

PS 261  
School Leadership Team  
Needs Assessment Survey and Interview Summary  
April – October 2007  
*Annotated December 2007*

**PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT:**

SLT hopes to use this document as a foundation for creating an outline for the continuing 2007-2008 school year to assess ways to allocate PS 261's resources where they will do the most good.

**CONTENTS OF THE DOCUMENT:**

- SLT Parent Survey Spring 2007
- Interview Summaries:
  - Administrative Needs
  - Climate
  - Communication
  - Curriculum and Instruction
  - School Discipline

## **ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

*Zipporiah Mills, Principal*

*Lena Barbera, Assistant Principal*

### **Communication**

#### ***What are the ways that you get information you need from the school and communicate information and your concerns?***

Much of the information Lena acquires comes to her verbally. This is particularly true when it comes to her communication with teachers. From her conversations she tries to ensure that she follows the protocol of procedures in place.

Lena also prefers verbal communication when dealing with parents. She emphasized that e-mail is *not* a good method of communication due to the large number of e-mails she receives from the DOE. Unfortunately parent e-mails often get lost in the shuffle.

Zip reflected that she tended to communicate verbally with the school community rather than through memos and letters. Communication with teachers is done primarily through faculty conferences and grade level meetings where the focus is on verbal communication.

Much of the communication with the parent community occurs during meetings with the PTA. Executive board meetings and emails tend to be the primary source of information. Zip has an open office policy, where both parents and teachers are welcome, and often come in, to discuss concerns, ideas, and generally communicate with the administration. Zip noted particularly that she does much of her communication with parent community in the small yard during afternoon dismissal and also in the hallway and lobby.

#### ***In what ways are you satisfied with how information is shared?***

Lena is generally satisfied with communication within the community and feels that she is doing her best. She is not sure that the parent community is satisfied with communications. She is not sure that the parent community understands the limitations of the school resources, both human and technological.

Zip is satisfied with the way she tends to communicate as it allows for an openness and sharing that she thinks is a valuable part of the school culture. She does however recognize the need for improvement, perhaps with more formalized methods.

#### ***What are your suggestions for how these can be improved?***

If the budget allowed, Lena would seek to hire additional school aides to assist in disseminating information. Also, she would have more parents utilize the website in order to get information. She believes that there are a number of parents who are not aware of the amount of information available on the website. She would like the PTA to remind parents about the availability of this

website and instruct on how it works. New families (including those who register after the first day of school) should be given, and encouraged to use, the welcome packet/folder that contains the parent handbook, and provides information about school procedures. The PTA should be given a list of those new families and attempt to contact them.

Zip has a desire to increase written communication with all school community members as follows:

- 1) Write a monthly article in the PTA newsletter, directly addressing parents.
- 2) Writing letters on each grade to both parents and students to share information about events and expectations.
- 3) Writing letters to individuals in order to share insights, expectations and observed feedback through walkthroughs.

### Parent Involvement

#### ***Do you have any suggestions to improve or increase parent involvement?***

Lena feels that PS 261's administration does a great deal to get parents in, as does the PTA. Teachers do a lot on their own through celebrations, trips and other activities that help increase parent involvement. Lena wondered if it would be possible to have more fluctuation in the times during which parent meetings/workshops are held to allow for varying parent schedules. She also discussed the potential to videotape parent workshops, administration messages and PTA meetings and post them on the website. This will greatly increase the access to information for those who are not able to come to meetings. Again, the ability to do this is limited by staffing.

Zip expressed concern that activities and workshops that are more academically focused are not as successful in drawing as many parents as other activities. She would like to see more parent involvement in the academic workshops that can greatly benefit their children. She believes that a greater emphasis on being in tune with student work, as well as on "fun" activities, will mean even greater student improvement.

#### ***How could the school benefit from increased parental involvement?***

Lena thinks parent efforts in fundraising are critical! Also, our school is very lucky to have so many parents with a tremendous amount, and variety of, talents and specializations. Lena knows that parents are rich in knowledge that we as a community can benefit from. We need more parent input, and talent sharing.

Zip felt our school greatly benefits from the tireless fundraising efforts of our PTA. The fundraising pays for essential programs like Dance Africa, academic intervention, the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade trip, etc.

### Curriculum

#### ***What is the best thing about the school's curriculum?***

Lena said that for the most part our curriculum is state mandated. The best thing about that is that it fosters consistency throughout the system. PS 261 teachers bring the curriculum to life and make it more exciting by building in related class trips, projects, videos and more. Creative teachers who take the things we must do and make it fun are wonderful for kids and foster learning as well as self-expression.

Zip most loves the school's hands-on projects such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Bridge Study, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Africa Study, the Civil War study in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. They allow for creativity and differentiation. She hopes that the newly created position of content-area (social studies & science) coordinator will help teachers in each grade level expand on those projects and provide them with the support necessary to make them even more successful. These projects enhance the curriculum with more portfolio driven assessments. In many ways the projects do the differentiating for us.

***What is the worst thing about the curriculum?***

Lena said that with the mandates teachers lose autonomy with regard to the subject matter. The state curriculum is quite broad and often does not allow for deeper investigations and inquiry that would greatly enhance learning. Often students just touch the surface of topics (due to time). Allowing more time on narrower themes will allow for deeper understanding.

The worst thing about the curriculum for Zip is the expectation of differentiation in every classroom, given the class sizes. Zip really wants to focus on lower class size in every grade going forward. She would like to more push-in academic intervention. The plan is to have one grade level intervention specialist at each grade level. Teachers would have to coordinate schedules so that the grade level specialist can be in each classroom during its literacy periods. Her hope is to use F-status teachers to fill gaps.

***Thinking about these issues how could we enhance the strengths and correct for the weaknesses for the school in general?***

Lena believes we can generally strengthen the curriculum by making sure that we show how different subjects and topics are all connected, related and relevant. We must demonstrate to students that learning outcomes are important to their current lives and futures. We must also continue to celebrate diversity and recognize its importance for all students. Diversity is used to enhance everyone's learning, as each person's experience is unique. Lena knows that the teachers here are committed and dedicated to the safety and welfare of students beyond academics. This is a major strength of the school.

Lena also felt that one way we must address our weaknesses is by putting more emphasis on centralizing, collecting and analyzing data for the entire school community. We must use data to make more strategic choices about how to enhance/improve performance for both high-end and low-end performers. Steps have been taken to centralize grade level assessments and to standardize the intervals at which they are administered. We must create and implement grade-wide assessments that are authentic and match the work that we do.

One weakness Zip sees is the class sizes across the grades. To address that she wants to focus on accepting fewer students into each grade level, with the aim of having no more than 110 students per grade. A reduction in the number of students accepted through variances may be needed to achieve this goal.

To enhance the school's focus on project work Zip would like more professional development in the content areas and utilize the content-area specialist to assist.

## **CLIMATE**

*Anne Biddlecom, Alice Peck*

This is a brief assessment of the school climate at P.S. 261 that highlights findings from two surveys of parents and teachers, grade-level group meetings with parents and individual interviews with school staff.

Climate was described in the group discussions and interviews as “the physical environment of the school—the building, classrooms, bathrooms, playground, cafeteria and all common areas—as well as how welcoming a place the school is—the ‘vibe’ if you will.”

Specific suggestions for improving the climate at P.S. 261 are provided. The findings and suggestions are intended to be taken into account during the overall planning that school administration makes for the 2007-2008 calendar year.

### **DATA**

The information contained herein is a compilation of information received from:

- 163 respondents to the SLT school survey of parents;
- 28 teacher respondents to school-administered survey;
- Kindergarten parent meeting
- First grade parent meeting (7 participants)
- Second and fourth grade-combined parent meeting
- Special education parent meeting
- Individual interviews with fifth grade parents; custodial staff David Tatum and Jessie Sanchez; and lunch aid Vicky Ferguson.

### **1. OVERALL SUMMARY**

The climate at P.S. 261 is generally welcoming and the facilities well-maintained; for example, 42% of parents surveyed said they strongly agree that school facilities are clean and appropriate and another 47% said they somewhat agree, and many teachers said they enjoy coming to work. However, there are a few very specific areas identified by many parents, teachers and school staff where there is need for improvement.

### **2. BATHROOMS & CAFETERIA**

**Findings:** The bathrooms were uniformly described as dirty and regularly lacking soap and paper towels. The cafeteria was noted by a number of respondents as having a dirty floor.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Can there be a regular bathroom check during the day (several times during the day? hourly?) for tidiness of bathroom and ensuring supplies available (paper towels, soap) with a verification sheet?
- Can sanitizer dispensers be installed in the bathrooms and cafeteria?
- Is it possible to add artwork to the cafeterias (e.g., paintings)? This would also address the less common concern that there is not enough artwork on display in the school.

*December 2007 - A parent is pursuing purchasing and maintaining automatic soap and towel dispensers for the bathrooms.*

### **3. SUPERVISION DURING LUNCH AND RECESS**

**Findings:** Parents, teachers and school staff identified a big need for increased supervision during lunch and recess. The general view is that neither time period is well monitored. Dirt throwing and fence climbing happen.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Hire more lunch aides: is this possible and, if not, what can be done to hire more staff for supervision during lunch and recess?
- What happened to the PTA grade rep and class parent suggestions from February 2007 for coordinating parent volunteers who are available and interested in providing supervision during lunchtime recess? There still seem to be no procedures or guidelines for lunch aides and volunteer parents.
- Keep supply of playground equipment maintained (jump ropes, balls, etc.) Who at the school is charged with this?

*December 2007 - The SLT has formed a committee to research and implement a conflict resolution program. Managing lunchtime will be a major part of this program. Problems on the playground should be reassessed now that the playground is completed.*

### **4. SECURITY**

**Findings:** Some have noted improvement with the new location of the security guard desk in the front lobby. However, the security guard in the front lobby often does not look up from her desk and note the people coming into the school. The guard is also the first person that a school visitor sees—one of the first impressions of the school.

The late pass and general chaos around morning drop-off in the cafeteria have meant that some students wander through hallways on their own or are left behind in the cafeteria in the rush of classes leaving. Sometimes children are afraid to go to the restroom during the day.

Sign-in and sign-out procedures are inconsistently followed.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Install panic bars on the front doors.
- Publicize the outcome of getting a video surveillance camera.
- Publicize the uniform sign-in and sign-out process, and ensure that staff and security guard are implementing it.
- Who on school staff will speak with the security guard about the issues identified above?
- Can an additional security guard be hired?
- Can all lower-grade classes institute a buddy system for daytime restroom visits?
- Can there be detailed supervision in the restrooms during morning drop-off and afternoon dismissal?
- Who ensures that the gate is locked?

□PTA and school admin must ensure that children are monitored during meetings and events—often children are left to run around unsupervised places (e.g., gym)

## 5. LESS COMMON CONCERNS

- a. Food in cafeteria: There is a big need for more fresh food and vegetarian options.
  - Initiate a parent committee to identify feasible options for bringing more fresh food and vegetarian options into the school.
  - Can the sale of ice cream be ended?
- b. Street safety—Crossing Atlantic Avenue is dangerous.
  - Kindergarten parent Laura Abel volunteered to get in touch with a person at Boerum Hill association who is working with Transportation Alternatives to nudge the Dept. of Transportation to improve pedestrian safety. She also is willing to contact the DOT Commissioner.
- c. Playground
  - Need to hear from the school administration about what the plans are for the new playground: Will it be open to the public on weekends? Will there be yard usage rules posted? How will tennis be made available?

***December 2007 - The playground has been completed. Parents and administration are exploring the feasibility of keeping the climbing area open after school hours and on weekends.***

- d. Little yard is often dirty and should be cleaned on a regular basis.
  - Can the schedule for Little Yard cleaning be posted?
- e. Mice
  - Hire an exterminator during the summer months?
  - Forbid any food or beverages in the school auditorium?
- f. Auditorium
  - Could the school community be updated in writing about progress in improving the school auditorium? It is not in a good state for an arts magnet school.
  - Air conditioning in the auditorium is out-dated and needs to be replaced. How can PTA and school staff work with school admin to push this along the usual lines faster?
- g. Vibe
  - Further increase the welcoming vibe in the school by asking principal or assistant principal to be regularly visible in the school lobby during morning drop-off to welcome, be available for casual conversation.
- h. Organize public display areas better
  - Increase the number of bulletin boards around the hallways so that signs are not taped to walls (requires overtime from custodial staff to remove tape—sometime with special chemicals depending on the surface)

## **COMMUNICATION**

*Anne Biddlecom, Deanna Logan, Pam Potischman*

This is a brief assessment of communications at P.S. 261 that highlights findings from two surveys of parents and teachers, grade-level group meetings with parents and individual interviews with school staff. Specific suggestions for improving communications at P.S. 261 are provided. The findings and suggestions are intended to be taken into account in the overall planning that school administration makes for the following calendar year.

### **DATA**

The information contained herein is a compilation of information received from:

- 163 respondents to the SLT school survey of parents;
- 28 teacher respondents to school-administered survey;
- Kindergarten parent meeting
- First grade parent meeting (7 participants)
- Second and fourth grade-combined parent meeting
- Special education parent meeting
- Individual interviews with fifth grade parents; custodial staff David Tatum and Jessie Sanchez; lunch aide Vicky Ferguson; parent coordinator Carmen Perez; school liaison with Arabic-speaking families Hibba Omar; principal Zipporah Mills; and Assistant Principal Lena Barbera.

**OVERALL SUMMARY:** Communication at P.S. 261 is relatively good; for example, 62% of parents surveyed said they strongly agree that they are adequately provided information about school matters (and another 28% said they somewhat agree). Multiple sources are used for getting information about the school: newsletters, backpack flyers, meetings, website and so on. However, there are several areas where there is need for improvement. Dissemination of information needs to be done in a more uniform and accessible way to the whole P.S. 261 community both in placement (e.g., consistently using the same range of formats) and content (i.e., translation). Perceptions about accessibility of staff and ability to provide timely feedback must be enhanced in order to maintain a quality school environment.

### **WRITTEN MATERIAL**

**Findings:** Dissemination of written information was an area that raised the most concern. Despite the many ways that information is disseminated (newsletter, backpacks notes, listserv, bulletin board and so on), there was a general consensus that information was not consistently and uniformly disseminated.

Special Education parents were concerned that they do not adequately receive information, and because many special education children are bussed to school, parents do not have the opportunity to see information posted around the school.

Concern was raised that language to communicate information was not sensitive to parents for whom English is a second language. In addition, concerns were raised with quality of written communication.

### **Recommendations:**

- The school could create a central and consistent location for information; e.g., a bulletin board where notices and a giant calendar are placed. A kindergarten parent (Jonathan Spears) volunteered to go around the school to assess how information is displayed and to think about new ways to make displaying information more attractive and efficient.
- Custodial staff wanted more bulletin boards for the school to prevent notices and advertisements being taped to walls.
- To improve reliable availability of written material to actually disseminate, the PTA might start an account at a local copy shop. Another suggestion was for the PTA to purchase a copier for the school (though the PTA currently pays for service to one of the school's photocopiers).
- To better facilitate concerns by special education parents, the Special Education Representative must be more pro-active than in the past in terms of starting a phone tree list to contact families and to more actively disseminate information and convey the concerns of families. The Special Ed "grade rep" would recruit class parents from each of the special-ed classes, such as the inclusion , CTT, and 8-1-1 classes. From there a phone tree could be developed to aid more effective outreach to special ed parents.
- Flyers might be handed out in the morning.
- Parental volunteer proofreaders might be useful for lengthy school communications—in the past year a couple parents have offered to do so (via e-mail is even more convenient).
- A central person (or team) could be appointed or elected by the PTA would be in charge of maintaining the bulletin boards, getting info to the website and newsletter.

### **Follow-up**

- PTA creates a communications plan and presents it to the school community via its new and improved communications network.

## **MONTHLY WORK SHOPS**

**Findings:** Monthly workshops were seen as an informative and effective method of communication. However, it appears that some parents may not understand what these are or the degree to which they actually take place. For example, in the parent survey 23% of respondents left this item blank (the highest percentage doing so for any item).

### **Recommendations:**

- Provide some of the workshops during evening hours—not just school hours—in order to give working parents ample opportunity to benefit from the information.

- Advance notice (at least one full week prior, preferably two) of such workshops is needed so that staff liaisons with Spanish-speaking and Arabic-speaking families (Carmen and Hibba) may be able to talk with families in person and translate written announcements.

#### **Follow-up**

- Parent Coordinator and parent reps explore relevant topics that parents would like to know more about.
- Special-ed representative is willing to sponsor parenting workshops open to the entire school

### **COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS**

**Findings:** A common view among parents was that there was inadequate in-person interaction with teachers to discuss areas of concern. Written feedback from teachers was inconsistent and sometimes deficient on student homework. Parents were particularly concerned when they learned their child was having academic problems that they first learned about at the parent-teacher conference.

There was also the view among some that there is a lack of receptiveness to parent involvement in the next year placement process of their children, and not understanding how students are placed in classes engenders negative feelings for some parents.

Finally, some reported a varying range of support by teachers for the existing Parents as Learning Partners day each month.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The school should develop at least a couple further opportunities for conferences or in-person discussions with teachers, especially with respect to increasing interim written feedback to parents regarding their children's progress, particularly when there are serious concerns.
- School admin should provide description of the process for placing students in classes and communicate it early, widely and via multiple mechanisms (newsletter, listserv, bulletin board) to parents.
- Another option suggested was to consider providing a mechanism for parental input into their children's placement.
- School administration should encourage all teachers to welcome and encourage parental involvement in the Parents as Learning Partners day.

### **RESPONSIVENESS OF ADMINISTRATION**

**Findings:** A very common view was that some concerns voiced never received any feedback. Communication does not mean much if there is no follow-through on the issues raised. An example is that many parents and teachers raised supervision during recess and lunch as a

concern. It should be noted that class parents raised this same concern and grade reps back in February 2007 and a series of specific steps were to be taken by school admin. It is not clear what has happened since then and communication back to the school community did not happen.

**Recommendation:**

- i. Create a method by which administration can post on a bulletin board or e-mail responses to questions that affect entire school community; specific issues raised in the data collected were:
  - o Policy for placement of children in classes (noted above);
  - o Lateness policy and consequences;
  - o Promotion guidelines for each grade; and
  - o Policy on recess when weather is inclement.

**VISIBILITY AND PRESENCE OF PRINCIPAL AS COMMUNICATION TOOL**

**Findings:** Some expressed the view that principal presence and visibility is not very strong. The presence of the principal was seen as communicating openness to discussion and accessibility. Visibility of the principal provides an overall feeling of confidence in an involved administration. The lack of a visible presence seemed to communicate an acquiescence and acceptance of a chaotic morning drop-off.

**Recommendations:**

- j. The principal could set specific days during the week when she is visible and present to the parent body during morning drop-off in the school lobby; in the cafeteria; or in the playground.
- k. Teachers requested monthly meetings all together as a community with school admin (rather than only grade-specific meetings)
- l. The principal herself suggested specific steps for improving regular communication via multiple written formats (see below).
  - o Regular monthly column in the PTA newsletter, directly addressing parents;
  - o Letters on each grade to both parents and students to share information about events and expectations;
  - o Letters to individuals in order to share insights, expectations and observed feedback through walkthroughs
- m. Monthly coffee hour with Zip and Lena, perhaps with coffee and treats provided by the PTA. This would enable parents to talk with Zip in a low-key environment and feel her presence (this is an idea Zip had proposed earlier for the parent coordinator to organize).

**Follow-up:**

- Zip responds to these concerns and proposes solutions to her perceived lack of visibility.

*December 2007 - Zip now writes and publishes a monthly newsletter for families.*

## **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION, TEACHERS, OTHER SCHOOL STAFF AND PTA**

**Findings:** Communication via grade level meetings, verbal communication and newsletters are inadequately providing information to all members of the faculty. Most notably, special education needs are not effectively communicated to all and therefore student support and placement is lacking. Custodial staff raised the issue that while there is a written procedure in place for responding to requests, they are frequently bombarded with verbal requests from teachers and school staff. This is not acceptable as they then have a difficult time managing the work and prioritizing the work if a lot of it is just verbal. The parent coordinator noted that she is not notified about various PTA events and meetings held in the building, and she must know ahead of time via e-mail or a written note.

### **Recommendations:**

- There should be more meetings with the entire staff on a monthly basis.
- An increased focus should be placed on discussions of at risk students with all the appropriate service providers.
- The principal and asst. principal must let all school staff know about the written protocol for work orders to custodial staff and what the work responsibilities are of custodial staff.
- PTA must systematically copy the parent coordinator about meetings and events.
- PTA must consistently inform its parent volunteers that announcements should be placed on bulletin boards (not taped to painted doors or marble walls) and REMOVED following the event or meeting by the PTA.
- PTA should provide a written list to custodial staff about who has access to the key to the PTA closet.
- E-mail addresses and contact information should be clearly posted on the school website and in the office.

## **FOLLOW-UP ON THE SLT SCHOOL REPORT**

**Findings:** Parents were enthusiastic to have the opportunity to share their ideas in the survey and in the class meetings. They were anxious to see the report and the responses to it. Teachers also want to have a more effective forum to express their concerns. It is critical that the results reported here are aggressively shared with families.

- The SLT must come up with a plan for distributing this report.
- There must be a clear mechanism to get and share responses to this report, both from the people specifically addressed, as well as by members of the community who would like to comment on the findings.
- There must be a mechanism in place to let the school community know how these concerns will be addressed (or not addressed as the case may be).
- If no action is to be taken at this time, there should be a clear explanation as to why that is. This may include a clarification of procedure, explanation of the school's limitation.

- The SLT will decide how we will pursue certain issues that were raised in this report.

## **CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

*Nancy Melissas, Alice Peck*

This is a brief and limited assessment of the curriculum at P.S. 261 that highlights findings from two surveys of parents and teachers, grade-level group meetings with parents, and individual interviews with school staff. The findings and suggestions are intended to be taken into account in the overall planning that school administration makes for the following calendar year.

It is important to note that because curriculum is DOE-mandated, the information is skewed more toward how things are taught, not what is taught.

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- 28 teacher respondents to school-administered survey
- kindergarten parent meeting
- first grade parent meeting (7 participants)
- second and fourth grade-combined parent meeting

### **OVERALL SUMMARY**

Parents and teachers were generally satisfied with the curriculum at PS 261. Homework and testing seemed to be the primary areas of focus, particularly for parents. Sustaining and enhancing our approach of “integrating the arts” was also a concern for many.

## **TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVE**

### **Findings**

Teachers interviewed felt that technology provided and resources that are available to students were some of the best things about the curriculum.

Teachers saw the arts such as dance, music, and visual art are an important part of our school’s educational offerings as well.

### **Recommendations**

- More professional development to support the technology that exists in the school including workshops about differentiating curriculum to meet the needs of all students
- Meetings with other teachers about student work in their classroom to better understand individual children and possible actions other teachers would take
- Language support for children who are ESL
- Clear expectations on assessing students
- Teachers felt they could enhance the strengths and correct the weaknesses for the school in general by looking at other schools with some working practices that are a concern.

- School meetings more for better communication.

## **PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE**

Almost 70% of parents felt teaching methods being employed were very helpful to their children's development.

Parents of younger children seemed more satisfied with the curriculum than the parents of older children who voiced concerns about preparation for and ability to keep up with their peers in middle school.

## **PS 261's EDUCATIONAL GOALS**

50% of parents strongly agreed that they understood the educational goals for their children.

### **Recommendations:**

- More meetings like the grade meetings held at the beginning and the end of each year.
- Utilize website to convey curriculum information.

**HOMEWORK** was generally an issue with many parents—especially the amount (too much and not enough), the level (too easy, too hard) and the lack of feedback.

**CLASS SIZE** was an issue with some parents.

### **Recommendation:**

- Accept fewer students into each grade level.

**TESTING** was an issue for parents—both concerns about inadequate preparation for tests and concerns that preparation for tests was over-emphasized and limited time for creative and less test-centered learning in the classroom.

### **Recommendations:**

- More communication between teachers/administration and parents about testing processes and expectations.
- A workshop with testing experts from outside the 261 community (psychologists, admissions officers, DOE) for parents.
- Utilize website to convey testing information and philosophy.

**ARTS FOCUS** in the curriculum—integrating the arts into “non arts” topics—e.g. using art in social studies, music in math, etc. was something parents didn't want to lose sight of.

### **Recommendations:**

- More long-term projects (like bridges, post office) that tie into curriculum, don't feel like busy work, and teach children to research subjects and budget their time as well as taking a holistic approach to learning.
- Examine how "specials" are distributed between grades so that no group feels that they're lacking balance between traditional academics and arts.

## **SCHOOL DISCIPLINE**

*Rose Beau, Ramona Fluker, Pam Potischman*

This is a brief assessment of discipline at P.S. 261 that highlights findings from two surveys of parents and teachers, grade-level group meetings with parents and individual interviews with school staff. Specific suggestions for improving communications at P.S. 261 are provided. The findings and suggestions are intended to be taken into account in the overall planning that school administration makes for the following calendar year.

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- first grade parent meeting (7 participants)
- second and fourth grade-combined parent meeting
- special education parent meeting
- individual interviews with fifth grade parents; lunch aide Vicky Ferguson; Assistant Principal Lena Barbera.

**OVERALL SUMMARY:** The biggest concern for parents and administration is discipline and supervision during recess. Parents feel that the aids at lunch do not discipline children appropriately or consistently. Parents were mixed about discipline in the classrooms. Some parents felt that discipline wasn't carried out effectively. Cited instances of teachers "yelling" and "grabbing" and "losing it."

There was concern about how staff manages ongoing behavior problems with particular students. Parents, teachers and administration said they would like to see a uniform approach toward discipline and conflict resolution in the classroom and during lunch and recess.

Several parents asked what had happened to the resolution program, RCCP.

### **LUNCH AND RECESS**

#### **Findings**

All parts of the PS 261 community have expressed that lunch and recess are not adequately supervised. Teachers no longer allowed to use their time for supervision during lunch, so school aides and some parent volunteers cover those duties. As well, the lack of playground equipment may have contributed to problems. Student conflicts and behavior problems are inconsistently addressed. One lunch aid reported that she felt lunchtime is understaffed.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Institute a behavior curriculum that the lunch supervisors can be trained in (see Conflict Resolution)

- Centralize the supervision of lunch aides and parent volunteers
- Implement effective ways to use parent volunteers during lunch
- Consider using the same person who runs the after-school to be in charge of lunch and recess, thus making that position a full-time job.
- Consider training upper graders to act as trained referees during lunch

**Follow-up**

- Create an advisory board with an SLT member, parents, lunch aides and guidance to monitor progress during lunch, including doing regular observations that will be recorded
- Report back to SLT in 3 months on progress

**CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

**Findings**

Conflict resolution previously had been a regular part of the PS 261 curriculum. This program needs ongoing maintenance. Parents, teachers and administration alike would like to reinstitute a conflict resolution and/or related behavior management program that is consistent throughout the grades.

**Recommendations:**

- Consider having SLT research conflict resolution programs and make recommend programs to the administration
- Explore who in the faculty, including special ed and guidance, who can contribute time and knowledge to this effort
- Provide training for parents to strengthen the home-school continuity

**Follow-up**

- Create a study group in SLT who will act as liaison between administration, staff and parents
- Set goals and time line for reporting research
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*December 2007 - The SLT has created a sub-committee composed of parents, teachers, specialists, and a school aid to research and implement a conflict resolution program.*