

Youth, Education, & Libraries Committee
Manhattan Community Board 9
3/14/18

Committee members present: Ken Miles, Alec Barrett, Miriam Aristy-Farer, Menlee Mansue

Presentation

Superintendent Manny Ramirez, Community District 6

No school system is going to run without problems, and it's important to see the problems. Superintendent Ramirez spoke a little about the schools in District 6 that fall under CB9 and the principals of each school.

Superintendent Ramirez opened the floor up for questions, and attendees introduced themselves.

District has a deficit of teachers certified in dual-language education. There has been a vacuum of people working in those programs, preventing us from meeting all ESL students' needs.

Also a need for special education early childhood teachers. UPK last year, and 3K to be implemented by 2020, district is identifying students at those ages who need special ed services, and doesn't have enough teachers certified in those areas. Met with City College to create a 15-credit program for teachers who are early childhood certified or those who are special education certified to earn credits to get certified in the other area. Looking into financial assistance for those teachers, and hoping to open this program in September.

Another challenge is the infrastructure of the buildings. Many buildings built without playgrounds or gyms, creating a challenge for meeting the socio-emotional needs of the students.

Same predicament as everyone else: schools not receiving 100% of fair student funding – some as low as 87%. Makes the difference between services not provided, teachers not hired, because they don't have the funding.

Question about PS153 having access to their "big playground": big playground has been deemed unsafe – the adjoining Hamilton Heights school does use it because the SLT met and lobbied the principal and decided they were willing to accept the risk. CM Levine has allocated funding to repair the big playground for September. The "small playground" is for little kids and also doesn't have much room for many students, and Kindergarten has priority access to that playground. Teachers who are not PE teachers are concerned about supervising kids at recess because they are not PE teachers, creating a liability issue.

Miriam Aristy-Farer suggested that the school has a dance studio, auditorium, and gym which could be used for PE. It is a scheduling problem, not a facilities problem.

Not enough that a teacher is willing to take the students outside to play: the principal has to evaluate the risk and make the decision. This would be outside of a teacher's contractual

obligations. And in a school with 800 students, arranging a schedule for use of a particular playground is an issue.

A parent from PS153 explained that currently students are shown movies in the cafeteria during recess, or are as of recently allowed to play board games. She expressed frustration that parents need to be involved in the process in the first place; the principal should have made plans at the start of the year.

Miriam provided context: when her child was at that school, the same issues existed: the PTA purchased board games to provide an alternative to watching TV during recess. Miriam suggested something as simple as freeze dance or walking around the block.

Superintendent Ramirez has worked with Superintendent Rux on planning for UPK and 3K expansion.

When a charter school wants to open in the district, they meet with the Superintendent but he has no control over their process – they go through channels outside the District office.

This year the mayor's office informed schools that they would not be receiving an increase in FSF. Some of it has to do with the lack of funding from the state that should be guaranteed under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity suit. The public should be getting engaged to lobby state elected officials to provide adequate funding. The state owes the city over \$2B in educational funding.

Regarding academic goals: schools have made progress every year on state ELA, Math, and Science tests. The main goal is to assess students without the need for the state test. Some day we can imagine there won't be high stakes testing. We are developing assessment portfolios for every subject and every grade level. When a parent goes to school, they can ask to see their child's assessment portfolio in literacy, mathematics, science, etc. without having to wait for state test results.

A pilot group of 10 elementary/middle school principals is working to move these to digital portfolios in SY18-19 which will make it even easier for parents to access and track their children's progress. The district invited principals who have made the greatest progress in terms of implementing a culture around assessment portfolios in the classrooms. Starting in sixth grade (when different subjects are taught by different teachers), every academic subject has to have a portfolio to show students' growth or lack thereof.

A music educator in attendance shared his view that assessing arts or music is not more difficult than academic assessment, since students are exposed to music in school or out of school through culture every day.

Ken Miles spoke about the NSF grant that local institutions received to invest in next generation internet connectivity. He sits on the advisory committee for the project, and Columbia is in a position to teach schools about the implications for their research and the new technology. They want to understand what technology needs schools have and how the universities can help them bridge their connectivity gap.

Miriam pointed out that Comptroller Stringer did an audit.

Superintendent Ramirez said that the district did as well. There is limited bandwidth capacity and limited access to WiFi because Manhattan uses a device that limits the capacity of WiFi in schools. During school hours, there is high traffic and the capacity when it was built did not anticipate smartboards, tablets, and other new hardware. The state will put over \$600M into schools' internet access over five years. Bandwidth can be reallocated among schools but it is zero sum.

Some schools are already embracing STEM programming: PS8 did well in a citywide robotics competition recently.