Citywide Council for Special Education Tuesday, June 16, 2020

Joint Zoom Video Conference with CCSE/CEC15/CCD75

 Parent Forum Meeting Minutes

Attendees(CCSE): Ellen McHugh, Gloria Corsino, Azalia Volpe, Abi Fenalon, Margot Weinstock, Paullette Healy, Cynthia Arbulu-Vacca, Tamara Foye, Erika Newsome, Artelia Flowers, Noah Gotbaum, Carmen Robles

(CEC15): Camille Casaretti, Mark Bisard, Krystal Cason

(CCD75): Shameel Lawrence, Craig Spencer, Tiesha Groover, Grisel Cardona

 DOE: Jose Rios Lua, Deputy Chancellor Adrienne Austin, Chief Academic Officer Linda Chen, Deputy Chief Academic Officer for Special Education Christina Foti

(FACE): Claudette Agard, Shona Gibson

158 attendees, 10 call ins, 10 in Spanish translation room= 178 attendees total

Ellen McHugh convenes meeting at 6:04pm.

Gloria Corsino gives opening remarks in Spanish

Shameel Lawrence from CCD75 gives opening remarks in English

A moment of silence was observed to honor those we have lost recently.

DC Adrienne Austin gives welcome remarks

CAO Linda Chen gives her welcome remarks

DCAO Christina Foti gives her welcome remarks

Paullette goes over meeting logistics. Council members have 90 seconds to speak which Azalia as timekeeper will moderate. Once the last Council member speaks, Paullette will introduce speakers that signed up for public comment.

Azalia introduces the following Councilmembers-

Mark Bisard(CEC15)-asks what reopening plans look like for the fall.

DC Austin discusses the FALL FRAMEWORK. In the process asking principals to meet with SLTs to discuss what social distancing can look like and discussions are being had on what blending learning may look like.

Margot Weinstock(CCSE)-expressed concern for students aging out experiencing regression because they could not engage in remote learning. Asking for compensatory services to be considered. DCAO Foti responds that compensatory services will be looked into for those students at risk and figure out what transition support services look like. Need is recognized and working hard to find solutions.

Tiesha Groover(CCD75)-asked for transparency regarding related services and how in person services will be rendered

Azalia Volpe(CCSE)- what is the DOE planning on doing to address the academic social emotional support for our children with disabilities in September? THRIVENYC is riddled with issues and Chancellor speaks of equity but mocks parents from Staten Island for advocating in person services for their children. DCAO Foti wants our children to be protected and the doors can’t just be opened without proper precautions but the DOE does want to provide some services. The health and safety of our children comes first but they are still trying to improve upon the services presently provided. Daily living skills, life skills, and literacy interventions are the focus during summer instruction.

CAO Chen needs to look at local policy other than just what comes down from the state. Concerns from parent leaders are mixed but health and safety are the utmost priority. DC Austin addressed the varying perpsectives, lots of politics are involved in these conversations.

Craig Spencer(CCD75)-spoke about having an opportunity to stop regression in our children. Chancellor had mentioned Edie Sharp overseeing the return from COVID-19. He asked if she can be available to the parents for feedback.

Paullette Healy(CCSE)- brought up the REC centers are already serving D75 students and students with IEPs. We ask that PDs be provided to program directors and volunteers to better service our students and to reconsider the proposal to use the REC centers as a hub for in person services by Staten Island BP Oddo. Parents just want a choice. DCAO Foti agreed that PDs and trainings should be provided to the REC centers for better service.

Noah Gotbaum(CCSE)-talked about school environment. NYPD has budget to add safety officers when they are already outnumber nurses, counselors and social workers. What plans do we have to move money from school safety officers into special education? DC Austin stated the DOE is looking at what school safety means. DC Robinson from school climate is working hard to move away from the school to prison pipeline and reevaluating how discipline and school safety should look like to support learning.

Azalia repeats the meeting logistics and speaker protocols. The floor is opened to public speakers.

**Parent Concerns**

1. Remote learning is not working with our children with special needs in District 31. The inconsistencies in the quality of instructions is failing to meet the IEP goals of our children. Please change the way remote learning looks for our children with special needs. DCAO Foti agrees remote learning does not take the place of our teachers. DOE understands the urgency to get in person services to our children,
2. Surveys going out are not getting to those children in who are privately places schools. Robocalls are being dictated too fast for most parents to comprehend. Transition plans are being offered with little explanation. Children aging out are running out of time. DC Austin said surveys is for the DOE to gather data to find out what is the priorities for fall. DOE can control what our public schools can roll out but not so for private schools for those in private placement. Will bring this concern back to the DOE
3. Asking the Chancellor to apologize to parents of students with special needs. Parents need to work and are unable to while children are still home for remote learning. DCAO Foti address that without a green light to provide in person services, the doors to the schools just can’t open.
4. Parent has 3 special needs children in which remote learning has been a disaster. D75 class sizes are small. Why can’t they resume as is in September? Why is planning only happening now? CAO Chen noted that even though they are unable to move forward without the green light doesn’t mean they are only looking into solutions now. Planning has commenced since March. Lots of factors involved in consideration of social distancing. It’s not just the number of students but the size of the rooms, number of adults and PPE.
5. How can we prevent our most vulnerable children in the younger grades who need intensive early intervention from missing opportunities to progress? The window is narrowing and the loss of these therapies have lasting repercussions on their quality of life.
6. Evals for AT devices have been on hold since the quarantine. How can we get these devices to the kids who need them?
7. BCBA(or ABA) should be made available in September for all children to address the regression behaviors due to remote learning. Staten Island has had problems getting D75 programs and co-locations prior to COVID-19 and the need is more dire than ever. DCAO Foti agrees BCBA would be a great idea to address behaviors. DC Austin addresses the devastating loss that has been caused by the pandemic to justify the need for precautions. DOE has worked hard at addressing hunger, the digital divide, providing REC centers for essential workers so they can continue their contributions to fighting COVID -19
8. We need resources for our communities now. How will the DOE address the transportation issues for our children once schools are reopened? DCAO Foti will get answers out to families as soon as she receives it and get that info out to families as fast as possible.
9. For students with IEPs in ICT settings who receive paras, will they receive more in person support compared to their gen ed counterparts once schools re-open?
10. K-2 students are not eligible for summer instruction. Can trainings or meetings with literacy specialists be given to parents to help support the remote learning process? DC Austin agrees PDs for parents would be a great idea to support early education literacy. CAO Chen mentioned that their teams are compiling support training for parents.
11. Only 1 REC center available in Washington Heights and they are closing their doors June 26. The closest REC center is miles away. Why are there not more locations available in this neighborhood? Also, parent suggested the use of CUNY campus as another space to explore for REC centers or in person services since the universities will be doing classes online, therefore the campus buildings are empty. DC Austin is unaware of any REC centers in Washington Heights being closed but will look into it and report back. CAO Chen acknowledged the empty CUNY buildings was new information that needs to be explored.
12. What supports will be made available to parents as we look into a long period of remote learning? Are we looking at virtual contractors for specific challenges? DCAO Foti said DOE is looking into what supports will be most effective since the parent component is so important when it comes to remote learning. CAO Chen mentioned looking into online apps for programs like Wilsons or Orton Gillingham to ensure a more robust curriculum. Also making in person evaluations a priority.
13. Ellen asked DC Austin to elaborate on the 8 teams responsible for the fall re-opening and are any of the teams special education specific. DC Austin explained the 8 following principles.
14. Enhance Health Measures(PPE,safety gear)
15. Trauma Informed Approach
16. Blended Learning
17. Making sure schools are ready to open(DOH guidelines)
18. Phased approach (dimmer approach instead of on/off switch)
19. Implementing social distancing
20. Building operations(custodial)
21. General school operations (busing, school food)

Parent advocacy groups (AQE, CEJ, Advocates for Children, Immigration Coalition, etc) have been tapped to aid the process by being a sounding board for the proposed framework. Engagement sessions with parents will continue over the summer.

Gloria asked since there has been 0 cases of COVID-19 at the REC centers why not offer in person services as a layered schedule with PVC partitions. Use protocols already in practice at the REC centers as guidance. CAO Chen agrees REC centers have been successful in protecting our children. No transportation available for REC centers presently so transportation needs to be fleshed out before they are opened up for other services. Considerations need to be made for students with sensory challenges who won’t be able to wear a mask and looking at how to accelerate learning for our students.

Ellen stressed to CAO Chen to look at the list of parents on this forum to participate in the advisory board in order to be part of the teams the DOE mentioned.

Paullette read statement asking if summer supports for younger grades were available. CAO Chen recommended to have that conversation with the child’s school for early childhood supports.

DC Austin thanks all the parents and speakers in attendance and recognizes the urgency and will continue to engage parents in these continued discussions. Craig from CCD75 asked that their Council also be included in the ongoing conversations.

CAO Chen stresses the need to complete the DOE survey as soon as possible to aid in planning.

DCAO Foti thanks everyone for participating tonight.

Jose drops a link for parents to submit questions directly to the special education office. Parent Forum adjourns at 8:16pm