to phrase the questions just right, especially now that one of my grandchildren is becoming a teenager. I find targeted questioning is a good

method to frame the discussion around something specific and draw kids out of themselves.

## What is targeted questioning?

Targeted questioning is my method of asking specific questions that require thoughtful answers, and not just a one-word response. This method grew out of brainstorming ways to get middle school kids talking, because a silent classroom isn't productive.

Targeted questioning is a great strategy for parents. Ask my grandkids 'How was school?,' and they might answer: 'Good.' But that doesn't lend itself to an active dialogue. A more effective method is to target a specific topic: "What was the worst thing that happened in school?"

A higher level of detail is required in this kind of response, and gets kids talking. Even a negative question can always turn into a way to view the situation from a positive standpoint.

## What kinds of conversations can be initiated with targeted questioning?

Targeted questioning is often a great way to tell kids stories from your own childhood. Kids love envisioning what parents and other adult figures might have been like during their school years. Having experiences to share also helps kids feel less alone in their struggles.

Talking about a story from the newspaper is also a fun topic for conversation at meals. This is a great way to introduce new vocabulary and discuss current events, and get a sense of what your kids think about what's going on in the world. I once had a spirited conversation with my five-year-old grandson about Bernie Madoff. He took the story right back to school to brief his classmates. I think his kindergarten teacher wondered what kinds of things we were teaching him at home.



Have a question for the Chancellor? Send it to [AskCarmen@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:AskCarmen@schools.nyc.gov)



“Incorporating parent and family involvement into the classroom supports learning and adds value to the entire school community. Your child's teachers are probably already discussing innovative ways to use the new contract's 40-minute block each week for parent engagement. Below are a few ideas your school may be considering:”

- Potluck dinners that celebrate foods from different cultures
- Club programs led by parents
- Computer, English as a second language and other courses
- Career day
- Community service programs
- School beautification projects
- Music and dance fairs



**HAVE AN IDEA?**

Please share it with your school!  
or contact Sadye at [SCampoamor@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:SCampoamor@schools.nyc.gov)

# NATIONAL BULLYING PREVENTION MONTH

**October is National Bullying Prevention Month**, a campaign that advocates for awareness and education of bullying prevention. A nationwide issue affecting schools across all grade levels, bullying can take the form of aggressive physical, social, verbal, or written behavior that is meant to harm someone. But together, students, educators, and parents can work to eliminate bullying.

## P.S. 129 in Queens – A Model for Bullying Prevention

At P.S. 129, which serves grades pre-k through five, it's not only Principal Marilyn Alesi that has taken a strong stance against bullying. Each year, students, teachers, and parents all read and sign an anti-bullying contract, promising to be kind to one another and shun mean behavior. It's a personal pledge for every member of the school community to do their part, to prevent "punching, hitting, teasing, cursing, or hurting someone's feelings." Expectations are clearly displayed every day, too. Each classroom hangs an anti-bullying poster, with students' names signed on top.

In the lower grades, P.S. 129 social workers, psychologists, and guidance counselors talk to kids about positive behavior, what it means to be kind and respectful to one another, and the differ-

ence between telling and tattling. Children are very aware of what it means to be a bully, and what to do: speak up, and don't be a bystander and let things happen. At the heart of the discussion is what many students often strug-



gle to answer: when to resolve disagreements themselves, and when to tell an adult.

Older students in fifth, fourth, and third grade serve as mediators for younger students. They receive training to help their schoolmates end disputes and reach agreements, which is especially helpful

during lunchtime when so much socializing can lead to negative behavior.

One of the new features of P.S. 129's anti-bullying culture is the Star Program, which rewards students for positive, constructive actions. Simple awards like helping the guidance counselor, getting a book, taking a tour of the school basement—even borrowing the principal's chair—motivate students to be on their best behavior. And according to Principal Alesi, the incentives are working.

Although students receive a strong anti-bullying message during the school day, Principal Alesi stresses the importance of strengthening the message at home. "Kids should always feel comfortable talking to their parents," she says. "Parents are role models, and what they show their kids will be carried through."

## What to Do if Your Child Is Being Bullied

Respect For All is the Department of Education's citywide effort to prevent and dispel bullying. **A student who believes he or she is a victim of bullying**



should tell the Respect For All staff member at the school or another trusted adult immediately.

Families should visit [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov) and [schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/RespectforAll](http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/RespectforAll) for additional information and resources.

# PARENT ACADEMY CORNER

## Chancellor's Parent Conferences

Learning more about what your child is doing in school will no longer be limited to parent-teacher night. This fall, the Chancellor will once again offer a series of parent conferences at Tweed, the Department of Education's central office. These three conferences will address the unique needs of students at different grade levels—elementary, middle, and high school—and will take place on three Saturdays this fall.

At each of the Chancellor's Parent Conferences, parents will break into small-group workshops, where they'll get detailed tips and information to help them be more informed to navigate the system and act in the best interests of their child. Sample workshops include:

**Elementary School and Pre-K:** "Operation Respect," the DOE's anti-bullying initiative; building reading skills at home

**Middle School:** Navigating the IEP; curriculum changes in middle school social studies

**High School:** Workshop with the school guidance office; diploma options for students with IEPs

There will also be helpful information and insights for parents of ELL students at the conferences, and a presentation and discussion around the new social studies curriculum that partners with museums and cultural institutions.

The Chancellor's philosophy behind these parent conferences is simple: the more parents are engaged in their child's education, the better the educational outcomes will be.

## Mark your calendars!

All Chancellor's Parent Conferences will be held at

[Tweed Courthouse](#)  
[52 Chambers Street](#)  
[Manhattan 10007](#)

8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**Elementary School and Pre-k:**  
Saturday, November 1

**High School:**  
Saturday, November 15

**Middle School:**  
Saturday, December 6

Stay tuned for more information, which will be posted [here](#).

## Come Out and Join Us!

The chance for parents to learn more about navigating their child's ever-evolving educational journey is not limited to the Chancellor's Parent Conferences. Parent Academy also offers workshops year round on topics ranging from College and Career Readiness to effective parenting skills.

Recently, Parent Academy worked with parents in



District 4 to rally 600-700 parents for the district's September kickoff event at P.S. 171 in East Harlem.

Learn more about Parent Academy events, like the District 25 Parent Empowerment Summit in Queens, happening all across the City. Events be-

gin this week! Register and get involved at [schools.nyc.gov/Offices/FACE/parentacademy](https://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/FACE/parentacademy).

# PARENT TO PARENT

## Dear Parent,

The school year is underway, and as parents, we are all focused on the basics: getting our children to school on time and making sure they do well in their classes. Yet, now that the new routines are in place, we also have an opportunity to think “big picture” about our children’s future.

It is in that spirit that I share with you how you can play a vital role in shaping educational policy for our schools, something that I know is a priority for so many parents. You’ve probably heard of Community Education Councils (CECs) and Citywide Education Councils, but may not know exactly what they do. Think of them as parent committees with community, district, and citywide influence. From advising the Chancellor to working directly with the district superintendent and reviewing district educational programs and needs, the 32 CECs and four Citywide Education Councils play a major role in education policy and help make our public schools the best they can be.

Members of these councils are elected every two years during a 90-day window from February to May. The next election takes place this spring, but the process begins now, starting with you becoming informed and involved.

CECs affect schools and policies at the district level. The 32 CECs each have 11 members total: nine parents with children in grades K-8 (including one seat reserved for a parent of an English Language Learner and one seat for the parent of a student with an Individualized Education Plan), and two members appointed by the borough president. Each CEC also has one non-voting high school student.



Citywide Education Councils advocate for specific populations across the five boroughs. The four Citywide Councils represent special education, English Language Learners, District 75, and high school students. Like CECs, each citywide council has 11 members, except for the Council on High Schools, which has 13.

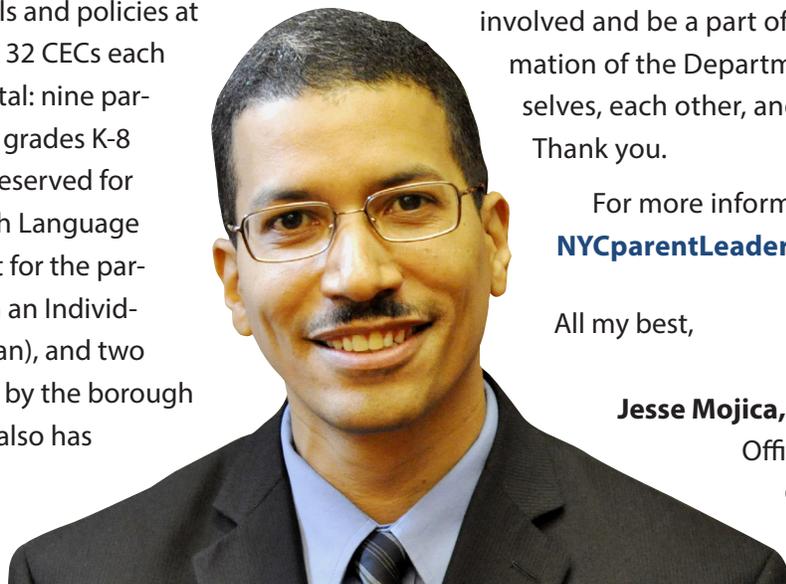
Parent engagement is one of the Four Pillars Chancellor Fariña has chosen as a hallmark of her administration: that parents should play a more influential part in the education system. During this vibrant time of transformation, parents have an opportunity, once every two years, to change “business as usual” and bring their best ideas to the table.

You have a voice, and your voice matters. As a fellow parent, I urge you to get involved and be a part of the transformation of the Department of Education, for yourselves, each other, and most of all, our students. Thank you.

For more information, go to [NYCparentLeaders.org](https://nycparentleaders.org) or call 311.

All my best,

**Jesse Mojica**, Executive Director,  
Office of Family and  
Community Engagement



# IMPORTANT DATES

**G&T** **Middle School** **High School**

**September 30 – October 9** **Middle School**

The **District Middle School Fairs** will be held September 30 and October 1, 2, 8, and 9.

**October (various dates)** **High School**

Open Houses for Specialized High Schools will take place throughout the month of October. For dates and locations, visit:

[schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/specialized](http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/specialized)

**October 3**

Parent Academy at P.S. 20 (Staten Island)

**October 9** **Middle School**

All students interested in applying to Mark Twain for the Gifted & Talented must submit a Request for Testing (RFT) form by October 9, 2014.

**October 10**

Parent Academy at P.S. 10 (Staten Island)

**October 13**

Columbus Day (No School)

**October 13 – 24** **G&T**

Gifted & Talented community information sessions take place. For dates and locations, please call 718-935-2009 or visit [nyc.gov/schools/GT](http://nyc.gov/schools/GT).

**October 14** **High School**

Registration deadline for the SHSAT and LaGuardia auditions at school or Enrollment Office

**October 15**

PSAT Testing

**October 15 – October 22** **High School**

at 12:00 PM, Late registration period for SHSAT

**October 18 – 19** **High School**

Borough High School Fairs

**October 22** **High School**

SHSAT Test/audition tickets distributed to students

**October 23**

Pre-k students not in attendance

**October 25 and 26** **High School**

SHSAT testing for all 8<sup>th</sup> graders

**October/November** **Middle School**

**Open Houses:** During the fall, many middle school hold open houses for interested families.

**Click here** for a list of middle school open house dates and times.

**Early November (date TBD)** **Middle School**

Students receive middle school applications

**November 1** **High School**

**SHSAT:** All 9<sup>th</sup> graders and 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> graders with IEPs, approved 504 accommodations, and/or ELL accommodations

**LaGuardia:** Auditions begin by borough

**November 7** **G&T**

Deadline to submit a Request for Testing form for September 2015 placement into Gifted & Talented programs.

**November 16** **High School**

SHSAT make-up (by permission only); Sabbath Observers with IEPs, approved 504 accommodations, and/or ELL accommodations