

Brooklyn Prospect Charter School PTSO

Meeting, April 18, 6:30-8 p.m.

Present: 21 parents, including executive officers: Tilda Doscher, Carla Lino, co-presidents; Kristian Larsen, co-vice president; Adam Schechter, treasurer, Julie Triedman, alternate reporting secretary.

For the school: Dan Rubenstein, executive director, LaNolia Ufodu, principal, Penny Marzulli, devel. & communications, Kelly Vaughan, science teacher.

**Upcoming events:**

Carla spoke about the plans for the **Spring Gala**, the major fundraiser by the PTSO of the school year. The date is **June 3**, and the venue is Union Temple. Ruth Willner is the chairperson. The gala will include a cabaret, a silent auction, and a basket raffle from each advisory. The board of directors and new incoming parents will also be invited to attend.

**Admissions:** As to the new families, Dan said 113 acceptance letters were mailed and a total of 150 students (accepted and waitlisted) and their families have been invited to attend an accepted families event on **Thursday, April 22**. The first deadline for those families to accept or decline the offer of a seat is April 26.

Nat Moss, a member of the Nominating Committee, spoke about the **PTSO officer nomination and election process**. The committee emailed notices to current parents with an **April 22 deadline** for expressing interest in a position for the 2010-11 school year. Nominations will be made at the next month's PTSO meeting (May). Elections will be in the June meeting. Hopefully a lot of new families will come to the final two meetings and core group of active involved parents can be informally roped into the PTSO efforts over the summer.

There was discussion about how **best to include new families in the nominating and election process**. It was determined that if all the co-officers positions are not filled, whatever offices are still open will be nominated and elected from the new families in the September PTSO meeting.

On **Thursday, April 29**, at 2:30 pm, there will be **Gang Awareness** presentation by the local police precinct. Nina Flores and Mike Willner, of the health and safety committee, set it up. Students were sent home a form on Friday in which parents may "opt out" if they prefer that their child not attend the workshop but instead attend regular PE class.

On **Tuesday, May 4**, the PTSO will host a **Teacher Appreciation** week event. The teachers will be invited from 7:30-8:15am to enjoy breakfast provided by parents. Carla said we'd like parents to come by and show their support for our teachers, also if you can, have children make a card.

**School important dates:**

State tests will be April 26-28 for ELA and May 5-6 for Math.

**CURRENT PARENT TOURS** will be held for parents of current sixth grade students who desire to **see the kids and teachers in action**. Sign up and come to the school at 8:30 a.m. after dropoff on **April 22, 29, May 4, and May 10**.

Also, Ms. Ufodu asked parents to fill in the DOE schools survey if you haven't and mail it. The goal is 100 % participation and we are not there yet. The participation rate makes up a part of our school "grade" so it's important! If you sent the form in with your child, the school DIDN'T get it. Ask the office manager for another one if you did that.

**Presentation by Jeff Maclin**

This year, the looming state budget hole means that there will be \$1,000 less per pupil in state aid. The school will have \$200,000 less funding next year, Dan Rubenstein confirmed. But there's a lot parents and students can do to help change the situation. Dan invited Maclin, vice president, school advocacy, at the [NY City Charter School Center](#), to come talk about that group's efforts and to invite more parent involvement.

Maclin described the group's mission, to help incubate and support new charter schools (like ours). The group also does leadership training, outreach, and advocacy, as well as refining and leveraging "best practices" for charter schools. The NYC schools Chancellor sits on the board.

But in NY state, charter schools are such a politicized issue, with strong opposition by teachers' unions, so much so that funding for charters has been frozen at current levels for the past two years. Even legislators who privately support what charter schools are doing have to contend with pretty strong union opposition at the polls. "We exist in an environment in which charter schools are seen as the problem," Maclin said "Advocacy is one way to debunk the myths."

To get more political support for charters like ours, the center created a vehicle for a parent voice, [CPAN](#)(Charter Parent Advocacy Network) because parents are the single most effective tool to persuade legislators to support our schools, to correct misrepresentations made by the teachers' union, and to get legislators behind lifting the cap on charter schools statewide. At this time, NY State did not get selected for the first two "Race to the Top" federal education subsidies that the Obama Administration is offering. But with a possible \$1.4 billion hole in the state education budget, lawmakers are now probably a lot more receptive to offering support for charter schools, because now states are getting in line for the second round of Race to the Top federal grants; the deadline for the application for Round Two is June 1 and we are hoping NY is a contender for the \$700 million that would be made available to state schools if New York wins. The federal money would benefit all public schools, not just charter schools. Meanwhile, with our group's help, state Sen. Eric Adams and Marty Golden are sponsoring a bill to help put NY in a good position to win that money.

Things we can do: There is a hearing called April 22 by State Sen. Bill Perkins (Harlem) on charter school oversight from 9-5. Maclin's group is holding a rally. It's at 250 Broadway in Manhattan. Perkin's premise is that charter schools are not properly regulated, which is not true.

Jeff handed out a flyer so parents at BPCS can be part of the online charter school parents community that the center is promoting. Ask Penny Marzulli ([pmarzulli@brooklynprospect.org](mailto:pmarzulli@brooklynprospect.org)) or go to the Center's website, (see link above) to sign up to be in the online parent advocacy group. Also there will be some kind of district-wide meeting with state Sen. Velmanette Montgomery, to be announced, that parents will be invited to attend.

Also, Dan Rubenstein invited any parents who want to be part of the school's new advocacy group to come to a meeting at the school **Thursday, April 29** -- notice will be sent. Students can come too. This is part of a related group's efforts, [Education Reform Now](#).

"When schools have parents who are knowledgeable and willing to engage politicians, we can have some success," Maclin said. "We are asking parents to do what they can, and we'd like to support you in doing that."

***Presentation by Kelly Vaughan, the school's science teacher:***

Ms. Vaughan described the curriculum to date. The class started with the concepts of 'force' and 'motion' and was very project-focused. Students began in the fall to learn to do measurements, to write a lab report, and to learn teamwork skills. The themes evolved from energy to heat to weather (currently.) Next up is climate change, and a water test experiment of the Gowanus Canal.

There's been a bit of a shift towards more quizzes and more reading lately and a bit fewer projects. She's trying to introduce good study skills as part of the process. One of the things she's been doing is allowing kids to make an index card to bring in to tests. The actual creation of the study card--distilling the material--is a great way to study. By the time they've made it, they often don't really need it during the tests. Making flash cards, review sheets, index cards 'tricks kids into secretly studying.'

Things you can do to encourage your child in science at home:

--Take opportunities to measure things, particularly helpful to do it in metric units. Notice units in the real world. It can be as simple as cooking with your child. Use a unit whenever you use a number, and make them do the same.

--Practice writing skills. While Mr. Cetrulo has been teaching the "claim--evidence" construction of essay writing, Ms. Vaughan is doing the same kind of construction in science writing/lab reports. Parents can look to see that your child is stating a claim, and then following it with the evidence, using numerical/measurement examples. Push them to go for some kind of statement and ask them to justify that statement.

--Support their science reading. It can be very challenging to read scientific material, particularly for kids below grade reading level. There are great websites that can help: [Scholastic StudyJams](#) (free) and [BrainPop](#) (not free). The sites use videos to reinforce concepts.

Also, push the kids to actually DO THE READING. Reading is not a scavenger hunt! They are being asked to underline and mark up the text to show they're actually doing the reading, not just looking at the questions and searching the text for the correct "answer."

--If your child asks a science-related question, ask them a question: 'How could you find out?' 'What do you think will happen?' or 'Maybe we can take it apart!'

Grades are made up of: 30 % quizzes, 30% projects, 20 % homework, 20% participation. Most of the time homework is posted weekly in Ms Vaughan's blog, [brooklynprospect.org/blog](#). Or email Ms. Vaughan and she will send you homework assignment. Last, she is offering lunchtime extra help and more "do overs" for longer tests.

## **Q&A**

Q: Any news on new school building?

Dan Rubenstein: Not yet, but soon.

Q: Demographics of newly accepted students?

Dan: Some 500 were in the lottery, compared to 300 last year. As last year there were a higher concentration of applicants from certain schools. From one school, 50 percent of fifth graders entered the BP lottery. There will probably be bigger chunks from those schools. We won't know racial or ethnic makeup until students are fully enrolled. There are likely to be few acceptances from out-of-district families because of the large number in the lottery pool in district this year.

We are hiring 9 new teachers next year. Mandarin will be offered. Half the students said they preferred or would be willing to take Mandarin.

Q: When will we be certified for IB Middle Years program?

Dan: Probably by 10th grade. Will get back to parents on that at another meeting.

Q: Summer school to be offered?

LaNolia: Yes. Letters will go out next week to families whose children are in danger of failing and who may be required to attend mandatory summer school. The dates are July 13-Aug. 12, the site is at the school, and new teachers will be hired to teach the summer school program.

Respectfully submitted,  
Julie Triedman, alternate reporting secretary