



**Community Education Council for District 4**  
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District 4 Community Superintendent

February 6, 2008

**TO:** Representative from the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy  
 Representative from the Office of Portfolio Development  
 Representative from the Office of Public and Community Affairs  
 Representative from the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs  
 Representative from the Office of Accountability

**RE:** Consultation and Conversation

Late in 2007 the Department of Education (DOE) announced the closure of three District 4 schools due to their persistent low performance. Just prior to the official announcement our Council was contacted and engaged in conversations, although the decision was already made. The Chief Accountability Officer gave testimony before the New York City Council’s Committee on Education, that “as in the past, CECs were not consulted prior to the decision being made, but are now being consulted<sup>1</sup>.” This official statement speaks volumes. If the DOE was free to determine to consult or not consult the law would not be so specific. We are outraged! Not only are your actions unacceptable and unlawful, but they failed to uphold the letter and spirit of the law. Ironically, “...had Community Education Council for District 4 (CEC4) been consulted we would have stood by the Chancellor’s side<sup>1</sup>.”

Today the District Leadership Team (DLT) will participate in another such conversation with the above mentioned DOE representatives. Although there is value in conversation there is greater value in conversations that are part of consultation. The recent series of conversations are about a year too late. The Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy (OFEA) took on the responsibility of organizing the discussions that have taken place thus far. As the department directly in charge of parent involvement, OFEA needs to get to know our district in depth and our parents in particular. It is clear to us that they are unaware of the key players in District 4. For example, **1)** some community based organizations, with a long history of serving our schools, were left out of the discussion, **2)** to date, there has been no parent representation from affected schools at the meetings, **3)** meetings are poorly promoted, **4)** some members of the District Leadership Team were not invited, **5)** OFEA representatives were inexperienced, lacked interest and comprehension on the significance of the discussion, and lastly, **6)** parent coordinators and district family advocates need

to be kept informed on matters relating to the proposed school closures in order to address the concerns of parents. Today, at what was literally the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, a member of the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy called me and offered a breakdown of incoming schools. This disjointed effort at communicating is not working. CEC members and parents are not being served like this.

On January 10, 2007 Community Education Council for District 4 passed a school closure resolution specifically requesting that the DOE notify the affected community when considering the opening, closing and/or consolidation of a school (see attachment). This resolution is aligned with New York State Education Law 2590h and the Federal NCLB Law which guarantees the meaningful consultation of parents. Suffices to say both the resolution and the law were ignored.

### **Child First Reforms**

The recent wave of reforms resulted in the creation of network leaders whose position is designed to enhance the level of support given to schools. In our opinion, this additional level of responsibility dilutes the authority of existing school leaders. For the most part incumbents are newcomers and their unfamiliarity with the school community they serve weakens their effectiveness. Our district network leaders have not made themselves known to the CEC nor have we engaged in dialogue.

Considering that, “strong leaders are at the center of the reforms... and that they cannot thrive in a system that ties their hands<sup>2</sup>,” it is our recommendation that the DOE seek the expert opinion of our community superintendent, an experienced educator with a proven track record of service. He has the pulse of our community as a whole and should be consulted on issues affecting the schools.

### **Non-negotiable Demands**

The Child First reforms seek to “provide the options that students and their families demand<sup>2</sup>.” As CEC4 and the District Leadership Team members prepare to listen to your proposals we devised our own list of non-negotiable instructional related demands that must be incorporated into the curriculum of incoming schools:

- Existing District 4 full day Pre-K classes must remain intact and especially in P. S. 101 which is one of the schools slated for closure.
- P. S. 101 elementary school also has a Kindergarten Dual Language Program that must be preserved. The Dual Language Program should be incorporated into the school’s curriculum to include all grades.
- Based on District 4’s large population of ELL schools’ curriculum should reflect a Dual Language Program. On February 14, 2007 CEC4 passed a Dual Language Resolution “supporting the expansion of the Literary Mansion Dual Language Program... to include all District 4 schools and grade levels (see attachment).” This program has been deemed educationally appropriate as an effective tool in preparing our ELL students to reach proficiency on State mandated academic achievement standards and assessments.
- District 4’s special education and bilingual special education students need exceptional consideration. Our middle schools are experiencing a shortage of special education seats and graduating elementary school (special education) students are not guaranteed a seat. Incoming schools must make adequate accommodation in this area. JHS 117 which is slated

for closure has handicap accessible ramps for physically challenged students that must be preserved.

- District 4 students must not be deprived of a high quality educational experience that includes a curriculum that is augmented by instructions in arts to include, but not limited to, dance, music and art appreciation classes.
- Prior to their opening incoming schools must consult affected parents, CEC4, Community Board 11, community based organizations and State and Local elected officials.

## **Our Community**

The fabric of our community is changing. Gentrification has widened the social and economic gap of East Harlem. An affluent and mostly childless population of urban professionals is moving into luxury condominiums while poor working class families are being forced out. A pattern of decreasing enrollment rates supports our belief that we are losing our community and will ultimately lose our schools. The negative variance between the projected and actual enrollment rates has resulted in District 4 schools having to return funds. As we consider the current state of our schools, and the adverse effect of budget reductions, we question how our district schools will be able meet the academic needs of our students and what measures are in place to prevent additional schools from failing? In light of the school closings, what strategies are in place to support the instructional practices of District 4 schools? What criteria did the DOE utilize to determine adequacy of incoming schools and will they enjoy an unfair advantage over existing District 4 schools as it relates to equipment, space, teacher-to-student ratio, and overall resources? We are concerned for the morale of the teaching and school staff as well. Has there been ample information offered on the transition process? What options, if any, are available and what efforts are being made to retain staff members?

## **Accountability**

### **Elected Officials and Community Board Members**

CEC4 looks towards our elected officials and community board members on issues impacting our community. With one or two exceptions, you failed to express your indignation at the lack of respect. Are we to assume that you had prior knowledge and opted to express no opposition, or worst, the news failed to impact you? How are you supporting public education in East Harlem? This is a crucial community issue; yet, many of you opted to be represented at meetings by inexperienced staff members. The DOE has demonstrated little regard for our community and your position. To remain silent now would constitute nothing short of neglect of duty on your part. Stand up for East Harlem's children by demanding that our rights be respected.

### **CECs and CPAC**

Lack of parental consultation is not unique to District 4. To our colleagues who are serving on Community Education Councils we encourage you to join us in raising your voice in objection. Parent leaders serving on the Chancellors' Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) are asked to raise their voices on this topic as well. The Federal and State law mandate to consult parents needs to be placed on the CPAC agenda immediately and should be revisited periodically in order to assess compliance. There needs to be a strong message of opposition. The adoption of a School Closure Resolution (see attached resolution) on a district level by all CECs, and on a citywide level by CPAC members would be an unprecedented show of unity. Our collective interest is to even the

playing field by securing the delivery of a sound education for all New York City public school students; impossible without parental consultation and a united front of parent leaders.

### Community Based Organizations

In our opinion, our community based organizations (CBOs) have through the years become complacent. Our CBOs need to have a renewed spirit of interest matched by proactive, committed action. Among other strategies, you should continually analyze the needs of the community you serve and synthesize your findings by identifying specific areas of need for intervention.

### Conclusion

CEC4's advocacy efforts is fueled by our resolve to ensure that students have an equal chance at obtaining a high quality education, the empowerment of parents, and holding persons in position of responsibility accountable. This communication is not requesting that the DOE extend Community District Education Councils the courtesy of consultation, it demands it. Accountability in the public education sector should foster an environment where business practices reflect a high standard of conduct which, at a minimum, includes the principles of equity, empowerment, transparency, informed decision-making and strict adherence to governing statutes for all.

As an initial step in the arduous process of changing the culture of the system<sup>2</sup> we highly recommend the renaming of the TWEED Courthouse. Adopting a name that is synonymous with corruption and greed is highly inappropriate and out of sync with the principles of accountability.

Once again we state for the record that CEC4 seeks to foster good working relations with all parties, but in order for this to happen we must demonstrate mutual respect for each other and the statutes that govern our activities. As a lasting thought we recall the words of Edward Abbey who said, "absence of the law... is the beginning of tyranny." The question begs, and when the law exist and ignored, what do we have instead? You fill in the blank!

Thank you for your time. It is my sincerest desire that future dialogue will be one of a consultative nature. Should you wish to discuss this further please feel free to contact me directly at (347) 672-6174 or via email at [HRNazario@aol.com](mailto:HRNazario@aol.com).

Sincerely,

Hector R. Nazario  
President – CEC4

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.ny1.com/ny1/content/index.jsp?&aid=76659&search\\_result=1&stid=4#](http://www.ny1.com/ny1/content/index.jsp?&aid=76659&search_result=1&stid=4#)

<sup>2</sup>[www.hlpronline.com/2007/04/klein\\_01.html](http://www.hlpronline.com/2007/04/klein_01.html)

