



# PASEsetter

ISSUE 11  
WINTER 1999

## INSIDE

**2** Ultimate Involvement

**Case in Point 3**

**4** PASE Updates

**In-Sites 5**

**7** Just for Youth

**Parent Involvement Survey Results 8**

**11** Funding Alert

**Off the Shelves 11**

**12** Bulletin Board

## School Reform & Community-based Organizations: What are the connections?

By Eric Zachary

SCHOOL REFORMERS AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS working to rebuild low-income neighborhoods are increasingly realizing that each needs the other to succeed. School reformers recognize that without pressure for improvement from the local community, political and school system establishments will too often allow schools in low-income neighborhoods to continue to fail. On the other side, advocates for the comprehensive rebuilding of poor urban neighborhoods realize that healthy communities need successful schools.

Schools and districts across the country are implementing a range of reform initiatives to improve student outcomes. In New York City, these include several promising reforms initiated by the NYC Board of Education, including the New Standards, Performance-Driven Budgeting, and the School Leadership Teams. However, they are unlikely to leverage significant system-wide improvement in student achievement without concurrent pressure from outside of the sys-

tem. The school system is too big, too bureaucratic and has too many entrenched political interests for these top-down reforms to successfully filter down to the many low-performing schools in the city's low-income neighborhoods to facilitate the kinds of instructional and cultural changes that are needed.

Who can mobilize power at the grassroots to complement the pressure from the top of the system? At the NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy, we believe that community-based organizations are potentially powerful actors in school improvement efforts. These organizations—community organizing groups, community development corporations, youth service agencies, and immigrant service and advocacy groups—are concerned about the quality of their neighborhood schools, possess meaningful relationships with their parent and resident constituencies, and have the staff and infrastructures necessary to support and sustain organizing.

Community-based organizations can be an important vehicle

for organizing parents and residents to both hold their schools accountable for implementing the necessary reforms that will result in improved student outcomes and help schools deliver quality education.



### STRATEGIES

There is no one way for community-based organizations to involve parents and residents in efforts to improve their local schools. The strategy that a CBO selects will depend a great deal on the organization's mission and resources, the performance of the school, and how collaborative or resistant the school is. Most CBO involvement in schools has focused on providing additional educational, recreational and social services to the children and their families. Typically, this approach has meant enrichment and after-school programs for youth and integrating a range of human services in the school, such as Beacon programs.

*continued on page 6*

## PASE FUNDERS

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120 BROADWAY  
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VOICE: 212 571-2664  
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# Ultimate Involvement: An Interview with Maria Jaya Vega, Co-director, Cyprus Hills Community School

EIGHT YEARS AGO, MARIA JAYA VEGA WAS A PARENT WITH A SON IN P.S. 7 IN CYPRUS HILLS, QUEENS. SHE RECEIVED WORD THAT HER SON WAS A "PROBLEMATIC CHILD" IN HIS KINDERGARTEN CLASS, AND, FEELING SHE HAD TO GET INVOLVED, MARIA BEGAN VOLUNTEERING IN HER SON'S CLASS. ONE DAY SHE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM THE SCHOOL NOTIFYING HER THAT HER CHILD WAS GOING TO BE EVALUATED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION. CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANT, SHE STOPPED IN AT A HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THEY REFERRED HER TO ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION. WHEN THERE WAS A HEARING, MARIA WAS PREPARED FOR IT, AND SUCCESSFULLY CHALLENGED THE PLACEMENT. SHE INSTEAD WAS ABLE TO NEGOTIATE SERVICES SUCH AS SPEECH THERAPY AND MORE ADVANCED WORK FOR HER SON WHO WAS BORED IN CLASS. AT THAT POINT SHE BECAME "FAMILIAR WITH THE SYSTEM," AND, ALONG WITH OTHER PARENTS, BEGAN ADVOCATING FOR IMPROVED CONDITIONS IN THE SCHOOL, WHICH WAS OVERCROWDED, AND ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF RE-ZONING. MARIA BECAME PART OF THE PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL OF P.S. 7, BUT, EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS PART OF THE PAC, SHE NOTICED THAT "WHEN DECISIONS WERE MADE THEY WERE MADE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS." DISSATISFIED WITH THE WAY THINGS WERE OPERATING, THE PARENTS COLLABORATED WITH CYPRUS HILLS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION TO RESPOND TO AN RFP TO CREATE A NEW VISIONS SCHOOL. THE CYPRUS HILLS COMMUNITY SCHOOL WAS CREATED WITH THIS FUNDING, AND MARIA BECAME ITS CO-DIRECTOR. THEY HAVE JUST STARTED AN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM RUN BY CYPRUS HILLS COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND CYPRUS HILLS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, AND PASE INTERVIEWED MARIA REGARDING HER IDEAS ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT, ESPECIALLY GIVEN HER SPECIAL POSITION AS BOTH PARENT ADVOCATE AND SCHOOL DIRECTOR.

**PASE:** *What do you think the role of parents should be in after school programs?*

**MJV:** I think there should be a way to get the parents involved, not only physically, like as a volunteer, but a way that parents can help to plan and develop the after school program. To assess whether it's working or not working. When we started our after school program, we involved parents through a survey. It was for them to identify what activities they would like to see at the program, what kinds of needs their child has, whether they have time to volunteer, those kinds of questions. This is a kind of parent participation.

**PASE:** *Do you find that there may be cultural issues between parents and schools or between parents and after school programs that make it difficult for parents to get involved, or do you find that it's a matter of the time element, that parents have busy schedules and can't find the time to get involved?*

**MJV:** Yes, there are cultural

issues, that parents feel that the education of children should be left to teachers and the school. That the role of the parent should be to feed the child, put him or her to bed, and provide shelter. But, the function of the parent is more than that. We are the child's first teacher, we don't realize that. And the barriers don't only come from the parent, they come from the people who are running the schools, who have an attitude that they are the professionals with a degree in education, and the parent's opinion is not valued. And principals sometimes feel that schools are their properties. But we've been seeing movement in the schools towards having parents as partners. It's going to take a long time, though, because we have a lot of people in the system who resist this.

**PASE:** *PASE recently did a survey of after school programs to ask them about parent involvement, and programs indicated that they have trouble engaging parents, that they provide offerings to par-*

*ents and the attendance is low. What advice would you give these programs?*

**MJV:** I believe that in order to engage somebody they have to feel ownership. Parents need to feel that they own the program. And they have to be engaged from the beginning. You can't bring parents in when the process is already ahead, you need to say to them, "We are having this problem, what's your idea?" Because if you don't bring the parents in, they won't get engaged. It's someone else's idea. If you ask them, they will express their needs. And then you have to evaluate the needs, and see what are the highest ones.

**PASE:** *It seems like it's the difference between designing programs for parents and creating relationships with parents. It's a different kind of approach...*

**MJV:** That's our approach, and we have a good response in our meetings, but our parents are also involved in the governance

*continued on page 11*

# Case in Point: Littig House Community Center Parents Committee

By Lynette Batts

LITTIIG HOUSE COMMUNITY CENTER is located in public housing in Port Washington on Northern Long Island. The housing development, where low-income, African American families reside, is a small pocket in the middle of a wealthy neighborhood. Critical issues affecting the residents in this area include those of racial, educational, and economic social justice.

In an effort to address the multitude of community and life issues facing the residents and the necessity to have more parent involvement in our organization, we instituted a Parents Committee in 1997. Our goal was to identify leaders and provide them with information so that they could become more active in the community. We also wanted the Committee to become peer educators, and to create an internal support network at Littig House.

We began recruiting parents through a community forum. This was a meeting convened for the general population of Port Washington. Littig House reported the results of an evaluation, and asked the audience for feedback on existing programs and identify the need for new ones. Our educational advocacy and housing advocacy work was high on the list of priorities. As a result of the forum, the Parents Committee was formed to address educational issues of their children.

When we began organizing the Committee, there initially was some resistance from parents who did not feel qualified to talk with various institutions and agencies on behalf of their children. In response to these con-

cerns, we brought in training, based on work by the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension. Staff of Littig House were also able to participate in training held by the Long Island Advocacy Center and Cornell Cooperative Extension on the topics of educational advocacy and community empowerment. They brought this training back to the organization to share with others. The parents were pleased with the training, telling staff that they were gaining knowledge on issues of critical interest.

The Parents Committee now meets twice a month to discuss program planning, and to prepare for community projects members have identified as critical issues. Special Education and the overplacement of African American boys in Special Education has been one of the most important issues parents have identified. They have been attending SEPTA (Special Education Parent and Teachers Association) and act as advocates for other parents at Special Education Hearings to challenge placements. The Committee has also established a partnership with Littig House Youth Council. The Youth Council serves as advisors to senior staff, helping them design programs. In addition, Council members assist as tutors in the after school program. The two groups meet every other month to participate in joint training or work on joint ventures.

The Committee began focusing on the topic "Parent Involvement" in 1998. This occurred because the parents at Littig House were relying on the Committee to advocate for them, without gaining any knowledge

or skills themselves. The Committee formed an Outreach Sub-Committee, and began to solicit parents, grandparents, and elders to become involved. The outreach was successful, and three new members now participate in the Parent Committee.

The biggest challenge the Committee encountered in their outreach efforts was finding parents and caretakers with enough time to be available for meetings and events. The Committee responded by electing members to serve as parent representatives who take on the responsibility of attending meetings and then report back to parents.

Finally, the Parent Committee has been successful in forming a volunteer base made up of parents and community members who tutor in the after school program and act as chaperones for our Youth Development programs. The Committee now plans to focus on early childhood education, and is fundraising to bring in the "Parent-Child Program," sponsored by the Port Washington Library. This program will be for caretakers and their toddlers, concentrating on child development. They are also working on a "computers in every home" project, and have already received donations from corporate and civic organizations. We thank our Parent Committee for their commitment and hard work, and look forward to a new year and continued collaborative relationship.

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*Lynette Batts is the Executive Director of Littig House Community Center in Port Washington, N.Y.*



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# PASEupdates



ABOVE: Presenters at the December General Meeting (r. to l.): Eddie Calderon Melendez, Rodney Fuller, Anne Laurence, Antonio Serrano and Monhallal Teloki.

RIGHT: Charisse Johnson from St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation/Williamsburg Beacon presenting at the December General Meeting.



## PASE in a Nutshell.

**A New York City association of youth practitioners, funders and technical assistance providers to youth programs. PASE's goals are to strengthen the identity & visibility of the after school profession, articulate concepts to guide programming, provide staff development, program exchange and networking opportunities, and advocate for funds and resources.**

## GENERAL MEETING.

PASE held its quarterly General Meeting at New York University on December 11, 1998. The theme for this meeting was "Literacy and After School Programs: Making the Connection." Lena Townsend, Director of Community Initiatives at the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College was the host, introducing the activities for the morning. She was followed by three after school programs demonstrating how they incorporate literacy in their programs. The programs included Amy Chan and staff of Immigrant Social Services, Rodney Fuller of Fresh Youth Initiatives, Eddie Calderon-Melendez and staff of St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation/Williamsburg Beacon, and Anne

Lawrence of the Literacy Assistance Center. The presentations were followed by small group discussions. The next general meeting will be on February 5th, 1999 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. The theme of the meeting will be "Parent Involvement."

## AFTER SCHOOL LITERATURE.

The pilot year of PASE's After-School Literature Project (ASL), has reached an exciting point where all sites have begun to implement the program, and some have trained staff to assist in the process. Children have been engaged in ASL activities, for example, at the Children's Aid Society, Taft Houses Boys & Girls Club participants drew their own Pysanky Eggs after reading *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco. Children at Boys Harbor used *Zinnia and Dot* by Lisa Campbell Ernst to settle a dispute they had amongst themselves. PASE is happy to welcome the Developmental Studies Center back to New York in February for a second round of training with the pilot year programs.

## PEER MENTORING

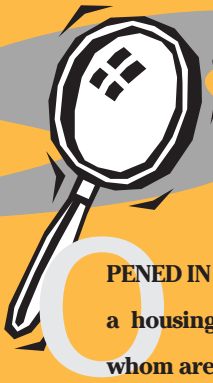
PASE's Peer Mentoring Program is moving along as mentors and mentees work to reach the goals articulated in their working plans. PASE is now conducting the Management Training Series, with workshops in different areas of focus. The Management Training Series helps participants align new or existing programs with the organization as a whole. The series is offered to organizations and individuals participating in The Robert Bowne Foundation's Re-Imagining After-School Programs Initiative, the PASE Peer Mentoring Program and the Fund for the City of New York Youth Development Institute's Networks Partnership Committee.

## THE AFTER SCHOOL CORPORATION (TASC)

This fall, PASE was busy working with coordinators and staff of the 25 TASC sites. Two Core Knowledge Training days were held for staff, at Central Park East Secondary School. Four hundred after-school staff attended a cross-section of workshops—including Conflict Resolution, Classroom Management, Literacy, Homework Help, Visual and Theater Arts. PASE continues to meet monthly with Site Coordinators. With the selection of 25 new sites, scheduled for start-up Feb. 1, 1999, PASE has begun a new round of training. Over a week in January, PASE coordinated an Institute for the new Site Coordinators. Core Knowledge Training for staff was held on two successive Saturdays in January at the Valley Beacon at Wadleigh Secondary School. Another round of Core Knowledge Training is to follow in March. PASE extends its thanks to all the dedicated and innovative professionals who have shared their wonderful services at these events.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

The 1999 Annual PASE conference will be held on May 6th and 7th. May 7th will be the plenary session followed by workshops, and will be held at Hostos Community College. The keynote speaker will be Robert Moses of the Algebra Project. Conference registration, when available, will be sent to the PASE mailing list. In addition, conference information and registration have been placed on the PASE website, PASEsetter.com. There will also be a symposium on Thursday, May 6th, which will consist of policy and research oriented discussions. Site to be announced.



# In-Sites:

## New Settlement Apartments/Parent Action Committee

OPENED IN 1990, NEW SETTLEMENT APARTMENTS (NSA) is a housing development of nearly 900 families, 30% of whom are formerly homeless. Composed of 14 renovated, previously abandoned buildings within an eight-square block area of the Mount Eden neighborhood of the Southwest Bronx, this economically-integrated and ethnically-diverse housing development is actively committed to neighborhood revitalization and community development. Its diverse mix of residents includes a very substantial core of working people who exemplify the potential for economic independence through education, training and employment. NSA's mission is not only to rebuild and maintain a sizeable portion of the housing stock in the neighborhood, but also to support the rebuilding of the social capital of the community.

The NSA Parent Action Committee (PAC) originated with a group of parents whose children attended the NSA After-School Program. These parents attended educational workshops sponsored by New Settlement Apartments and conducted by The New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy. After the parents learned about the Annual School Report, Parents' Rights and Responsibilities, and Title 1 funding, they formed the Parent Action Committee to take action and change their community's schools.

The parents in PAC felt their children were not receiving the education they deserved. The parents learned that more than 80% of the children at the local elementary school, C.E.S. 64, were not reading at grade level. They also learned that as parents in the public school system they should have a voice and have a right to hold the school and District 9 accountable. The parents asked New Settlement Apartments to support them in their efforts to improve the quality of their children's education.

The focus for the PAC's efforts was C.E.S. 64 because it was the worst performing elementary school in School District 9, was fifteenth (15th) from bottom in the entire city and was the school that many of the children from the neighborhood attended. With the philosophy "all children can learn," the parents wanted to

know why 80% of the children at C.E.S. 64 were not able to read at grade level. They researched the problem. They met with the principal of C.E.S. 64 and the Superintendent of District 9. They held a public forum asking other parents to relate their experiences; PAC's concerns were validated. They demonstrated at Community School District 9's public meetings and demanded that something be done.

C.E.S. 64 had introduced many district-wide program initiatives to help the children learn, but the implementation was ineffective. The Parent Action Committee visited other grammar schools that had been failing and were now successful. "Why?", they asked. They learned through these visits and other research the importance of the role of the principal. The parents decided there needed to be new leadership at C.E.S. 64; leadership with vision, commitment and skills to turn the school around.

The campaign for a change in leadership was difficult. A petition demanding new leadership was created and signed by over one thousand (1,000) community members. Demonstrations with media coverage exposed the persistent educational failure occurring at C.E.S. 64. Meetings were held with local elected officials, Community School Board members and the Bronx representative on The Board of Education. The PAC was determined and unrelenting. Finally, in the Spring of 1998 the principal of C.E.S. 64 stepped down.

The Parent Action Committee had succeeded in its first step. The second and current step in the campaign is insuring that a new principal is appointed who meets the needs of C.E.S. 64.

A core group of members has undergone training in the C-30 process (the principal selection process wherein the Board of Education mandates the involvement of parents in the selection of five candidates for recommendation to the District Superintendent). PAC sought the community's support to ensure that PAC members will serve on the selection committee in the C-30 process. And on Wednesday, November 18th six of the PAC members were selected to participate in the C-30 process!



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## School Reform & Community-based Organizations

*continued from page 1*

Increasingly, however, more community organizations are recognizing that additional services do not automatically lead to improvements in the quality of education that children receive during their six or seven hours inside the school. As a result, they are initiating independent parent and community organizing efforts to influence what happens inside the school during school hours. This usually involves some of the following:

### Organizing a Parent/Education Committee

In the past, parent associations functioned as the voice of the community in schools. In part because more women have entered the labor market, parent associations have been less able to play this role. Moreover, parent associations' all-volunteer nature, limited resources, and "insider" status have limited their capacity to initiate school improvement efforts that challenge existing school practices and outcomes.

Over a dozen community groups in NYC—including several PASE groups, like New Settlement Apartments, Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement House, and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation – have organized groups of parents and community residents to hold their local schools accountable for providing a quality education for all of the children in their neighborhood. Several of these community groups have initiated their organizing efforts by offering parent rights workshops to

the families of children enrolled in their after school programs. These parent groups have researched the practices and outcomes of their schools, identified a specific issue that they think needs improvement, and recruited other parents/residents to get involved. With their knowledge and determination, they have launched campaigns focused on convincing the school or district or Central Board to address the issue. In one case, the group played a major role in bringing new leadership to the school; in another, the group is focusing on persuading the Board to relieve severe overcrowding in their school.

### Participating in Citywide Coalitions

Many of the problems that parents face in their local schools are not particular to those schools; in neighborhoods across the city, parents are dealing with many of the same issues. Individual groups can't address them alone. They need to come together to influence system-wide policies.

A good example is the Community Campaign for Good Schools, a two-year old coalition of community-based organizations and citywide advocacy groups fighting for a stronger parent role in school decision-making. The group recently helped to persuade the Chancellor to initiate School Leadership Teams with a strong parent voice and genuine power. Specifically, the teams will have 50% parent membership, and will have responsibility for developing the school's comprehensive education plan and budget. The Campaign was also successful in fighting for community-based organizations to be members of their neighborhood school's team. PASE and several member organizations, including East

Harlem Tutorial Program, are involved in the Community Campaign.

### Supporting Candidates for Community School Board and School Leadership Teams

While the power of Community School Boards was reduced by the changes in the NYC school governance law enacted by the New York State Legislature in 1996, they retain some policy-making authority. At the local school level, the new School Leadership Team will have significant potential authority over instructional and budgetary matters. Running for the Community School Board and being a member of the School Leadership Team is neither simple nor easy; it is complicated and requires much time and effort.

Community-based organizations can provide much needed information and support to candidates who are committed to the parent group's vision for improving the community's schools.

### Creating a New Public School

This option takes on more possibility with the recently enacted charter school legislation in New York State. One hundred charters for new schools will be granted. Starting a new school provides a community-based organization with the opportunity to create an educational experience for the children in their neighborhood that is academically rigorous and parent "friendly." As part of its mission to serve the comprehensive needs of the community, the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation opened the Cypress Hills Community School in 1997. It is a dual language school that will eventually serve 400 neighborhood children. Interestingly, it may be the only public school in NYC that has a teacher and a parent as co-directors.



## DILEMMAS/ CHALLENGES

Once a community-based organization makes the decision to organize parents and residents to improve their local schools, what problems and challenges do they face? Based on our work at the Institute for Education and Social Policy, we have identified the following:

### A. Building a Parent Base

Community groups that are organizing to improve a school face a unique dilemma; parents already have an officially sanctioned organization that is supposed to represent their concerns in the school, namely the parent association. School officials will try to undermine the legitimacy of parent-led community organization efforts by refusing to meet with any group other than the parent association. Dilemmas arise over several questions, including, how does a community group build a parent/community base for school change? How does a community group avoid a competitive battle with the parent association? Does the CBO work with the parent association? If so, on what basis? Or does it work through the organization's existing community base, i.e., parents of the after-school program, and other community members?

### B. Relationship with the School

Connected to the issue of the community group's relationship to the parent association is the equally important question of its relationship with the school. A community group cannot change a school by itself, without a relationship with those individuals and structures that have decision-making authority over the school. The group must assess whether it can work collabora-

tively with school/district leadership or must work independently—an assessment that can change over time as the work progresses (this choice is obviously more complicated if the CBO operates an after school program inside a school). Often, the relationship is determined by the level of willingness of the school leadership to engage the group and their commitment to change school practice and outcomes. Dilemmas arise over the questions: Does the CBO collaborate with the school administration? If so, what is its role and how does it remain independent? Or does it adopt a more confrontational stance and work from the outside?

### C. Defining the "Target"

In large measure a group's choice of demand or goal shapes who the target will be. For example, a proposal to start a school will be directed to the district, while an effort to have children line up inside school during the winter will be addressed to the local school. Quite often, however, groups start by directing their concerns to the school administration and then proceed up the system hierarchy when their concerns are not adequately resolved. Community groups face an additional choice, one that is greatly affected by the size and capacity of its staff: does the group focus its organizing on one school, a cluster of schools, or an entire district?

### D. Issue/ Demand Focus

A community group faces the additional challenge of identifying an issue to organize around that makes sense given the conditions of its school. Groups must determine what needs to change and what they can propose that the school/district do

differently to improve student achievement. The issues and demands often change as the group's analysis deepens. Options, drawn from the current work of community groups, include:

- demanding greater accountability for student performance in particular areas, such as reading or special education;
- changing school leadership, such as the removal of an inadequate principal or superintendent or supporting new candidates for the community school board;
- advocating for a specific educational program or a whole school reform model, such as Reading Recovery or Success for All;
- focusing on "smaller" and more concrete issues, such as improving school facilities or school safety;
- developing a comprehensive proposal for school restructuring or for systemic city-wide reform;
- developing a proposal for starting its own school.

Politicians are increasingly saying that education is at the very top of their agenda. Ultimately, however, it is only organized communities that can ensure that American public education delivers on its historic promise to educate all our children. While there is no one strategy that will fit all communities, the role of community-based organizations is critical.

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*Eric Zachary is the Co-director of the Community Involvement Program at the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University.*

# Just for Youth

• **HIGH 5 TICKETS TO THE ARTS** is offering \$5 tickets for teenagers to attend some of the best of the City's cultural riches. Tickets are going on sale on Friday, January 29th, and any student in junior or senior high school can buy \$5 seats to more than 450 events listed in the High 5 Tickets to the Arts Spring '99 Catalog—Off-Broadway theater; ballet and contemporary dance; classical music, opera and jazz; cutting edge performance art and museum exhibition throughout the five boroughs. For more information and to receive the Spring '99 Catalog, call (212) 445-8587 or e-mail [info@high5tix.org](mailto:info@high5tix.org).



• **9th ANNUAL LATINO COLLEGE EXPO** will be held on Saturday, April 17, 1999 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at Pace University, One Pace Plaza (Across from City Hall in downtown Manhattan). At the Expo students can meet representatives from public and private colleges and universities, learn about the college admissions process, and find out about college scholarships. Admission is free. For more information call (212) 346-1323

## NEW FEEDING PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH IN AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

NYC Office of School Food Nutrition Services (OSFNS) will accept requests to provide free snacks to youngsters 13 - 18 years old who are enrolled in after school programs. Therefore, on their applications to OSFNS, new programs should include children through the age of 18 in their total count. Programs already feeding younger children through OSFNS should do the following:

*On agency letterhead, write to:* Beth MacDonald, OSFNS, 44-36 Vernon Blvd, LIC, N.Y. 11101

*and indicate the following in a letter:* 1) School district, 2) School number, 3) Number of youngsters between 13-18 for whom you are requesting additional snacks.

Children receiving snacks no longer need to be identified by income category, so income forms do not need to be collected from families. OSFNS only needs the total count of youngster receiving snacks. Programs must still take daily attendance and daily meal counts. None of the above applies to suppers served to children ages 12 and under. There is no change in procedure for these programs.

NOTE: The above applies only to those programs based in public schools. For those programs based in community based organizations, the NYS Department of Health will work with your organization on a case-by-case basis. Call 1-800-942-3858.

*Submitted by: Community Food Resource Center.*

# Parent Involvement in CBOs: Initial Responses to a Survey

THE MISSION OF COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS typically reflects an active interest in including parents in identifying and addressing priority needs of young people and families. This interest occurs because CBOs know that informed parents are the most compelling advocates for their children. Similarly, parents seek alliances and resources for providing safe and enriching environments for their children to flourish in—whether these environments are after school programs, schools, or other neighborhood institutions.

Yet, parents don't always know how to negotiate community institutions such as schools and youth organizations. Similarly, while these same neighborhood institutions seek the partnership of parents, they don't necessarily have the skills, knowledge and information to build relationships and create structures that support parent participation. Both CBOs and parents seek ways to involve one another in promoting the social and academic well being of children. However, both groups share a similar need: they often do not have the knowledge or skills to come together in mutually beneficial ways to accomplish this goal.

It is with an eye to creating a project that would address the above needs that PASE distributed a Parent Involvement Survey at the December 11th, 1998 General Meeting. Thirty-two surveys were completed and returned, and the following are

the initial findings. We hope to receive more completed surveys in the upcoming weeks (for a copy of the Parent Involvement Survey, see p. 9 of the PASEsetter) to add to our knowledge base and to inform new program development.

In response to the question, "What programming for parents have you been doing at your program?" 81% of the programs said that they offer workshops and training, 50% said they conduct phone outreach, 66% have parent meetings, 53% have one-to-one conferences, 50% have guest speakers, and 16% have overnight retreats. Nine programs out of the thirty-two who responded have a parent advisory committee.

In response to the question "Were parent events facilitated by parents, guest speakers or outside facilitators, or program staff?" 31% responded that parents facilitate, 50% use guest speakers, and 94% use program staff. On average, programs offer 26 events for parents a year, and, on average, 9 parents attend each event.

In response to the question, "What are the biggest problems or challenges you face when working with parents?" The most common responses from programs included:

- Getting parents to show up. Many parents are overwhelmed, have complex schedules or don't have time to participate;
- Some of the parents lack the motivation or commitment to become involved;

- Language barriers and communication issues;
- Time designated for staff to work with parents;
- Lack of space and resources such as child care;
- Parents not feeling welcome;
- Parents needing to understand the relationship between the after school program and the day school.

In response to the question, "If PASE were to sponsor activities on parent involvement, what would you like to see offered that would support your work with parents?" Responses included:

- Debriefing on public school system;
- Designing/ writing materials that parents will read;
- Ways to motivate parents to volunteer their time with programs and to support the work of after school programs;
- Ways to design and implement programs and workshops for parents;
- How to establish a parent advisory committee or parent network;
- Recruitment and outreach strategies;
- Identifying parent needs and developing tactics to address them;
- How to involve school personnel;
- Providing resources for the parents: adult basic education, jobs.

# PARENT INFORMATION/INVOLVEMENT SURVEY

*needs survey*

NAME

AGENCY

TITLE

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE NUMBER

1. What programming for parents have you been doing at your agency? (check off all that apply)

workshops/training

phone outreach

advisory panel

meetings

one-to-one conferences

guest speakers

overnight retreats

Other (Please describe below)

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2. Were these events or activities facilitated by

parents

guest speakers/outside facilitators

program staff

Other (please describe)

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3. Were the events or activities

hands-on/experiential

lectures

Other (please describe)

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4. How many events or activities for parents (approx.) do you offer a year? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many parents (approx.) attend on the average? \_\_\_\_\_ smallest # \_\_\_\_\_ largest #

# needs survey

6. What would you like to see happening at your organization in the way of programs for parents? (Workshops, etc.) Be as specific as possible.

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7. Do you have a Parent Advisory Committee? y n

8. If yes, how often do they meet?

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9. How many members are there?

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10. Do you have a Parent Phone Tree? y n

11. If yes, how often do you use it?

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12. What are the biggest problems or challenges you face when working with parents?

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13. If PASE were to sponsor trainings on "How to create and implement Parent Involvement Programs," what would you like to see offered that would support your work with parents?

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**Please return to: PASE, 120 Broadway, Suite 3048, New York, N.Y. 10271, Fax: 212 571-2676**



# Off the Shelves

## BOOKS ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Consistent with the theme of this PASEsetter on parent involvement, the books selected for *Off the Shelves* reflect a variety of perspectives on the topic. Parent involvement can have several different meanings, and programs for and by parents can be constructed using a range of formats. The following books can inform this process, and provide direction as youth programs address this important issue.

**FRUCHTER, N., GALLETTA, A., AND WHITE, J. L. (1992). *New directions in parent involvement*. Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development.**



A policy study that provides some important information about parent involvement programs and practices. It begins with a historical survey of parent

involvement programs in the U.S. from 1945 to 1985, and then ties in current parent involvement efforts, especially those related to school reform. The book also profiles several programs, including Parents as Teachers and The Kenan Family Literacy Project in addition to programs for school-age children.

**SHOCKLEY, B., MICHALOVE, B., AND ALLEN, J. (1995). *Engaging families. Connecting home and school literacy communities*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Press.**

This book describes how classroom teachers created a connection between home and school and collaborated with parents in the teaching/learning process. The authors discuss what they learned about creating an extended literacy community, and provide examples of their work including a complete home-school journal. While originating in the classroom, the ideas can easily be adapted to the after school context.



**WILSON, G. B. (1998). *ACTIVITIES FOR PARENT GROUPS. Structured developmental activities for parent groups*. Atlanta: Humanics, Inc.**

This is a practical book for parent involvement coordinators or for parents themselves who want to learn how to run groups. Chapters in the book cover assessment, group work, conflict resolution, problem solving and program development. The book includes reproducible forms in addition to a list of resources.



**WINTERS, W. G. (1993). *AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS AND URBAN SCHOOLS. The power of participation*. New York: Macmillan.**

The book describes a research study conducted by Howard University, which, rather than observe the relationship between parent involvement and children's performance, examined the relationship between parent involvement and parents. The study particularly focused on African American mothers, and the development of "personal power" as a result of their participation. The study documented that many mothers who became involved in their children's school themselves, some becoming professionals in the roles of teachers, social workers, or nurses.



## Funding/Legislative Alert!

**CUTS TO YOUTH PROGRAMS** are proposed by Mayor Giuliani by nearly \$20 million for FY 2000. Specifically, Giuliani proposes to cut 19.73 million from DYCD, 8.5 from YDDP. If these cuts are implemented, hundreds of programs currently funded through DYCD would lose their funding. Because the Mayor is not expected to release the Executive Budget for FY 2000 until mid-April, there is a window of opportunity for Youth Programs to let the Mayor know the impact such deep cuts would have on young people throughout the City. PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TODAY TO WRITE OR CALL THE MAYOR. Mayor Giuliani, Office of the Mayor, City Hall, New York, NY 10007, 212 788-3000, fax: 212 791-9628. Be sure to send copies to City Council members Peter Vallone (Council Speaker), Herb Berman (Finance Committee Chair), and Ken Fisher (Youth Services Chair), whose addresses are: NYC Council, City Hall, New York, NY 10007.

**CBO/PARENT ALERT!!!** By next October every school in New York City must have a School Leadership Team (SLT), and parents must make up 50% of the membership. The SLT is the decision-making group in a school that decides what should be done to improve the school and how the school's resources should be spent, making decisions in areas such as curriculum, instructional programs, staff development and parent involvement. SLTs are being formed now. To find out more about SLTs, and the role of CBOs in them, call Community Campaign for Good Schools, NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy, (212) 998-5877, ask for Kavitha Mediratta.

## Ultimate Involvement continued from page 2

of the school, we have a governance council, like a school leadership team, 51% are parents, and we meet twice a month. And they come.

*PASE: That's to run the school?*

MJV: To run the school. The decisions are made at that meeting. I think it's also the agenda of the meetings that draw in parents. Are we going to discuss real issues or are we going to discuss irrelevant issues? And we can't fool the parents. If they're going to get involved, they want to make their time valuable. They're not going to go to the meetings if they're not related to their child's education. So when we put the agenda together, they have to be issues that really affect them.

*PASE: Does the same kind of planning and governance go on for the after school program?*

MJV: It was during the governance council meeting that we decided to do a survey about the after school program, to find out what the parents wanted. It helped us when we designed the program. You need this kind of communication if you want to have a real partnership.

# Bulletin Board

• **Doing Art Together: Inspirations from Within** a first-of-its kind exhibition of art works by New York City public school children, will be held from January 11 to March 9, 1999 in Aaron Davis Hall, at 135th Street and Convent Ave. More than 100 works by school children from the City's five boroughs will be on display, including paintings, masks, puppets, portraits, and story collages.

• **Workshop: Doing Art Together** is providing hands-on art workshops for parents, children, and teachers on the following dates: Tuesday, February

16, Thursday, February 18, Saturday, February 20, and Saturday, March 6. Workshop materials are provided, and will be held in the Aaron Davis Hall Lobby at 135th Street and Convent Avenue. Workshops will be held at 10 a.m. – 11 a.m., 11:30 – 12:30, and 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. Free. Limited to 30 children and adults, pre-registration is recommended. For information and to register call (212) 650-5969.

• **Workshop: Teaching for Social Justice**, a workshop presented by Bill Ayers, sponsored by Educators for Social Responsibility and

Teachers & Writers Collaborative. Wednesday, February 24th, 6 p.m. - 8 p.m., at Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 5 Union Square West, 7th Floor (between 14th and 15th Sts.). Free. For information, please call (212) 870-3318 ext. 8.

• **Workshop: Discovering Science through the Arts: Integrating Science and Arts into After-School Programs** Facilitated by Mary Grace Berberian, After-School Program Director, Hartley House. Explore creative ways to challenge children to learn more about science.

Participants will be introduced to a series of activities designed for after-school and other youth education programs in which literacy and the arts are woven through the exercises to motivate learning and growth. Wednesday, March 31st, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Literacy Assistance Center, 84 William Street, 14th Fl. Free. RSVP: Mary Olmsted (212) 803-3332.

• **PASE General Meeting, Friday, March 19, 9:00 a.m - 1:00 p.m.** The topic will be *Reverse the Cuts: The Importance of Stable and Strong CBOs*. Site to be announced.



**PASE**  
120 BROADWAY  
SUITE 3048  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10271