



# The Travel Training Newsletter

New York City Department of Education District 75

## Thoughts and Reflections

By Peggy Groce

Director

Office of Travel Training D75

Dear Friends of Travel Training:

It has been a while since our last newsletter and much has happened during that time. Let's start with bringing you up to date on Travel Training events and activities. The Office of Travel Training continues to work with our schools and families to provide our young people with the opportunity to learn to use public transportation safely and independently before they leave our school system. We know how important it is for our students to learn to travel before they leave school. All of us share in the pride our young people and their families have when they achieve their goal of independent mobility and use of public transportation. Over 300 students received 1-to-1 travel training last year and 91% completed the program and began to use mass transit for their daily commute. What an achievement!

Our young people are so successful as a result of their determination, motivation and hard work, the support and courage of their families, and the expectations and professionalism of the staff. Having highly qualified staff is the key to maintaining the high Travel Training standards. Actually, emphasis on highly qualified staff and professional development is embedded in IDEA 2004.

The law requires that all teachers of special education be highly qualified to teach what they are teaching and it also places additional requirements for paraprofessionals. We believe that we already meet these requirements. Many of you know that the universities and colleges do not offer courses in Travel Training or prepare personnel to provide this essential part of special education services.

This lack of curriculum/course content meant that we were always responsible for personnel preparation for our travel trainers and travel training teachers. Any agency, school system or transit system wanting to provide travel training faced the same problem - how to find or prepare qualified staff for travel training. It was a challenge to develop and maintain professional standards and competencies that were recognized as essential for providing travel training services.

However, the Office of Travel Training met the challenge and developed a system of preparing our staff. We are fortunate, however, in now having the *Competencies for the Effective Practice of Travel Instruction*, to use as a foundation for designing our personnel preparation and professional development activities.

These Competencies were adopted by the national Association of Travel Instruction as a standard of practice for personnel providing travel training. We are proud that the D75 Office of Travel Training was instrumental in developing the Competencies. During 2005-2006 we placed emphasis on studying how travel training practices are supported by academic theories and research that are included in the Competencies. We aligned these theories and research specifically with our field-based travel training instructional strategies, techniques and assessment practices for our ongoing professional development. It has proven to be a very worthwhile endeavor and we will continue this practice in the future.



Photo by Velky MontesdeOca

There is no doubt that the ability to use public transportation is beneficial in finding employment opportunities, enjoying recreational and leisure activities, and being included in all aspects of community living. Transportation and mobility have an essential role in the daily lives of all people. Without accessible public transportation and the ability to use the transit system as independently as possible people with disabilities have a more difficult time finding employment, participating in recreational activities, and being included in the life of the community.

The sense of freedom and independence gained by being able to travel is almost immeasurable. The survey of graduates and families we conducted

in 2004 emphasized that learning to travel changed lives for both the individual and the family. To continue our follow-up on what our former students are doing and how they are doing, we are going to continue the survey. We hope that anyone who receives the survey will complete and return it. The information is important as it lets us know how we are doing and what we can improve. It also lets us know what obstacles or barriers our former students face in the adult world and what we can do to help. We recognize that the only success that we can claim is your success.

SPRING 2006

Volume 8

Inside this issue:

**I Student 3 Views** 2

**A Brooklyn Travel Training Story** 2

**Letter from a Parent** 3

**Welcome to Tweed, Now Get Out!** 3

**Travel Training @ PS 188X** 4

**Steve Garcia Honored** 6

**Adventure with David & Desiree** 7

Special points of interest:

- **Quotes from PS 79M**
- **Facing the Unknown**
- **Letter from a Parent**
- **Tips for Travel**
- **To the Job Fair!**
- **There is a Travel Trainer Near You!**

## ***1 Student 3 Views: The Story of Marc Castro***

**By Marc Castro**

**Student, PS 811Q @ Francis Lewis HS**

When I was told that I could do travel training I felt excited. I was tired of depending on a school bus to take me to school. I knew I could travel on a city bus and was happy that other people felt the same way.

I followed all the instructions and rules given to me by my trainer, Gus (Chaviano), such as what to do if I rode the wrong bus or if I missed a stop.

Finally, I feel like I'm being treated like a young man. I also feel very confident. It's great being on my own.

**By Vilna Castro**

**Parent of Marc Castro**

When my son Marc was accepted in the inclusion program at Francis Lewis H.S. he insisted on traveling like all the other high school students using public transportation instead of a school bus.

Of course, like most parents, I was apprehensive about the whole idea but also was aware that it was an important step that Marc needed to make in order to feel confident and self-reliant. Marc was lucky in that he was given the opportunity to "travel-train" as soon as school started. You see, there is a waiting list. I met Steve (Garcia) and Gus (Chaviano) at which time the program was thoroughly explained to me and whatever questions and fears I had were also addressed.

Gus was to be Marc's travel trainer. He would pick up Marc every morning. Marc would be shown the best route to school. Gus also instructed Marc on what he should do in the event he should miss a stop or get on the wrong bus. I was given a daily report on Marc's progress. Well, Marc was travel trained in no time. In fact, he has initiated subway traveling as well. I still worry but I find keeping in touch via cell phone eases my anxiety. Travel training has helped Marc's self-confidence, a trait much needed for success.

**By Eileen Goldberg**

**Teacher, PS 811Q@Francis Lewis H.S.**

My name is Eileen Goldberg, and I am a newly appointed SETTS teacher at Francis Lewis High School. When I started in September I knew very little about the Travel Training Program.

Steve Garcia, came to Francis Lewis in September and introduced me to the world of Travel Training. He explained the program and told me that some of my students were ready to be travel trained. He needed to assess them, get parental

permission and they would begin the process.

I couldn't believe some of my students would take the bus independently, in just a few weeks. Steve assured me that the students were being trained by highly qualified travel trainers. I was more nervous than the parents. In the next few weeks Gus (Chaviano) and Maria (Rocha) showed up and explained their roles to me. They would meet my students at their homes, travel with them, teach them how to get on and off the bus using the metro card, tell them don't talk to strangers, etc. and then fade back and watch the students solo. One of my students actually mastered taking the bus back and forth in 2 weeks. The sense of pride that he felt was contagious. We were all so proud. After that student finished the program, 4 more of my students are now independent travelers. The parents are calling asking "When will my child get travel trained?" The transformation of the students is amazing. They feel like they belong to the school and they are not labeled "Special Education" because they travel on a yellow bus. This is a wonderful program and the staff are caring, and dedicated people. It makes our students independent and that's what we all want for our kids.



## ***A Brooklyn Travel Training Story: The Rich Rewards***

**By Christopher Nedd**

**Student, PS 77K**

***This is the story of Christopher Nedd and Travel Training. Christopher is a student at PS 77K in Brooklyn.***

**Starting Travel Training:**

When I first started travel training I thought it was going to be a big opportunity for me. I was nervous about it when I first started.; It was a big opportunity because it was like giving me a head start in life to do things by myself. I'm growing up and that was an important part of my life. And in the future when I'm a young man I have to start relying on myself. I'll start by getting a job by myself, buying a house by myself, and best of all working and traveling by myself. And that's how I feel about travel training.



*Travel Trainer Deborah Walker and student Christopher Nedd*

**Travel Training:**

My story and life of being travel trained. Ms. Debra Walker coming into my house and my puppy barking at her and my cat fighting the puppy and me stopping the fight. And after the whole huge frantic epidemic Ms. Walker and I went outside to begin the whole travel training process. She taught me how to cross streets, and buses what and what not to take. I observed all the instruction till I was ready to travel by myself and how really soon I'll be traveling by myself. I'm really excited and nervous at the same time. But I know that's the thing that keeps you alert and that helped keep me alert and helped me and I succeeded. I'm really pleased at myself for doing it. Who knows what my rich rewards might be when I'm released and not trapped in the cheese bus, filled with kids. I just can't wait till I'm released.

**Finishing Travel Training:**

Well, now I'm done travel training, and I did extraordinary, fabulous, and I feel great. And tomorrow is my travel trainer's last day, and it'll be my last day being travel trained. Now I know a few things how to get around in New York City. I take the B17 bus at Foster and Remsen to Church and Remsen to a Burger King or a Wendy's every now and then. And I take the B35 bus at Foster and Remsen then the B17 bus at Church and Remsen Avenue to Coney Island Avenue (our school). And then the B17 bus to east 37th street to visit my two cousins (they live next door). I feel proud and above level that I accomplished this process.

## A Happy Parent's Feedback

*"It gives them the confidence, awareness and knowledge to travel and he had a ball doing it"*

Dear Mr. Steven Gallo,

I just wanted to express my thoughts on what a wonderful program the Bronx Explorers are. My son Michael really enjoyed the program last year and learned so much from it. He has a greater understanding of traveling and can use his metro card independently. He also has a better understanding of safety and public awareness. These issues are of great importance to our children. It gives them the confidence, awareness, and knowledge to travel and he had a ball doing it.

I hope this program will be available to him this summer, he really benefited from it.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kuhl

Parent to Michael

PS 176 class XII

Bronx

## Quotes from PS 79M

"I can do it alone. I will be able to go to school, the clothing store and the sneaker store by myself."

*Quadajja Brown*

"Someday I will be able to go on the bus and the train to school...and get a job after graduation."

*Giovanny Reina*

...people do not tease me like they do on the school bus."

*Cynthia Lewis*

"I like that I am not on the cheese bus no more." "I feel great about traveling alone."

*Angel Soto*

"I love taking the train to school and taking the bus to go shopping by myself in the Bronx on Fordham Road."

*Chasity Cummings*

## Welcome to Tweed Courthouse. Now Get Out!

### DOE Therapists Put on Their Travelin' Shoes for Fall

Tweed Courthouse was the historic and architecturally dazzling setting for a Travel Training Workshop given for DOE Physical and Occupational Therapists on October 28th, 2005. Titled "Road to Independence II," the workshop was a chance to follow up on the first travel training workshop given for therapists in the spring of 2004. Students with disabilities need to be able to get around in the community, whatever the obstacles, and from the first planning meeting, the DOE Travel Trainers turned sharp eyes to obstacles and the principles of travel training.

"Look at this door," Travel Training Director Peggy Groce commented as she surveyed the "handicapped access" entrance to the Tweed Courthouse. "Where's the button to let someone know you need help getting in with a wheelchair?"

Groce, (Mike) Sohtz and fellow trainers Steve Garcia, and Phillippe Jean Louis met extensively to plan the workshop, given for approximately sixty Occupational and Physical Therapists who work with students with disabilities in school settings across the city. After welcoming remarks by Groce and her team, therapists were given an overview of travel training principles, including discussing what they hoped to get out of the workshop.

Suffice it to say, there were surprises for everyone.

"OK, you're getting out of here," Sohtz announced mid-morning. Trainers broke the group into ten teams of six, handed out digital cameras so teams could go document obstacles, and gave instructions on destinations each group was to travel to and from. Teams that would be taking the subway or bus were given Metrocards, and with that the therapists filed out, looking a little nervous ("We have to go into a **subway station**?") one therapist was heard to say, incredulously).

After lunch, during which trainers uploaded the photos to PowerPoint, each team presented its findings. A rather unglamorous view of the City Hall neighborhood emerged, as team after team showed a steep curb where someone in a wheelchair might have hoped for a curb cut, garbage cans or the odd police van blocking available curb cuts, no handicapped accessible bathrooms at historic downtown churches, etc. "It's depressing," commented one therapist. Tell us about it, the trainers replied. Yet the therapists were asked at the end of the workshop "What will you do differently? How will you incorporate this into your practice with students with disabilities?"

Therapists who started the day thinking little could be done in the short therapy time available with each child (generally an hour or less per week), or very little that was even needed (students with disabilities usually take the yellow school buses rather than travel independently), brimmed with knowledge born of actual shoe-leather.

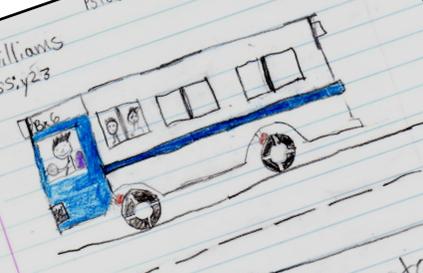


**Travelin' Shoes**

Therapists realized they could work on skills that would help with things like putting on a rain poncho, learning to swipe a metrocard, or use a pay or cell phone, deciphering a subway map, opening and closing an umbrella to travel in bad weather and many other

skills, such as problem-solving inevitable route obstacles. "We came in thinking travel training was something that took lots of time and there was no way we could do it in school," said Fareen Malik, a physical therapist in Brooklyn "...But after this workshop, we realized there's a lot we do to help our students be more independent, no matter how little time we have with them."

Teacher: Ms Williams  
Class: Y23  
PS 188 MS 301  
2/9/06  
Jose



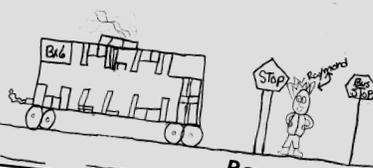
We took the number 6 bus to Safety City. The best parts of all was learning how to use a metrocard and use getting to long to look both ways.

Jose, class Y23

We learned about crossing signals and signs. A signal changes and a sign never changes. We learned to cross the street. We learned a lot from Steve. We took the Bx 6 bus from the Bronx to Manhattan to go to Safety City and then we went back to school. We learned about Safety. We played games at Safety City. We won Power Prizes.

Kenneth, class Y23

PS 188 MS 301  
Raymond



The number 6 bus took us to Safety City in Manhattan. We learned how to cross the street safely.

Raymond

**Travel Training Comes to PS 188X in The Bronx**

The day we went to Safety City we learned how cross the street and we also learned how to be safe. We watched a video about crossing safety. We learned a rap song.

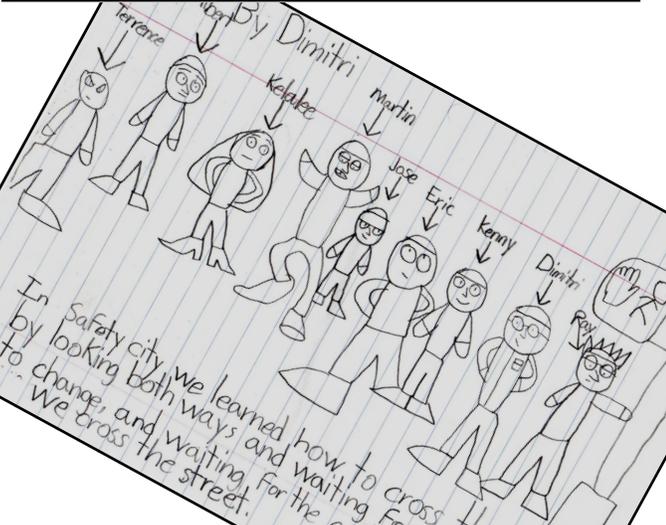
Kelalee, Class Y23

Fed 9 2006  
Class Y23

We Learned alot about safety from Steve. we Learned about Signs and signals, a sign never changes. It blinks a red hand so we can walk. we took The number 6 bus and we walked The rest of The way To Safety City. We Learned to Look both ways when crossing The street at Safety city.

Eric Y23

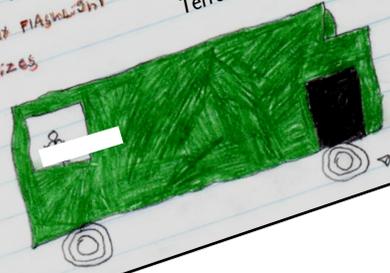
By Dimitri



In Safety city we learned how to cross the street by looking both ways and waiting for the change, and waiting for the cars to stop then we cross the street.

Dimitri class Y23

I HAD FUN IN SAFETY CITY LEARNING ABOUT SAFETY CITY AND LEARNING HOW TO CROSS THE STREET AND TAKING A BUS WE SAW LOTS OF STUFF WE SAW YANKEE STADIUM WE SAW THE BRIDGE WE WENT ACROSS IT WE WAS VERY HIGH MY FAVORITE PART WAS LEARNING HOW TO CROSS THE STREET I EXPICALLY LIKE WHEN WAS WATCHING THE MOVIE I LIKE MY POWER PRIZE I LIKE MY FLASHLIGHT I WISH WE COULD HAVE GOT MORE POWER PRIZES



Terrence, Class Y23

## ***Travel Training Arrives at PS 188X***

***By Steve Gallo***

***Travel Training Teacher***

This school year the Travel Training Program has arrived at PS 188 @ MS 301 in the Bronx. Thanks to Speech Therapist Jane Rosenberg, who made the school's first referrals to the program, we were able to travel train 2 students who will be moving on to high school in September 2006, and we were able to bring lessons to one class which led to a public transit trip to Access Safety City.

The students, teacher Dorothy Williams, Jane Rosenberg and I had a great trip on a rainy day on public transit getting to Access Safety City and back to the school. We in the Travel Training Program hope that this is just the beginning of a long and great relationship between the Travel Training Program and the wonderful staff and students at PS 188X @ MS 301.



*Students from class Y23, at PS 188X @ MS 301 on their trip to Access Safety City.*

## ***Speech Therapist “Speaks Out” for Travel Training***

***By Jane Rosenberg***

***Speech/Language Therapist, PS 188X @ MS 301***

As a provider of speech/language services to middle school students, my focus has always been to increase functional communication skills. Improving student's ability to use pragmatic language can lead to greater independence, thereby increasing future employment opportunities. Learning to travel independently can help a student learn many new invaluable skills. At the beginning of 2005-2006 school year, I began to gather information about the District 75 Travel Training Program. Although the students that I felt would benefit from travel training were just 13 years old, I was hoping that there may be options for those youngsters. After speaking with Steve Gallo, coordinator for the Office of Travel Training, I was informed of the process. After reviewing the paper work, Mr. Gallo made a visit to our school. During our visit Mr. Gallo clearly mapped out a plan for those students to be assessed for possible travel training participation. As the experience unfolded, some very exciting things began to occur. I always knew that engaging our students in a practical situation that mirrors everyday life would be extremely beneficial. However what I could not have known was how much relevant information my students would be exposed to, and how well they were able to internalize that information. Through a series of class visits, Mr. Gallo introduced neighborhood maps. Students became familiar with cross streets and avenues. During these lessons, vocabulary was taught and then reinforced weekly in classrooms and during related service sessions.

Mr. Gallo, Velky MontesdeOca, and Sandra Mahase worked with two of our students, focusing on independent travel skills. It began to peak the interest among other students, creating somewhat of a “buzz” about having one's own metro card. In addition to increasing language and communications skills, this program has created opportunities for students to engage in social interactions. As speech/language therapists, we are always looking for realistic venues in which our students can use the problem solving skills we focus on. From a communication point of view, an important part of the travel training experience is developing the student's ability to ask for help when encountering difficulty while riding public transportation. Again, this is a component that is addressed by Mr. Gallo and his staff.

In addition to learning new skills, the program also encouraged a wonderful sense of accomplishment, as these two students now travel to and from school using public transportation. Self confidence is usually an issue for our students, as their successes can be minimal. However completing and passing Travel Training experience has served to boost positive feelings of self worth.

Mr. Gallo and his staff are highly trained professionals who have a great understanding of the needs of District 75 youngsters. It was amazing to see those students in another learning venue, truly engaged and having fun.

Many thanks to the Travel Training Team.

## ***Gardner Gazette Honors Steve Garcia, Travel Training Teacher***



**Left to Right: Daqwan A., Dimitra K., Alexis R., Joseph W., Steve Garcia, Antoine K., and Mary A.**

***The following story, written by students from PS 81 IQ @ Queens High School for Teaching appeared in their newsletter, "The Gardner Gazette"***

The person that we chose to interview for our first cover story is Steve Garcia. Steve is a travel training teacher for the New York City Department of Education. He has been on the job for twenty-two (22) years. He has performed this job for so long because he loves it.

Mr. Steve Garcia understands how important it is for students

to learn to travel independently. Steve is very confident that his students can succeed at travel training.

Students attend community outings with Mr. Garcia. On these trips, students learn about safety issues. For example: look both ways before crossing the street, always cross at the intersection, where to stand when waiting for the bus, and stranger awareness.

Mr. Steve Garcia is a very important figure in the development of our independence. For that we would like to thank him.

## ***Tips for Travel***

### **On the trains:**

Be careful on the subway stairs that's not the place to run,  
If you miss the train that's already there wait for another one.  
Be sure to look for the Conductor board, the sign that's black and white,  
The conductor can assist you and help your trip go right.  
Don't go near the platform edge, stay closer to the wall,  
It can be quite dangerous if you were going to fall.  
If something that you own ever falls onto the track,  
Say goodbye, forget about it, don't try to get it back!  
When you do get on the train, don't lean against the door,  
It makes more sense to hold the pole, that's what it is there for.  
And surely you know to never walk through the cars that connect the train,  
If you ever need to move your place, get off the next stop and then on again.  
**Your body and your mind are safety tools that you don't want to hurt,**

**Follow all my Safety Tips and always stay alert**

### **On the City Bus:**

When waiting for the city bus on the sidewalk you should wait,  
The buses run on schedule, but sometimes they are late.  
Do not put your body near the curb or in the street,  
Away from the edge is the place to keep your feet.  
When the city bus arrives, another thing to learn,  
Don't go ahead of others, be sure to wait your turn.  
And when you enter on the bus, near the driver is where to stay,  
The bus driver is the one to ask if you're confused along the way.  
If you need to get by others, say "excuse me please",  
Following these safety rules will make your trip a breeze.  
**Your body and your mind are safety tools that you don't want to hurt,**  
**Follow all my Safety Tips and always stay alert.**

*Poems by Florence Tuchman Schomer  
Travel Training Teacher*

## ***To the Job Fair: An Adventure with David and Desiree!***

**By Germaine Brown**

**Student: PS 233Q @ Beach Channel High School**

On January 30, 2006 I went with a group of students from P 233 Queens to West Side High School in Manhattan. The reason for this trip was to learn about different jobs that I might be able to do when I leave this program. Some of the jobs were nurse's aid, mechanic assistant, chef and locksmith. There were also some jobs in law enforcement. This was a job fair. I enjoyed this trip.

I also enjoyed the train ride there with Mr. Dave. Mr. Dave helped us with which train stop to get on and off, and which direction to walk in to get to the school.

**By Donna Beggi**

**Teacher: PS 233Q @ Beach Channel High School**

Pam Gaynor (transition coordinator) and I (vocational teacher) planned a field trip to Manhattan's Upper West Side to attend a job/career fair. We wanted to take several students with us however; we wanted to go there via "SUBWAY" as well as getting there safely. Since Ms. Gaynor and I travel to and from work in the luxury of our cars, (not to get confused with luxury cars!) the subway ride from the Rockaway area to Manhattan was a real challenge for us as teachers. Lucky for us, travel trainers David (Abrahams) and Desiree (Pickens) were granted permission to "help us out" on this adventure.

Prior to the trip, the travel trainer met with us as a group to explain rules, expected behaviors, the route, destination, etc. At the meeting we were able to set the tone for the trip.

The trip to Manhattan finally arrived and we all received our Metro-cards. Needless to say a student had to show me which way to swipe my card. It proves we do learn something new everyday.

The trip to and from Manhattan went off with out any problems and the fair at the Westside High School was worth the trip. The students stepped up to the plate as well as David and Desiree. Pam and I want to thank everyone involved who made this trip so successful.

PS...A note to other teachers...Skip the cheese bus and take public transportation! It's a great experience.



## ***Facing the Unknown! With Michele***

**By Lillian Hannah**

**PS 721X**

In the past I have had the pleasure of working with Michele Buto, Travel Training teacher at 721x. Ms. Buto presented several travel related lessons which were followed up with field trips on public transportation. The field trips were always age appropriate, educational and enjoyable. Because of these experiences many of my students are eager to learn how to travel independently.

In the past I have been reluctant to use public transportation with my class facing THE UNKNOWN! Thanks to Ms. Buto I am more comfortable using public transportation and in fact have taken other trips on public transportation using the key points from Michele's lessons. I have also expanded on the lessons demonstrated by Michele

and developed many of my own. My students are now learning how to use the bus and subway maps to find their way to and from school as well as other locations in the Bronx. My class has designed a beautiful bulletin board exhibiting all the work they have done with maps and all they have learned.

It is a pleasure to work with Michele. She is always willing to share her ideas and give of her time whenever I ask for assistance. I encourage other teachers to work with Ms. Buto and the Travel Training staff.



**Class W15 from PS 721X**



# There is a Travel Trainer Near You!

## Getting in touch with the Office of Travel Training

There is a Travel Training Office in every borough in New York City. We accept referrals from any District 75 school and many High Schools. We work with students at varied off-sites, worksites, and often the agencies or facilities that students will attend after transition.

Below is a list of our main offices, with their addresses, telephone numbers, and the names of the Travel Training Coordinators. We welcome your questions, comments, and/or requests for information about the program and its activities. We can arrange bus demonstrations, trips to Safety City, parent and staff development workshops and of course explain our referral process for students you believe would benefit from our services. We look forward to hearing from you.

<u>The Bronx</u>	<u>Brooklyn</u>	<u>Queens</u>	<u>Manhattan</u>	<u>Staten Island</u>
<b>Michele Buto</b> <b>PS 721 X</b> <b>2697 Westchester Av</b> <b>Bronx, NY 10461</b> <b>(718) 822-2881</b> <b>Ext. 3012</b>	<b>Mike Sohtz</b> <b>PS 721K</b> <b>64 Avenue X</b> <b>Brooklyn, NY 11223</b> <b>(718) 266-0085</b>	<b>Roseanne Bopp</b> <b>PS 721Q</b> <b>57-12 94 Street</b> <b>Elmhurst, NY 11373</b> <b>(718) 760-2931</b>	<b>Gerard Grillo</b> <b>PS 751M</b> <b>113 E. 4th Street</b> <b>New York, NY 10003</b> <b>(212) 477-2090</b> <b>Ext. 2007</b>	<b>Florence Tuchman</b> <b>PS 721R</b> <b>155 Tompkins Ave</b> <b>Staten Island, NY 10301</b> <b>(718) 727-4938</b>
<b>Steve Gallo</b> <b>PS 754X</b> <b>470 Jackson Av</b> <b>Bronx, NY 10455</b> <b>(718) 993-5581</b> <b>Ext. 103</b>	<b>Phillipe Jean Louis</b> <b>PS 373K</b> <b>185 Ellery Street</b> <b>Brooklyn, NY 11206</b> <b>(718) 782-6800</b>	<b>David Abrahams</b> <b>PS 752Q</b> <b>142-10 Linden Blvd.</b> <b>Jamaica, NY 11436</b> <b>(718) 322-3500</b> <b>Ext. 1071</b>	<b>Florence Tuchman</b> <b>PS 721M</b> <b>250 W. Houston St.</b> <b>New York, NY 10013</b> <b>(212) 924-8825</b>	<b>High Schools All Boroughs</b> <b>Steve Garcia</b> <b>PS 721K</b> <b>64 Avenue X</b> <b>Brooklyn, NY 11223</b> <b>(718) 266-0085</b>

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