

C O V E R
S H E E T

FAX

To:

Ms. Tanya E. Martin

Fax #:

456 - 5381

From:

Leigh Dingerson
CCC

ph: 342 - 0594
fax: 333 - 5462

Date:

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Pages:

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COMMENTS:

Ms. Martin -

When you met, in March, with a number of community groups about school issues, you mentioned needing some short "stories" or soundbytes on some of the issues we raised.

The Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition has put together the following profiles. Hope you find them useful!

Contact info included.

-Leigh D.

Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington DC 20007

Phone: 202-342-0567
Fax: 202-333-5462

Contact: Mary Dailey, dir
Northwest Bronx
Community & Clergy
Coalition
103 EAST 196th St
Bronx, NY 10468
718 - 584 - 0515

Northwest Bronx Education Committee
Summary of issues - overcrowding, large class size, and failing schools

Overcrowding and large class size:

Schools in District 10 in the Northwest Bronx are among the most overcrowded in the country. The district currently has over 43,000 students, but has room for only 36,000 - leaving it nearly 7,000 seats over capacity. Many individual schools are packed to over 150% of capacity, with classes being taught in hallways, cafeterias, and converted bathrooms. Many schools have no room for kindergarten classes, leaving some of the district's youngest children to be bused to schools out of their neighborhood that have more room. Many schools hold classes not only in their main buildings, but also in separate annexes, leased spaces, mini-schools, trailers located in the schoolyard, and mobile buses parked on the street in front of the school. The district's playgrounds are crowded with transportable buildings, leaving children no safe space to play.

**** PS 86 - PS 86 currently holds over 2056 students, but was designed to hold only 1434. To accommodate the overflow, classes are held not only in the main building but in a temporary mini-school built in the playground and in leased space at a synagogue three blocks away. Kindergarten students are bused to two other schools over 20 blocks away because of a lack of space. Isabel Colon's son started this school year in a third grade class of 52 students. The class was run by two teachers, but was chaotic and ineffective.**

**** PS 246 - PS 246 is located several blocks away from PS 86, and is even more overcrowded. It was built to hold 814 students but currently has an enrollment of 2115. It has no gymnasium, and a tiny auditorium that holds less than 100 students. The building needs such extensive repairs and upgrading that five years ago the board of Education decided to tear it down and build a new building for PS 246. Due to "budgetary concerns" the new construction was quietly cancelled, and PS 246 continues to slowly decay, even as students crowd into it every day for classes.**

**** PS 33 - Not far away from these schools is PS 33, which holds over 1064 students, but was designed to hold only 694 - leaving it at over 153% of capacity. Under the elevated train that runs above busy Jerome Avenue in front of the school, a row of 5 mobile classrooms park everyday. These buses are used to hold classes that do not fit**

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into the main school building. Class sizes at PS 33 are extremely high. Regular classrooms hold up to 37 students each. Until recently kindergarten classes were held in combined rooms – with two classes meeting together in one room with two teachers. One room held 51 students last year, and two others held 52 students each. The rooms were so crowded that there was no room for desks and chairs – the students sat on the floor. Major repairs are needed at the school. The walls and roof leak to such an extent that pools of water form inside the building when it rains. Tiles from the roof of the gymnasium routinely fall, and many windows do not function properly. Next year will mark the building's 100th birthday.

Failing schools:

District 10 has a large number of low-performing schools with consistently low reading and math scores and poor performance on a range of other outcomes.

**** PS 306 - PS 306 has been on the NY State list of failing schools (SURR list) for three years. In 1997 only 19.2 percent of students at the school were reading at or above grade level, and only 25.2 percent were performing at or above grade level in mathematics. Only 55 percent of teachers were licensed and permanently assigned to the school. After three years on the SURR list, the school is finally being redesigned.**

Parents organize to win changes:

Parents are working collectively to tackle these and other educational problems through the Northwest Bronx Education Committee, a project of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. Parents from schools throughout District 10 have come together, developed agendas for change, and held meetings with public officials to demand action. When bureaucracies have stalled, parents have taken to the streets to hold demonstrations, marches, and press conferences.

In four short years, parents have won significant victories. The NYC Board of Education is currently building seven new buildings with a total of 3000 new seats, all at sites requested by the Education Committee. An annex for PS 33 has already opened, and next September two new schools will open close to PS 86 and PS 246 to reduce overcrowding. The class of Isabel Colon's son has been split, and many other classes have been cut in size. But a great deal of work remains to be done. Within the coming years District 10's population will continue to grow, and an estimated 4000 additional seats will be needed. Parents are pushing for the renovation of the long abandoned Kingsbridge Armory as school space, and are working to ensure that federal school construction legislation passes to provide much needed funding for new construction projects.

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At PS 306, parents are organizing to turn around their failing school. They have developed a 10 point agenda of changes they want made at their school, and are calling for the removal of their current principal. Parents are planning a "Community School Review" in which they will work with a team of experienced educators to conduct a two day visit and evaluation of the school. They will use the review to fine-tune their 10 point platform.

By working together as part of an independent community organization, parents in District 10 are helping to create an exciting new model of parent-led school reform.