

persistent educational failure

*The Crisis in School District 9
and a Community Roadmap for
Mayor Bill de Blasio*



A Report by
The New Settlement Parent Action Committee
December 2013

about the authors



THE NEW SETTLEMENT PARENT ACTION COMMITTEE

The New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC) is a multicultural group of concerned parents, guardians, and community members dedicated to improving the quality of education for all children in New York City, with an emphasis on District 9 in the Bronx. We organize, empower and educate parents and guardians to defend their rights in the New York City public school system and hold public school officials, elected officials and government agencies accountable for the quality of education our children receive. A founding organization of the groundbreaking Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 (CC9) and the Coalition for Educational Justice, PAC also collaborates with citywide coalitions to make real, lasting changes to our public school system. In 2001, PAC was awarded the Union Square Social Justice Award.

NEW SETTLEMENT APARTMENTS

New Settlement Apartments (NSA) is a non-profit organization located in the southwest Bronx with 23 years of demonstrated commitment to housing, community building and youth development. NSA houses over 1000 families, 30% of whom are formerly homeless, in 16 fully renovated, previously abandoned buildings and one newly constructed building. NSA's mission is not only to rebuild and maintain a significant portion of the neighborhood's housing stock, but to provide educational and community service to area residents and to organize for the continued improvement of our community. In September 2012, the New Settlement Community Campus opened. It includes a community center with an indoor swimming pool and, in partnership with the NYC Department of Education, a brand new pre-K-5 grade and 6-12 grade school.

executive summary

As a new administration prepares to enter City Hall for the first time in 12 years, Community School District 9 in the South Bronx is in crisis. Outgoing Mayor Bloomberg's education policies have failed to close the achievement gap between District 9 and the City's most affluent neighborhoods. In 2013, nine out of ten students in District 9 failed the English Language Arts exam, half of elementary and middle schools in the District are on state improvement lists, and only 10% of students graduated college ready.

Parent leaders of the New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC) strongly believe that

the status quo cannot continue. The incoming administration of Mayor Bill de Blasio has an historic opportunity to recommit the City to the mission of providing every child with an excellent neighborhood school. The new administration should use its mandate to create a new vision for education reform that's rooted in communities and builds on the successful model of neighborhood-school collaboration in District 9. We propose that Mayor de Blasio implement four strategies to transform District 9 schools.

FOUR STRATEGIES

1 Create a new community-driven process to hold schools accountable. We believe that school and district improvement should be a democratic process, and that parents must be full partners in their children's education. We call on de Blasio's administration to commit to a new inclusive process that will give all stakeholders a meaningful role in creating a new District Action Plan.

2 Build the capacity of local schools to meet the challenge of higher standards. Low-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods need additional support above and beyond the Children's First Networks to improve teaching, reduce teacher turnover, and involve families. We recommend that the Department of Education (DOE) establish a comprehensive system for mentoring new teachers, and placing effective, experienced educators at the schools that need them most.

3 Harness community resources to close the opportunity gap. To close the achievement gap between District 9 and high-performing districts, the DOE must first close the opportunity gap to ensure that every child receives the supports they need to be successful in school and has access to a rich array of educational opportunities arts programming, extended day, and social services. The DOE should partner with community organizations to transform struggling schools into full-service community schools, and replicate the middle school extended day initiative in the lowest performing schools in District 9. We also call on the Mayor to restore dedicated funding for arts education.

4 Prioritize parent involvement to improve literacy for English Language Learners Parents of English Language Learners (ELLs) want their children to succeed, but ELLs are currently one of the lowest performing groups of students in District 9. The DOE should commit additional resources to supporting ELLs and building partnerships with their families by working with community organizations to provide cultural competency training for school staff, creating a parent mentor and paraprofessional training program, and allocating funding for Pre-K programs in priority schools with high-ELL populations.

introduction

On January 1, Bill de Blasio will take the reins of City government and assume responsibility for educating 1.1 million young people. The Mayor will also take on the task of renewing the City's commitment to a quality education for all. As the new administration maps out its education agenda, it should look no further than Community School District 9 in the South Bronx to understand the depth of the crisis and chart a new way forward.

When Mayor Michael Bloomberg entered City Hall in 2002, he declared that demography would no longer define students' destinies. Promising dramatic change, his administration enacted sweeping reforms under the banner of "Children First," giving principals unprecedented autonomy, instituting a high-stakes testing regime and a policy of school closure, and replacing district bureaucracies with a loose "network" of support structures. Parents in low-performing districts were promised that strict accountability and school choice would give their children the education they deserved.

But as Mayor Bloomberg's administration draws to a close, the children of District 9 continue to be left behind. A close analysis of measures of student achievement demonstrates that the District is in crisis, and that in the last 12 years, the achievement gap between District 9 and the rest of the City has not narrowed significantly. In 2002, there was an achievement gap of 17% between District 9 students and the rest of the City on the New York State English Language Exam. In 2013, an achievement gap of 15% remains.¹

District 9 powerfully illustrates the urgency of the task that faces the next administration. In 2013, only 11% of students in grades three through eight passed the ELA exam, while just 13% were proficient in math.² District 9 has

more English Language Learners (ELLs) than any other District in the Bronx, and the lowest percentage of ELLs reading at grade level. Just a fraction of students growing up in District 9 graduate high school ready for college and careers: seven of the 21 neighborhoods with the lowest college readiness rates in New York City are located in our District.³

The incoming de Blasio administration has an historic opportunity to recommit the Department of Education to the mission of ensuring that every neighborhood has an excellent school. The new administration should use its mandate to create a new vision for education reform that's rooted in communities and builds on the successful model of neighborhood-school collaboration in District 9. We propose that Mayor de Blasio implement four strategies to transform District 9 schools: create a new community-driven process to hold schools accountable, build the capacity of local schools to meet the challenge of higher standards, harness community resources to close the opportunity gap between children in District 9 and the City's most affluent neighborhoods, and prioritize parent involvement to improve literacy for English Language Learners.

This report relies heavily on the New York State and New York City Departments of Education's own data to make the case for change. We present a snapshot of the District 9's results with the aim of alerting our readers to the scope and severity of the problem and the urgent need for a new approach. Nothing in this report is intended to detract from the good work being done every day by talented, dedicated educators and administrators in District 9. Rather, by calling attention to the educational crisis in District 9, we hope to inspire everyone who believes in the right to a quality education to join us- the parents, students and community members of District 9- in working toward a better future for our District.

portrait of district 9

District 9 is illustrative of the obstacles that students face, and the need for more comprehensive supports to close the achievement gap. District 9's student demographics parallel those of other struggling districts Citywide. Black and Latino children make up 96% of the student population. Eighty six percent of students are eligible for free lunch, 19% higher than the Citywide total.⁴ One in four students is an English Language Learner, compared with 15% of students across the City, and 16% are in Special Education.⁵

District 9 is located in the poorest urban Congressional district in the entire country. The District's 35,000 students live in the neighborhoods of Mount Eden, East Concourse, West Concourse, Highbridge, Mount Hope, East Tremont, Claremont, and Morris Heights. The median family income in these seven neighborhoods ranges between \$23,624 in Claremont and \$32,482 in Mount Eden, well below the Citywide median income of \$56,437.⁶ The unemployment rate is among the highest in the city and decent, affordable housing is hard to find. Forty three percent of households spend over half their income on rent, but 45.9% of the housing stock is rated fair to poor quality.⁷ Families frequently share overcrowded apartments or sublet a room to make ends meet. Ten percent of District 9 students live in temporary housing, the second-highest rate of all school districts citywide.⁸

Young people growing up in District 9 also face an opportunity gap compared with their New York City peers. Many youth and their parents point to a lack of afterschool programs, arts activities, and other enrichment in schools. Out of 28 elementary schools in District 9 that responded to the City's annual arts education survey, eleven have no full time certified art teachers on staff. Nine out of these eleven schools do not even have part-time certified art teachers.⁹



parent voices

ANA MARIA GARCIA
*mother of three former
District 9 students*

"I have been a District 9 parent for more than 15 years. All of my children have studied in District 9. Ten years ago there were problems, but not like the problems we have now. Although schools were struggling, some things were better: we had art, after school programs, and sports programs where the children really were learning and improving. But when Bloomberg entered office, all of the cuts took away the help we were receiving and really needed. Today, we as parents hope that the new Mayor- Mr. de Blasio- will re-establish these programs that really engaged our children and helped them feel good in school."

In place of art teachers and guidance counselors, schools are flooded with school safety agents. The neighborhoods that comprise District 9 have some of the highest rates of police stops in the City. The Morris and Taft Educational Campuses, the largest high school campuses in our District, have metal detectors, as do IS 313 and IS 339, two large, co-located middle schools that are among the only metal detector middle schools in the City. In the 2011-2012 school year, the Bronx had more school-based arrests and summonses than any other borough. Despite significant reductions in the 2012-2013 school year, rates of arrest and suspension remain high, and court summonses for incidents in Bronx schools represented 51.4% of all summonses Citywide.¹⁰ The prevalence of these discipline practices is a major obstacle to positive student outcomes: students who are removed from school due to suspension or arrest are then more likely to drop out.



Additionally, there are myriad barriers to parent involvement in schools. Not all schools prioritize community engagement, or make an effort to create a welcoming environment. Many parents report a lack of communication with school staff, poor or indifferent service by school administrators, and limited interpretation services for non-English speaking parents. Even when schools are open to parents, families frequently lack the resources needed to fully participate. Working parents with inflexible schedules are not able to participate in school meetings and activities, take time off to chaperone field trips, or volunteer during the school day. Additionally, it is more difficult for parents with limited formal education to effectively tutor and support their students with homework, and very few schools offer training or services to parents who express an interest in working with their children.

Meeting all these needs is complicated, and would require a significant investment of human and financial resources. But District 9 does not receive the additional or targeted funding support necessary. As a result, schools struggle to meet the challenges of a high-need student population. It is possible of course to create high-performing schools in low-income communities of color, and there are schools Citywide and even in District 9 that prove that students can beat the odds. While parents, students and school staff all have a role to play, the responsibility to build the supportive systems necessary to create strong schools District-wide rests with the city and state governments. In the last 12 years, Mayor Bloomberg and the New York State Education Department (NYSED) failed to fulfill their responsibility to this community and missed an opportunity for authentic education reform.

background: district 9 in the era of bloomberg

Michael Bloomberg's election in 2001 ushered in an era of Mayoral control of the NYC education system. Bloomberg inherited a highly decentralized system with a staggering student achievement gap. In order to address these issues he appointed Joel Klein as New York City School Chancellor in 2002; the pair subsequently implemented a reform agenda that included increased test-based accountability systems, widespread school closures, and expanded charter schools. Since 2002, the Department of Education (DOE) has closed over 150 schools Citywide, a controversial and contentious policy. Advocates of school closure argued that phasing-out schools and opening new options in their place would create better choices for families. Opponents pointed to the fact that schools slated for closure had on average a greater percentage of low-income, minority and ELL students in their populations than NYC schools as a whole, and that new schools frequently did not serve the same population as the schools they replaced. Critics also cited the detrimental effects of closure on students that remain in the school through the phase-out. In addition to closing schools, the DOE co-located low performing schools with charter schools or new district schools.

Bloomberg's administration also dramatically restructured local Community School Districts, instituting a policy of "empowerment schools" alongside new accountability standards. Historically, each school District was led by a Superintendent and governed by a local school board. Each Superintendent directed an extensive staff that provided instructional and managerial support to schools in the District. The local school boards were eliminated in 2002 with the passage of Mayoral control. Beginning in the

2007-2008 school year, principal autonomy was expanded to all schools Citywide, giving school leaders discretion over budget, curriculum and staffing decisions. The District support structure was eliminated and replaced first by regional support organizations and later by Networks. The Networks are not supervisory: principals select their own Network, which is staffed by a team of coaches. This new structure largely ignored geography. While each School District retains a Superintendent, a Family District Advocate, and a Community Education Council, the Networks do not serve schools located in a similar geographical area. By the 2012-2013 school year, the DOE no longer even created District Improvement Plans as required by New York's No Child Left Behind Waiver, opting instead to create one Citywide plan for all schools on state improvement lists.

This restructuring reflects the Bloomberg administration's distinct philosophy of parent and family engagement. The old Community School District (CSD) Structure was created in response to a community-driven push for decentralization and local control in the late 1960s. In a 2010 paper for the New York City Reform Retrospective Paper, a team of five academic experts argued that Bloomberg viewed the community school boards as flawed in both "concept and practice."¹¹ While it is certainly true that some community school boards- including District 9's- were corrupt and ineffective, his administration concluded that parent engagement should be defined not as collective participation in policy making but rather as individual child-centered collaboration. The DOE focused their efforts on encouraging parents to support their children at home and teachers and administrators at school,



instead of engaging parents as equal partners in the creation of policy. School choice, access to alternative educational options, represented the only alternative for parents concerned with the quality of their children’s education. As a result, parents and communities lost access to the decision-making process at a moment when the City embarked on its controversial reform agenda.

How did these policies impact District 9 schools? Eight schools in District 9 have been or are in the process of phase out, with mixed results. Some of the new schools that have opened since 2002 do represent quality alternatives for families, reflected in their long wait lists for admission.

But a glance at the accountability statuses¹ of District 9 schools shows that closure is not a silver bullet. Since William H. Taft high school was closed in 2006, eight new schools have opened in its place. Today, two of these schools are already in phase-out, two are on the Priority list, and one is classified as a Focus school. One school is academically selective and is performing well, and the other two are too new to be evaluated. The two District elementary schools opened to replace P.S. 90 are now Focus schools. Overall, 12 of 30 District 9 Schools on the Priority and Focus list were opened by the Bloomberg administration.

¹ Under New York State’s No Child Left Behind Waiver, struggling schools are categorized on the basis of their students’ academic progress, as measured by their scores on New York State’s English Language Arts and Math exams. The NYS Department of Education (NYS DOE) defines Priority schools as the bottom 5% of Title I schools that failed to make yearly progress or consistently graduate less than 60% of their students. Focus schools are the lowest performing schools located in “Focus Districts,” defined as Districts with one or more priority schools. In 2013-2014, the NYS DOE implemented a new category for struggling schools- the Local Assistance Plan (LAP). In line with the requirements of No Child Left Behind, LAP schools have failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress for a subgroup of their students for three years or have a significant gap between their “nongroup” and “subgroup” students. Subgroups include English Language Learners, Special Education students, African-American or Latino students, etc.

low performance

Ultimately, Bloomberg’s reforms not only failed to improve overall performance in District 9, they had the effect of compounding persistent educational failure. After years of reform, District 9 is still in crisis.

- In 2012, only 28% were proficient in English Language Arts (ELA), and 42% of District 9 students passed the math exam.¹²
- The same year, District 9 had the highest percentage of English Language Learners (ELLs) of any district in the Bronx, and the lowest percentage of ELLs reading at grade level. Only 8% of third- through eighth-grade English Language Learners could read at grade level, below the disgraceful Bronx average of 9% and far below the citywide average of 12%.¹³
- In the spring of 2013, New York State English and Math exams aligned with Federal Common Core Standards for the first time, resulting in a dramatic decline in test scores and the erasure of gains in math proficiency. As a result, only 11% of students in grades three through eight passed the ELA exam, while just 13% were proficient in math. Fifty-five percent of third- through eighth-grade students in District 9 scored at Level 1, meaning they are not even “Approaching Proficiency” in the subject. District 9 scores were significantly lower than Citywide scores: 26% of New York City students passed the ELA exam, and 30% passed the Math exam.¹⁴

A careful analysis of 4th grade test scores, an important indicator of academic success, suggests that while scores rose and fell as standards shifted, student outcomes remained static.

- In 2002, when Bloomberg entered office, 30% of 4th graders in District 9 were performing at or above grade level on the ELA exam. Students subsequently made gains, but when the exam was recalibrated in 2010 to more accurately reflect academic preparedness, the exam showed that only 31% of 4th graders were meeting state standards: a 1% increase after eight years of reform.¹⁵
- In 2013, only 10% of District 9 4th graders passed the ELA exam. Shockingly, 54.3% of 4th graders scored a Level 1, meaning that over half of 4th graders in District 9 are well below grade level in ELA. Citywide, 27% of 4th graders passed the ELA exam: a 17 point gap with District 9.¹⁶



parent voices

MAGATTE NDIAYE
mother of three District 9 students

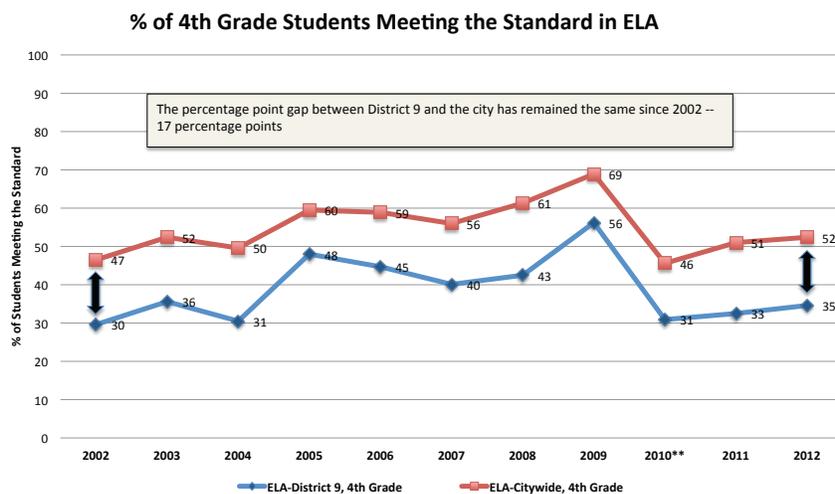
“I am from Senegal in West Africa. I attended college in French for three years, but not all African women had the same opportunity. Many African women who come here speak different languages and do not know how to read and write. There are many families from West Africa here in District 9, and schools need to understand these immigrant parents. Our community needs more help so parents can work with their children at home, and parents need to learn English and other skills so they can do homework and understand what’s happening at school. That’s why I think Bill de Blasio should create a parent mentoring training here in District 9 because I want my children to be successful like everyone else in New York.”

the achievement gap persists

Even more disturbing than the current low test scores in the district is the lack of progress over time. Between 2002 and 2012, there was no progress in closing the achievement gap between District 9 and the City’s most affluent neighborhoods, whether in ELA or Math, at the elementary or middle school levels.

- In 2002, the gap between the percentage of students meeting the state standards in ELA for District 9 and the city as a whole for both 4th and 8th grade was 17 points. Ten years later, the achievement gaps remained at 17 points.¹⁷
- Similarly, between 2002 and 2012 the gap for 8th grade math scores held steady at 14 percentage points. For the 4th grade math standards, the gap actually increased from 14 points to 19 points.
- Even when student test scores were at their peak in 2009, the gap between District 9 and the rest of the City on the ELA exam remained at 13 percentage points for the 4th grade and 18 percentage points for the 8th grade.

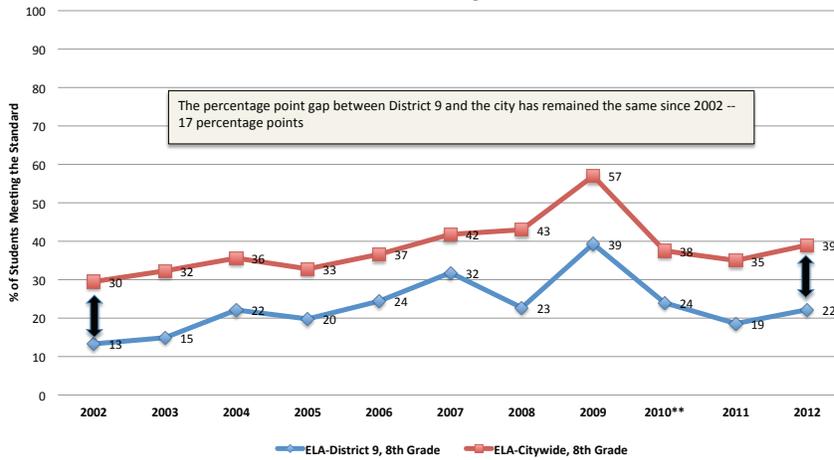
- When the introduction of the Common Core standards in 2013 caused test scores to fall Citywide, the gap between all District 9 students between the 3rd and 8th grades and the rest of the city narrowed to 15 points in ELA, but increased to 17 points overall in math.
- After so many promises and so little change, District 9 still ranks at the bottom of Community School Districts in New York City and New York State. In 2004-2005, when Bloomberg’s reforms had just commenced, District 9 was the second lowest performing district on the ELA exams in the City, slightly edging out District 7, its immediate neighbor to the south. In 2013, District 9 hovers slightly above District 7 (9% pass rate on the ELA exams) and District 12 (10% pass rate) as the third lowest performing district Citywide. Meanwhile, District 26 in Queens and District 2 in Manhattan- covering some of the City’s most affluent neighborhoods- remained the two highest performing districts, just as they were when Bloomberg entered office in 2002.¹⁸



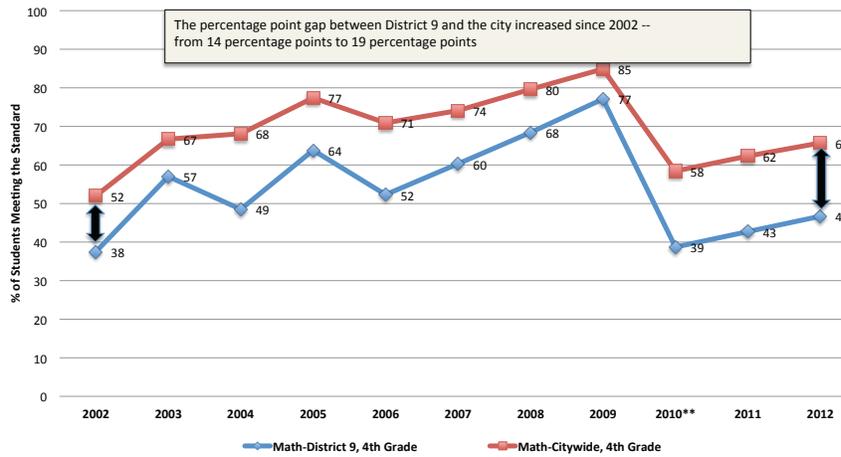
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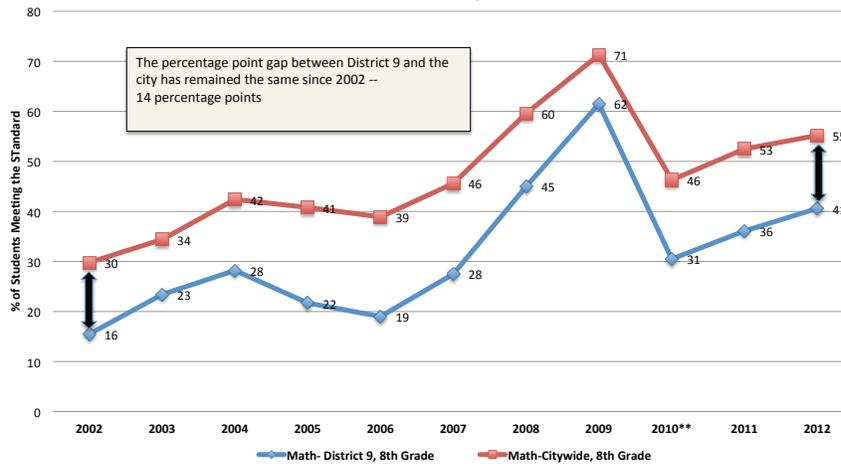
% of 8th Grade Students Meeting the Standard in ELA



% of 4th Grade Students Meeting the Standard in Math



% of 8th Grade Students Meeting the Standard in Math

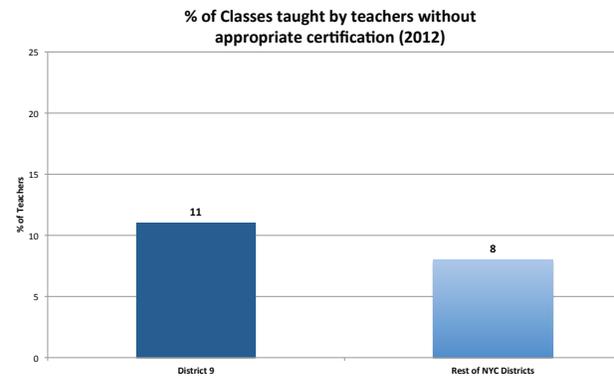
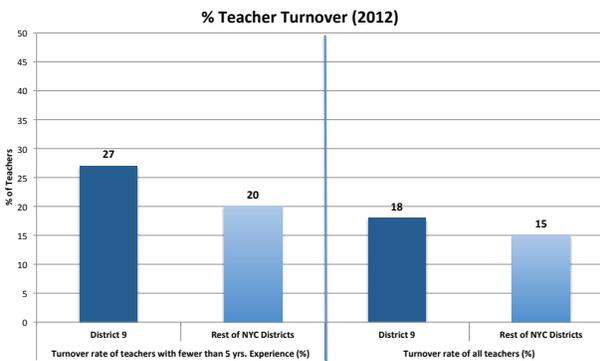
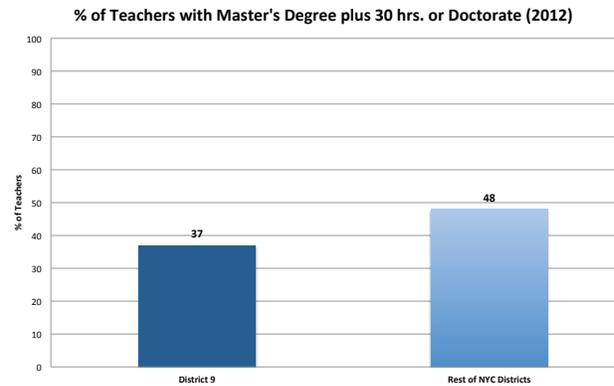
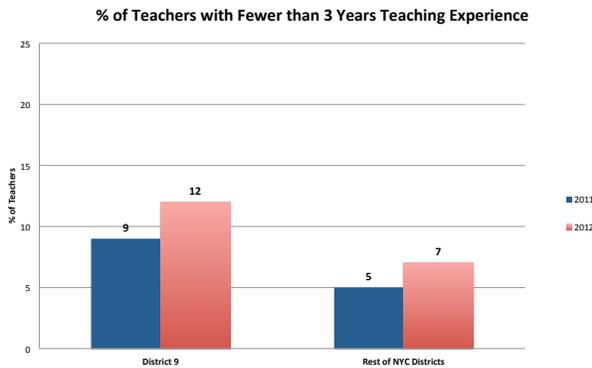


Sources: NYC DOE, Results of the State and City CTB-Mathematics Tests; NYC DOE, New York City Results on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) & Mathematics Tests Grades 3-8
Note: Tests were recalibrated in 2010

no change in teacher quality

Although the DOE identified teacher quality as a top priority, District 9 students still attend schools with a less qualified teaching pool than the city as a whole. Given that District 9 faces greater challenges with fewer resources than the rest of the city, one would hope that the DOE would assign a more qualified teaching staff to work there. Yet compared to the rest of New York City, District 9 has a higher rate of teachers teaching outside their area of certification, more classes being taught by teachers without appropriate certification, and core classes that are not taught by highly qualified teachers.¹⁹

District 9 has proportionally fewer teachers with more than three years of experience, and proportionally fewer teachers who have earned advanced degrees. Teacher turnover rates are higher in District 9, and much higher among teachers with less than five years of experience. While teacher turnover rates were not reported until 2006-2007, the overall turnover rate has only decreased slightly – from 21% to 18%– and the turnover rate for teachers with less than five years experience has held steady: in 2006-2007 the rate was 28%, in 2011-2012 it was 27%.²⁰



Source: NYSED School Report Cards, 2012.

Note: Averages for the rest of NYC districts were weighted by number of teachers

limited access to high-quality neighborhood schools

District 9 also belies the Mayor’s claim that school closure and choice have improved access to high-quality schools in struggling districts. As explained above, the New York State Education Department identifies schools as Priority, Focus, or Local Assistance Plan based on their graduation rates or low percentage of students passing the state exams. As of 2013, 24 middle and elementary schools in District 9 fall into one of these categories, out of a total of 49 schools.²¹ That means NYSED believes one out of two elementary and middle schools in District 9 is not providing students with an adequate education. At the high school level, 8 out of 18 high schools evaluated were on the list, though one of the schools listed as “in good standing” is actually in the final stage of being phased out. District 9 has 12 Priority Schools, more than any other New York City School District.

Where is the sense of urgency around providing a quality education for the students in these struggling schools? While State and Federal accountability systems have been adjusted repeatedly, many Priority and Focus schools have been on school improvement lists for over ten years. In 2002, the State classified five District 9 schools as “Schools Under Registration Review” (SURR),²² while the Federal Department of Education identified 16 District 9 Schools as low-performing.¹ In 2013, the NYS DOE still categorizes two thirds of these schools as Priority or Focus schools. Two of the remaining seven schools have since been closed, and one is currently in the phase-out process.

1 Under No Child Left Behind, the Federal Department of Education placed schools on a timeline for improvement. After two years of “School Improvement,” schools were moved to “corrective action.” If the students still did not improve, the school entered an additional two years of “restructuring.”



parent voices

ESPERANZA VAZQUEZ
mother of two District 9 students

“My child qualified for a scholarship for a high school in Manhattan... But even though he was lucky, he arrived at a disadvantage. He was an honors student at MS 22, but when he entered high school he felt frustrated because he couldn’t keep up with other children since students from Catholic schools were performing at a higher level. He was almost two years behind. He had to take remedial classes to get up to level. He would arrive home very late, and would stay up even later studying to catch up. As a mother this hurt me because... I want a fair shot and opportunities for all children in District 9, and for my children to be prepared for college and careers.”

No school as powerfully illustrates persistent educational failure in District 9 as P.S. 64, PAC’s local elementary school. The school was labeled as low performing by New York State in 2001 and remained on the list in 2013. The number of ELLs and students receiving free and reduced price lunch at the school has only increased over time, and low test scores have continued.²³ In 2013, only 1% of 3rd graders at the school passed the ELA exam.²⁴ As the Mayor leaves office, the school is beginning three difficult years of phase-out. It seems that schools like PS 64 and the rest of the Priority schools in District 9 should have been priorities for Bloomberg’s administration. However, Mayor Bloomberg has failed to make improvements to a system that has consistently underserved its students for over a decade.

DISTRICT 9 SCHOOL STATUS

SCHOOL NAME	2002-2003 ACCOUNTABILITY STATUS	2013-2014 ACCOUNTABILITY STATUS
P.S. 2	Corrective Action	Good Standing (Closing)
P.S. 4	SURR	Good Standing
P.S. 11	School Improvement Year 2	Focus
P.S. 22	School Improvement Year 2	Priority
P.S. 28	School Improvement Year 1	Good Standing
P.S. 42	Corrective Action	Focus
P.S. 53	Corrective Action	Focus
P.S. 55	SURR	Focus
P.S. 58	School Improvement Year 2	Focus
P.S. 64	SURR	Priority (Closing)
P.S. 70	Corrective Action	Focus
P.S. 73	Corrective Action	Local Assistance Plan
P.S. 90	Corrective Action	Closed
P.S. 109	School Improvement Year 2	Good Standing
J.H.S. 117	SURR	Priority
P.S. 132	School Improvement Year 2	Focus
J.H.S. 145	Corrective Action	Focus
I.S. 166	Corrective Action	Closed
I.S. 229	SURR	Good Standing
P.S. 230	School Improvement Year 2	Priority (Closing)
I.S. 303	School Improvement Year 2	Focus

the end result: students unprepared for college and careers

Without access to high-quality instruction and strong local schools, District 9 students leave school unprepared for college. One of the Bloomberg administration's most celebrated achievements has been increasing the graduation rate Citywide by opening hundreds of small high schools. Indeed, a few small schools opened in District 9 in the last thirteen years- including the High School of Violin and Dance and the Bronx Center for Math and Science- have a strong track record of graduating students in four years with good scores on the Regents exams.²⁵ The administration has also trumpeted their streamlining of the high school selection process to give more students in low-income neighborhoods access to better schools.

But the creation of a few good schools has not been enough to significantly change the end game for District 9 students. While students who live in District 9 now have the opportunity to attend high school across the City, few of them graduate high school prepared to succeed in college. In 2011, the DOE created a new measure of college readiness, defined by the following measures: the percentage of students who graduate with a Regents diploma; earn a 75 or higher on the English Regents or score 480 or higher on the Critical Reading SAT; and earn an 80 or higher on one Math Regents, and complete higher-level math coursework or score a 480 or higher on the Math SAT. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform analyzed students' college readiness scores by zip code, and discovered that major educational disparities still exist between students in the City's most affluent

neighborhoods and students in neighborhoods that are predominantly Black and Latino, particularly in the Bronx. In fact, 18 of the 21 neighborhoods with the lowest college readiness rates are in the Bronx, and seven of those neighborhoods are in District 9.²⁶

- In the neighborhoods of Claremont, Woodstock, and Morrisania, only 10% of students graduate college ready.²⁷
- In Mount Eden, Mount Hope and East Concourse, 11% of students graduate college ready.²⁸
- In East Tremont, only 12% graduate college ready, while in Highbridge 13% of students graduate college ready.²⁹
- In contrast, 79% of students in Tribeca (District 2) graduate college ready, and 74% of students in Douglaston & Little Neck (District 26) graduate college ready.³⁰

If students graduate unprepared for college, they are unlikely to enroll in a four-year program, and even less likely to finish. In an economy where a college degree is all but necessary, students who do not graduate from college face limited prospects and long odds of success. After 13 years, demography is still destiny in District 9.

where do we go from here?

After a decade of “Children First” reforms, the students of the South Bronx are still at the back of the line. But the election of a new mayor represents a real opportunity for change for District 9 children and their families. Improving struggling schools both in the Bronx and City-wide will not be easy, but is necessary work to close the achievement gap and recommit to the principle of equity in public schools. We call on the de Blasio administration to begin working right here in District 9. Not only are District 9 schools in urgent need of support, but a long history of parent organizing and community engagement in District 9 schools offers a model of how the next administration could move forward with parents as full partners.

The story of District 9 is not only one of crisis: it’s also a tale of community collaboration. District 9 is home to well-respected community-based organizations that have a long history of collective action for grassroots school reform. In 2000, the New Settlement Parent Action Committee joined with the Highbridge Community Life Center, South Bronx ACORN, the Citizens Advice Bureau (now Bronxworks), and the Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council to form the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools (CC9). CC9 developed a set of recommendations to create a stable, high-skilled teaching force, recruit effective principals, and develop effective family and community partnerships. When the Department of Education transitioned to a regional network structure, CC9 formed a cluster of 10 District 9 schools and brought District staff, the UFT, and parents together to develop a plan to reduce teacher turnover and improve the quality of instruction. The result was the Lead Teacher Program, a groundbreaking collaboration that created the position of a “Lead Teacher” in each of the CC9 cluster schools. The Lead Teacher provided

professional development and coaching to other teachers. Parents were involved in the design of the program, the hiring of the Lead Teachers and ongoing monitoring and implementation through a Coordinating Committee. Parents also worked with staff at each of the CC9 schools to plan community programming. For example, at P.S. 64 parents organized neighborhood tours for teachers, multicultural potlucks where parents and teachers exchanged information about both culture and the curriculum, and family literacy nights where parents were trained in key literacy concepts. As a result of these collaborations, reading scores improved in the 2004-2005 school year before the program was expanded Citywide. Unfortunately, the DOE eliminated the community involvement component from the Citywide Lead Teacher program, limiting its effectiveness.³¹

The Lead Teacher program is proof that persistent educational failure is not inevitable, and that if the next administration commits to work with the community real progress can happen. CC9 has merged into the Citywide Coalition for Educational Justice, but the organizations and parent leaders that made it possible are still here. However, the next Mayor will have to move beyond not only the Bloomberg administration’s reform strategies but also its flawed philosophy of limited parent engagement. School choice and child-center collaboration alone has not changed outcomes for students in District 9. Involving parents and community organizations as decision-makers and equal partners is essential to transform the culture of struggling schools and sustain reform over time.

PAC has already taken strides towards developing a new model of community-driven accountability. On April 28th, 2012, PAC organized the first-ever D9 Rising Community Forum. We

invited principals, students, parents and educators from across the district. Over 100 people participated in a day-long gathering that included workshops where all participants developed their vision for the district and identified priorities for improvement. The groups were based on the categories NYSED uses to evaluate schools: Parent & Community Engagement, School Leader Practices & Decisions, Curriculum, Teacher Practices & Decisions, Student Social & Emotional Health, and District Capacity. Each group presented their recommendations, which parents then used to develop a set of proposals for school improvement in the District. In evaluations, parents reflected that what they valued most about the Forum was the chance to engage with teachers, students, and educators as equals, and to work together toward their common goal of a successful District 9.

We recommend that the de Blasio administration draw upon these models of successful collaboration, and take action to address the educational crisis in District 9 by working side-by-side with the parents, students, and educators of our District. PAC recognizes that parents have both a right and a responsibility to be part of the decisions that impact our children, and we remain ready to do our part. We envision four strategies to transform District 9 Schools that build on the legacy of parent organizing in our district and leverage the knowledge and commitment of parents, students, teachers, administrators and community organizations to make our schools more accountable, equitable and democratic.

FOUR STRATEGIES

1 Create a new community-driven process to hold schools accountable.

We believe that school and district improvement should be a democratic process, and that parents must be full partners in their children's education. We call on de Blasio's administration to commit to a new inclusive process that will give all stakeholders a meaningful role in creating a new District Action Plan for District 9.

- *The DOE should facilitate the creation of a plan that addresses District 9 specifically, that responds to the needs and priorities identified by parents, students, teachers, administrators, staff and community partners by hosting biannual community forums (see below.)*
- *The plan must be concrete and specific, and include measurable objectives wherever possible. It must be simple, clear, and accessible enough that stakeholders- including parents, students, teachers, and administrators- can use it to drive improvement efforts.*
- *Ensure all stakeholders have an active, ongoing, meaningful role in creating, monitoring and evaluating the plan by hosting biannual community forums modeled on the successful D9 Rising Forum.*

2 Build the capacity of local schools to meet the challenge of higher standards.

Low-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods need additional support above and beyond the Children's First Networks to improve teaching, reduce teacher turnover, and engage families.

- *The DOE should establish a comprehensive system for mentoring new teachers, and ensure that ongoing professional development and support is consistent across schools.*
- *Follow the example of districts that have significantly improved academic performance using tools like the Strategic Staffing Initiative, which creates incentives for hiring and retaining experienced and effective educators at the schools that need them most.*

3 Harness community resources to close the opportunity gap.

To close the achievement gap between District 9 and high-performing districts, all children must receive the supports they need to be successful in school and have access to a rich array of educational opportunities including arts programming, extended day, and social services.

- *Partner with community-based organizations to transform all priority schools into full-service community schools to meet the social, emotional and medical needs of children and families.*
- *Replicate the middle school extended day for Priority and Focus elementary schools in low-performing districts.*
- *Restore funding for arts education to ensure that all schools are in compliance with New York State arts education standards, and expand partnerships with local community organizations to provide culturally relevant arts programming.*

4 Prioritize parent involvement to improve literacy for English Language Learners.

Parents of English Language Learners (ELLs) want their children to succeed, but ELLs are currently one of the lowest performing groups of students in District 9. The DOE should commit additional resources to supporting ELLs and building partnerships with their families.

- *The DOE must partner with parents, students and community organizations to provide professional development to all school staff on cultural competency, family involvement and positive communication.*
- *Create a paraprofessional training program for community members who speak in-demand languages, including but not limited to Spanish and the commonly spoken West African language Soninke. This program will build the capacity of schools to serve all students and their families.*
- *The DOE's Office of Family and Community Engagement should also partner with community organizations to create a parent-training program in District 9 modeled on the Parent Mentor program of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago to educate parents about their rights and train them to better support their children's learning at home.*
- *Allocate funding for Pre-K programs in priority schools with high-ELL populations.*

endnotes

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- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid. Page 7.
- 31 For more information on CC9 and the Lead Teacher Program, see: olatoye, shola, Zacharay, Eric. *A Case Study: Community Organizing for School Improvement in the South Bronx*. New York, New York: Institute for Education & Social Policy, New York University, 2001. Annenberg Institute for School Reform. 2011. *Parent Power: Education Organizing in New York City, 1995-2010*. DVD, produced by Eric Zachary and directed by Jose Gonzalez and Norm Fruchter. Providence, RI: Brown University, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Center for Education Organizing.

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