

TESTIMONY

New York City Council Hearing

New York City Council
Committee on Education

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The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators

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**Oversight Hearing on DOE's Division of Family and Community Engagement
NYC Council Education Committee, Dec. 15, 2011**

Good afternoon Chairman Jackson and members of the New York City Council's Committee on Education. My name is Ernest Logan, and I am President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). On behalf of CSA's nearly 13,000 members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify on family and community engagement.

CSA applauds Chancellor Walcott for declaring that "improving family engagement" is one of his top priorities. The Chancellor has acknowledged that the DOE needs to "do a better job bringing families into the educational process," and CSA looks forward to working alongside Jesse Mojica, the recently appointed Executive Director for Family and Community Engagement, in an elevated cabinet level position, to address many of the concerns of parents. Several surveys have indicated that indeed parents do not feel they have a voice at the table to discuss policy issues that are relevant to their child's education and we encourage the Chancellor to seize the moment and engage parents in a meaningful and productive exchange that aims at shaping the future of family engagement rather than lamenting the past.

The DOE publication, "Raising the Bar for Students & Schools: Our Commitment to Action," states that "As we challenge ourselves to *Raise the Bar*, we ask parents and families to commit to the effort...parents and families are critical to student success. Involved parents and families, combined with quality teaching and learning in the classroom, will boost college and career readiness for our students." The publication lists numerous commitments that the DOE was to undertake in an effort to improve both students and schools; however, while there were several noteworthy commitments, the DOE has fallen short in a number of areas that pertain to family and community engagement. We therefore hope the DOE will use its publication to evaluate both its successes and shortcomings in an effort to revive some of the commitments therein.

Among the commitments listed was to open 50 new schools per year to give more students and families access to high quality options. While providing more choices to meet the needs of our students is laudable, we must point out that at the same time DOE is opening new schools in record numbers, it is closing others, often without having provided the necessary support services and resources to enable them to succeed. There are several schools that have been neglected and are suffering from that neglect. When such schools are closed, that is an admission of failure by the DOE itself. When schools are closed, fairly or unfairly, the impact on students and families' self-esteem and future educational prospects can be tragic. The DOE needs to ensure that it is working with parents, school administrators, and community leaders to mend our failing schools before closing them down as a deceptively easy way out of a bad situation.

Another commitment identified in the publication is titled "Inform & Involve Families as Essential Partners." CSA firmly agrees with the DOE's statement that "Informed and involved parents and families lead to better results for students and more successful schools." As a

means of improvement, this section of the publication highlights parent guides, parent-teacher conferences, school selection, and capturing family feedback as its focus areas.

While the family guides are extremely helpful to parents because they are grade specific (from pre-kindergarten to grade 12) and available in the various languages of our diverse communities, and while several schools have mastered the art of collaborating with parents for teacher conferences, the school selection process and the ability to capture family feedback have yet to be improved upon.

In order to help families identify and advocate for the right school for their child, it is critical to inform parents early about the school choices available, and the selection process, prior to the terminal grade. Parents need to be provided with meaningful workshops that provide information and give parents an opportunity to ask questions regarding the selection and enrollment process. Had the DOE created a city-wide “parent academy” as intended perhaps this would be an appropriate forum in which to discuss admissions and enrollment policies within an accessible and transparent exchange. To that point, we would like to urge the City Council to hold a hearing specifically on school enrollment to address the many challenges and concerns families face when entering the DOE system.

One of the shortcomings of DOE has been the ability to “capture family feedback.” To quote DOE’s own words, “To be true partners in improving our schools, we need to be accountable to families and have an ongoing, systematic way of hearing concerns.” We would take it a step further and say that it’s insufficient to simply hear parents’ concerns; rather it is necessary to be responsive to those concerns by our demonstrated actions and policies to address the issues.

There are also some simple and very basic steps that DOE can take immediately to help parents and families. For example, it is important to re-define the role of parent coordinators at each school to work closely with the Principal to ensure that parents are being engaged and welcomed by each school community. Additionally, making regular updates to the DOE website could improve family and community engagement. As recently as today, we noticed “misinformation” on the site because some Superintendents, who are no longer in service, are still listed on the site. Procedures should be in place to regularly update the site to ensure that it is accurate, easy to navigate, and informative.

While what we say is important, the true measure of our success will be in judging whether our actions towards parents and families are in sync with our commitments. To that end, CSA continues to be prepared to work collaboratively with the Chancellor and Jesse Mojica to ensure that parents and families are indeed true partners at the table to positively impact policies that ultimately can ensure the success of our students.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ernest Logan
President

CSA is Local 1 of the American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), AFL-CIO, located in Washington, DC. CSA is also affiliated with the NYS Federation of School Administrators (NYSFSA), which is, in turn, a member of the NYS School Administrators Consortium (NYSSAC). CSA represents nearly 6,100 Principals, Assistant Principals, Supervisors and Education Administrators who work in the NYC public schools, 400 Directors and Assistant Directors who work in city-subsidized Day Care Centers, and 11,000 retired school supervisors and their spouses and domestic partners.