

**Museum Alliance for Science and Technology
P.S. 154 PTA – General Membership Meeting
Tuesday, March 10, 2009, 6:00pm
Multi Media Room**

Welcome

PTA President, Deb Capone opened the meeting by thanking the 2nd grade parents for hosting the potluck and introduced tonight's speaker, Joyce Szufliita.

Middle School Application Process

Joyce Szufliita is a Brooklyn resident, mother of two children, now in High School and has 10 years of experience researching and interviewing resources concerning school admissions processes, i.e. Middle School, High School, Pre-K, K, etc. She is a resource for parents in Brooklyn and her company is called NYC School Help. Ms. Szufliita started by emphasizing the importance of lateness and absences in the Middle School acceptance process. 3rd and 4th grade are very important years of focus and 4th grade (and 7th looking forward to High School) are especially scrutinized for lateness and absences.

Ms. Szufliita explained that the Department of Education, a city agency, divides the city into 32 distinct geographic school districts and each district is then broken down into smaller zones. P.S. 154 is in District 15. For purposes of Middle School admissions, zone does not matter. Children applying to Middle School have district wide choice or can apply to individual middle schools that are not part of a school district. A Middle School directory can be found on-line on the D.O.E. website; go to "Choices in Enrollment" and you can download a PDF file. The application process begins in the fall. Ms. Szufliita strongly recommended ranking as many schools as possible on the application up to 15 schools, and definitely at least 6. D.O.E. does not have to comply in giving people their choices, but most often, children get their 1st or 2nd choice. An appeals process is available but difficult. Make a copy of your application and any supporting documents that accompany it (like a doctor's letter explaining an extended absence for sickness). Let your Guidance Counselor know if there were any extenuating circumstances around multiple absences. She recommended using your guidance counselor to discuss the middle school application process for your child.

The schools pay attention to the ELA exams, grades, attendance and punctuality, and take into consideration the child's behavior, the interview, the essay, group activity and auditions in some cases. The match is made between the school that is ranked highest by the student with the school that matches or chooses the child. Apart from the D.O.E. application process schools outside of the district exist that are referred to as "school based application" schools. One such school that is new is Brooklyn Prospect Charter School. Ms. Szufliita said that it is a very promising school. Students apply to these schools independently and get the applications from the individual schools.

Tours begin at the start of the school year, right after Labor Day. Find out each school's tour schedule from each individual school. Fairs and applications come out in the late fall. The deadline for applications this year was January 9th. Placements are made in May and then the appeals process becomes available. Ms. Szufliita can be reached at <http://nycschoolhelp.com/aboutus.aspx>.

Executive Board for Next Year and Vote on Bylaws Change

Deb proposed a change to the PTA bylaws to allow the new fall budget to be voted on in the spring. (The change was voted in.) A preliminary budget for next year will be presented at April's meeting. The budget will go before the PTA for approval in May. For any questions on this year's current budget, please refer your questions to Treasurer, Dianna Plunkett.

Deb circulated a list of all of the Executive Board positions and descriptions. Deb announced that she would like to run for a second term and welcomes interested parties to run as co-president to work alongside her. Next year the PTA would like to have 2 co-presidents of fund raising. For those not interested in running for a position on the Executive Board, there are many opportunities for committee work, and co-chairing committees. Nominations will take place in April and voting in May.

Upcoming Events

- **Movie Night** – March 20th, 6:00pm, Yellow Submarine
- **100th Anniversary, save the date, April 3rd.** Invitations are going out soon. This is an adult event, centennial celebration, taking place in a gallery space in Chelsea and includes wine tasting, silent auction, student art show, live music, and food provided by Fresh Direct.
- **The Book Fair** is running from March 16 – 20.

Project Respect

Mr. Ortiz and Mr. Havlik fielded questions from Deb Capone (all questions were given to both in advance) and parents at the meeting regarding Project Respect and the decision to choose the **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** program as a follow-up strategy to address an identified bullying problem at PS 154. Mr. Ortiz explained that a Parent Environmental Survey identified a bullying problem at the school initially. In response, a group of concerned parents and staff developed a Community Code and set of consequences to address the bullying problem. This group and program was named Project Respect and is currently the system in place for addressing bullying issues in our school. In looking for a system to implement that could complement Project Respect, Mr. Ortiz researched program options in place in other schools, along with Guidance Counselor, Kristin Muscatella to determine what might be a good option for PS 154. Other principals in neighborhood schools were interested in partnering with PS 154 and recommended PBIS as a viable option.

Deb: Does PBIS address the issues of bullying?

Mr. Ortiz replied that he thought that PBIS could provide a framework to address bullying issues at the school. However, PBIS is not implemented at the school yet.

Deb: Are the Community Code and consequences being used at the present time and are they working?

Mr. Ortiz: Yes.

(A parent later attested to how effectively they thought the code and consequences worked for an instance of bullying that their child was a part of.)

Deb emphasized the need for campaigning and reinforcing the Code of Conduct and consequences.

Deb: Would you consider reconvening the Project Respect Committee?

Mr. Ortiz: Yes. Mr. Ortiz explained that the PBIS group was inclusive of the Project Respect participants.

Deb: Will this model work for us?

Mr. Ortiz and Mr. Havlik explained that they would like to use PBIS in a way that it can work for the school by instilling values to students via lesson plans. If they find that it cannot work for the school, they are willing to scrap the program. PBIS is a 3–5 year project to get completely up and running. It is a \$7,000.00 investment per year. The program

implementation has been running behind schedule due to disagreements amongst members of the group concerning the reward system and the model itself. They emphasized that they are not invested in this particular program if it does not work for the school and that it will be up to the PBIS/Project Respect group to decide which direction to go.

Brenna Beirne and Jane Rennert researched what other schools in our area do to address difficult behavior, existing primarily in the lunchroom, bathrooms, and playground. They contacted parent coordinators and principals at PS 107, PS 10, PS 321, The Children's School, and Brooklyn New School. All have lunchtime volunteer programs. Each school lets parents volunteer during their children's lunch slots, because otherwise they were not getting enough volunteers. Brenna and Jane also asked about peer mediation programs and were told that these programs can be very successful, but need paid staff in order to run effectively. A full-time guidance counselor is really essential to administer and coordinate a successful peer mediation program. A lively discussion ensued regarding lunchtime activities, behavior, volunteering ideas, etc. Deb appealed to Mr. Ortiz and Mr. Havlik to reconsider the parent/child lunchtime restriction rule.

The meeting came to a close at 8:10pm. The next PTA meeting will be Tuesday April 7, 2009 at 6:00pm.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Altman