

FEBRUARY 2015

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education



PARENTS: THE BEST ADVOCATES

In New York City public schools, election season is in full swing. In the five boroughs, parents are “Raising their Hand” and applying to run for a seat on a Community Education Council or Citywide Education Council.

Public school parents are eager to serve, for good reason: Councils’ seats give them a real opportunity to advocate on behalf of their communities, students, and schools, and have a say in the Department of Education’s policies. Elections are held only every two years, and with the

March 11 application deadline less than two weeks away, now is the time to raise *your* hand and make a difference.

Up for election this year are seats on each of the 32 Community Education Councils, local advisory bodies that guide policy for elementary and middle schools

for their district. Parent-candidates can also apply to one of the four Citywide Education Councils on High Schools, English Language Learners, Special Education, and District 75 programs.

“Every parent should take advantage of this opportunity to have an enormous impact

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

**Run for a New York City
Education Council**

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on students," Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña said. "And I mean every parent—there is absolutely no experience or language requirement, and parents' immigration status is never considered."

Community Education Councils are rooted in their community, and work with local parents, school leaders, organizations, and elected officials to make policy recommendations and respond to the needs of students in the district. While specific duties vary from district to district, Community Education Councils have a host of responsibilities, including approving school zoning lines, holding hearings on proposals for new or upgraded school facilities, working with school's parent and parent-teacher associations, providing input on local school safety and transportation, and much more.

While the Community Education Councils have an immense impact at the neighborhood level, the four Citywide Education Councils focus



more closely on particular issues and types of student learners.



These Councils evaluate and advise on policies affecting the students they advocate for, produce annual reports on how well these students are being served, and make

recommendations for improvements.

Applying for a seat is easy—interested parents should visit NYCParentLeaders.org, or call (718) 935-2495 for more information. To run for a local Community Education Council, parents must have a child enrolled in an elementary or middle school within the district. To run for the Citywide Council on High Schools, parents must have a student

in grades 9-12. Candidates for the other three Citywide Councils must have a child in the relevant type of program or receiving the relevant type of service. Online applications, are preferred, but paper applications are accepted too. All parents must apply by March 11.

Candidates who apply for a Community or Citywide Education Council seat will be invited to a forum in March or April to answer questions and discuss their positions. Parent and parent-teacher association officers will vote for candidates, and elections results will be published in May.

Your voice matters. Apply today!

Dates to Remember

Contact your school to confirm date and time

March 2
District 75 School Programs -
EVENING Parent Teacher Conference

March 3
District 75 School Programs
- AFTERNOON Parent Teacher
Conference

March 11
Middle School - EVENING Parent
Teacher Conference

March 12
Middle School - AFTERNOON
Parent Teacher Conference

March 18
Elementary School - EVENING
Parent Teacher Conference

March 19
Elementary School - AFTERNOON
Parent Teacher Conference

March 26
High School - EVENING Parent
Teacher Conference

March 27
High School - AFTERNOON
Parent Teacher Conference

CARMEN Q&A:

Last month, you announced a complete overhaul of the school support system. What will the new support structure look like, and how will it operate?

The existing network structure, which gives schools instructional and operational support, has been in place for 12 years now. But it hasn't brought satisfactory results to our kids. We needed to shift to a structure that would better support our students.

Under the current system, a network can include schools from anywhere in the City. This is confusing to schools and families—the school's network might be in another borough. Also, networks get the same amount of resources, regardless of how many schools they serve. One network might have 25 schools with 7,000 students while another might have 25 schools with 40,000 students, yet both receive the same amount of funding. This is unfair.

Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the 55 networks will be replaced by stronger superintendents supported by seven new Borough Field Support Centers. Together, the superintendents and support centers will ensure that principals and schools get the tools they



need to succeed. This structure will be clearer, simpler, and most importantly, more responsive to schools' needs. For the first time, schools will get supervision and support from one place, and families will have one place to call if they cannot solve problems at the school: the superintendent.

When will the parent and student surveys be distributed this year? Are they different from years' past?

The NYC School Survey is the second largest survey in the entire country, behind only the U.S. Census. Schools may begin handing out parent surveys, either through children's backpacks or at school events, as early as next week. You and every family across the City can complete the survey by hard copy or online at NYCschoolsurvey.org. The survey deadline is April 2.

I can't encourage you enough to submit a survey this year—it's more important than ever. While the surveys have always given us important insight into how your school is doing, this year, the survey has been improved with questions aligned to the

[Framework for Great Schools](#), a set of six core values that should guide every New York City public school. These values are rigorous instruction, supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective school leadership, strong family and community ties, and trust. The survey results that you submit are also part of the new [School Quality Snapshot](#), which replaced Progress Reports as a tool for measuring school performance.

This year, questions are more direct, focused, and effective. For example, students are asked how well guidance staff prepares them for high school or college. Parents are now asked more openly about family involvement.

Students and parents, who are at the heart of a school, provide very unique perspectives. Submit your surveys beginning next week at NYCschoolsurvey.org.

You recently announced major reforms to the discipline code. How do these changes affect my child and other students?

It's time we built trust among students and the school staff who lead them. For too long, we've had a discipline code that is too reliant on suspensions, keeping students out of the classroom and away from learning. In practice, the code has also not been fair to all students, suspending minority and special education students at a much greater rate than others. It's not a constructive way of

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Have a question for the Chancellor? Send it to AskCarmen@schools.nyc.gov

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handling misbehavior, and too often, causes more harm than good.

The new code and initiatives to support it will address many current issues. They are intended to reduce suspensions and calls to 911, increase oversight and accountability, and severely limit the use of handcuffs or

restraints for handling unruly students. A new School Climate Leadership Team will play an important advisory role in schools' disciplinary approach. The team will be made up of principals, parents, students, and union representatives, as well as representatives from the DOE, NYPD, Mayor's Office for Criminal Justice, City Council, and community groups.

Suspensions have been detrimental to students' progress and have eroded trust. Instead, we'll follow restorative approaches to discipline to create an environment in each of our schools that helps further every child's social development.

You can learn more on our website [here](#).

Building Trust Among Students and the People Who Care for Them

Six hours a day, five days a week, nine months out of the year, children are in our schools and under the care of our teachers, administrators, and staff. During this time, our students must feel safe, respected, and appreciated if learning is to take place; they must be comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. On school grounds, en route to and from school, and in hallways and classrooms, NYPD School Safety Agents play a pivotal role in students' well-being.

Following recent events and protests in New York City and across the country, several of our public schools have hosted events with their local precinct to further community relationships. These schools have built community bonds and provided students with a forum for their concerns. In particular, I.S. 68 in Brooklyn invited the local 69th Precinct to discuss sensitive topics with students. The exchange



helped students understand the role of the School Safety Agents and how to interact positively—students were brimming with questions, and the officers learned just as much from the students as the students did from them. Other schools have hosted friendly athletic

competitions between officers and students, and other precincts have given presentations to parent and parent-teacher association meetings around criminal justice, law, and other important topics. These types of events build trust, mutual understanding, and student growth, academically and personally.

While Chancellor Fariña encouraged principals last month to think of ways to build community relations, parents can play a key role as well. Speak with your principal, parent coordinator, or members of your parent or parent-teacher association. Together, we can ensure trust between our students and the adults they interact with every day.

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!



The Invisible String

(DeVorss & Company, 2014)

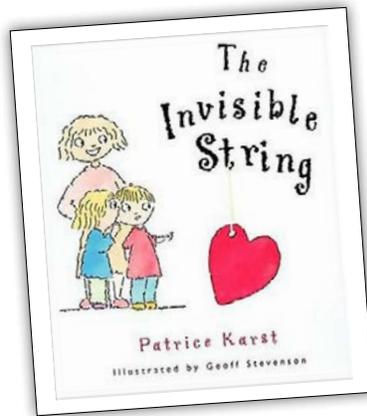
Written by Patrice Karst,

illustrated by Geoff Stevenson

Dear Readers,

Awakened one night by the roar of thunder, twins Liza and Jeremy rush to their mother’s side, too frightened to return to bed. To comfort them, mother tells her children about the “Invisible String” that keeps us all connected to the ones we love.

This tender story reminds us that no matter where we are or what we are doing, we are never alone, but instead, intimately linked through our thoughts, feelings, and memories. Our most cherished relationships transcend time and space: they can reach the ocean floor, a mountain top, deep in the jungle and, in our case, across our vast public school system. The intangible strings that bind us together cannot be broken: “Love is stronger than anger, and as



long as love is in your heart, the String will always be there,” the story explains.

This message resonates with children and adults alike, and is particularly relevant now as we reorganize our system for supporting schools—Strong Schools, Strong Communities—and align those supports to our Framework for Great Schools. I know you are working to strengthen your relationships with your child’s teachers, school principal, and all of the staff who give your child a safe and caring environment throughout the school day.

The two ends of the most treasured Invisible String are families and schools. This String, reinforced on each side, buoys students with love, guidance, and direction. But when one end weakens, the entire String falters.

You and your school must be intricately connected to support your child’s learning. Remind your child—and remember yourself—that when we need support, reassurance, or simply a kindred spirit, just give the String a tug and someone will tug back. This is powerful, and will keep your child on track through the remainder of his or her education journey.

Warmly,
Carmen



Do you have a child who turns 4 this year?

Then your child is eligible to attend free, high-quality pre-K this September. The application period is from Monday, March 16 to Friday, April 24. The DOE offers both district school and NYC Early Education Center pre-K programs. New this year, families can apply to all programs using a single application.

Find out more about Pre-K for All at nyc.gov/prek.

Application Period Starts March 16

Children born in 2011 are eligible to apply for free, full-day, high-quality pre-K.

▶ Call 311 ▶ Text “prek” to 877-877 ▶ /nycschools

PARENT TO PARENT

Dear Parents,

The Community and Citywide Education Council election process has really started moving. In every borough, parents have submitted their applications to be a Council candidate, and I see this momentum building further through the March 11 deadline. These Councils are one of the biggest ways for you to enact real change, and advocate for our public schools, students, and your own child.

I speak from very personal experience when I say that this advocacy work is not only powerful, but meaningful. The birth of my son Adam is one of the happiest moments I will ever have. Early on, Adam was hitting all his developmental milestones, even saying a few words. Then, slowly, my wife Ana and I noticed something wrong: Adam stopped speaking. He spent time gazing around. We knew he had to be evaluated.

Hearing the word “autism” for the first time was terrifying. My wife and I felt so helpless. But it was my wife who made the decision first: “We’ve got to learn everything there is about the education system. We’re helping our son no matter what.”

So I attended my first Town Hall. People came forward to speak, and my wife practically pushed me to the microphone, encouraging me to share our story. Like many of you, I felt passionate about my child’s needs, but unsure how I could get involved, and improve, the bigger system. But speaking aloud that day, telling my story, was life changing.

I had raised my voice, and I became involved.

Because of this, I was later appointed as the Panel for Education Policy Bronx Borough President representative, and eventually, I became the borough’s education policy director. I met and learned from so many other parents like my wife and me. I listened to them, heard their stories, shared their concerns. And then I realized: my work began because of my passion for helping my own child, but in the end, it extends far beyond that. It was about helping every other New York City public school family.

I am now here to encourage you to step forward, and to take this opportunity now to advocate for your passion and lend your voice. I want to hear the voice of parents who care about their community, who want to make a difference, and who want to improve their local schools. I want to hear the voices of parents of children with autism, the voices of parents of children with disabilities, the voices of parents of children learning to speak English.

There are no special qualifications to run for a seat, not experience, not language, not immigration status. Chancellor Fariña and I are both very excited to see you “Raise Your Hand” for our kids, and run for a Council seat. We are very excited to bring new voices—voices like yours— to the table.

Best,

Jesse Mojica

Executive Director
Division of Family and Community Engagement



Black History Month is an important way to celebrate the contributions that African-Americans have made to American history and culture. It’s important to talk about those contributions throughout the year, and not just in February. Explore this history with your child through a list of books and websites for all grade levels, available on our website at schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/Welcome/blackhistorymonth

Going on Eight

For seven years straight, P.S. 164 in Brooklyn has had a 100 percent response rate from parents on the NYC School Survey

The NYC School Survey, handed out to every teacher, family, and child in grades 6-12, is one of the largest surveys in the country. Nearly 1 million people complete the survey, making it second in size behind the U.S. Census.

Every year, parents give valuable feedback and input about their school, including its instruction, safety, class size, principals, and administrators. This feedback gives school leaders information to target areas of improvement and respond to needs. The surveys, combined with the new School Quality Snapshot, are an important part of measuring how schools are performing.

Citywide, about 54 percent of parents respond to the annual School Survey. But at P.S. 164 in Brooklyn, Parent Coordinator Brenda Soto has had a remarkable run: For the past seven years, she has achieved a 100 percent response rate.

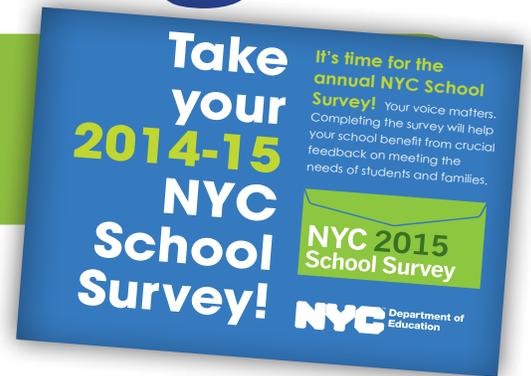
To get here, it took a full court press. "We wanted to look at data from our families to get a good

picture of what is going well, and not going well," she says. This required everyone to be on board. "Teachers needed time to collect surveys, parents needed to volunteer, students needed to get involved, and administrators needed to offer support," she says.

This all came together during the school's March parent-teacher conference, which now doubles as Survey Day. The community envelopes the school in green, from balloons on banisters and posters on exit doors, to banners on walls and tablecloths by entrances.

Parent volunteers who have been trained on survey protocol wear green t-shirts and provide surveys to parents as they wait for their conference. Language specialists are also on hand to clarify instructions.

Students get



involved too. On Survey Day, they sweep the hallways, reminding families to complete the survey. And there's an incentive—the first classes to complete and return 100 percent of their parent surveys win a pizza party.

The effort has been a resounding success: roughly 97 percent of parents fill out the survey on Survey Day alone.

Ms. Soto says the feedback has helped the school improve its communication and believes that, with a supportive community, any school can replicate her results.

Here's to another seven years!

