

Future Of Gifted And Talented Programs Discussed At P.S. 122

BY THOMAS COGAN

The March 6 meeting at P.S. 122 in Astoria was one of those emergency affairs that seem to happen every time the Department of Education (DOE) makes a proposal for purported improvement. In this case, the proposal is to revamp P.S. 122 in a way that would leave it a kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school but, because it would entail increasing the size of the student body in a school already over capacity, would require altering some of the physical space and programs there. In particular, it would mean reducing the number of students in the school's Gifted and Talented (G&T) program from the current count of 411 to 270. That alone could and would bring parents out to a meeting, but this meeting was full of parents and others who perceived a manifold duplicity in the DOE's actions (read: a plan for charter schools), regarding all the schools in District 30.

The meeting was well-arranged by the school's parent-teacher association, which welcomed several political figures but insisted they keep their remarks brief. Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr. said the DOE was about to harm what he said was probably "the best program in the city". He was confident, though, that the force of local parents' outrage would make the DOE change its plan. Tony Meloni, trying

to succeed Vallone in the City Council this year, said he went to P.S. 122 under the SP, or Special Progress, program that preceded G&T.

The DOE is trying to fix what isn't broken, he said, adding, "Gifted and Talented shouldn't become Gifted and Forgotten."

James McFadden representing Assemblymember Aravella Simotas read a joint letter sent to the DOE by Simotas and state Senator Michael Gianaris, also absent, imploring Commissioner Walcott to retain G&T as the gold standard program. Michael Morrison, speaking for state Senator José Peralta, said that parents move to this neighborhood so their children can go to this school, so why ruin that situation? Speaking for Councilmember Daniel Dromm, Andrew Ronan was the first to speak of something that, it turned out, was bothering many at the meeting: that in at least one school in the district, according to rumor, DOE would like to install a charter school. Costa Constantinides, another candidate for Vallone's council seat, noticed a sign a small girl was holding up that said, "This is my school," which prompted him to chime in, "It's our school!"

He said he was a graduate of P.S. 122's G&T program 24 years ago. Van Bramer was able to give the meeting a few minutes of his time and wondered why DOE



Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., and candidates for City Council Costa Constantinides and Tony Meloni spoke at the DOE meeting held to discuss the Gifted and Talented program at P.S. 122.

didn't seem able to come up with a plan beneficial to all kids, instead of one that leaves at least one school unhappy. G&T seats should be increased in number, not lowered, he concluded.

Two representatives of Community District Educational Council 30 followed. The first, Michele Noris, said that it's quite a program that promises one good thing—allowing children to go from kindergarten through eighth grade in one school—but only by, in her word, "evis-

cerating" that school's best provision, G&T. The second, Jeffrey Guyton, father of a daughter in P.S. 122, said he did not care how she did on "these stupid assessment tests" she and other students must take frequently, so long as the G&T experience makes her passionate for learning. Dermot Smyth of the United Federation of Teachers said he has been to a lot of protest meetings and the audience at this one was the best he had seen. He said the

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point has been reached in the city's school situation where Mayor Michael Bloomberg is effectively schools chancellor also. Representatives of other District 30 schools—P.S. 85, 141, 150 and 166—were present: Deborah Alexander, of P.S. 150, said that DOE calls P.S. 122 a model school, then proposes to tamper with it, while another, Evie Hantzopoulos of P.S. 85, reasoned that we all make mistakes and advised DOE that this was a mistake, so Chancellor Dennis Walcott should admit it and leave P.S. 122 alone. Stefanie Weissman, an alumna from the mid-1990s who later excelled at Stuyvesant H.S., Columbia University and NYU grad school, said she had heard about the DOE plan two weeks earlier and was horrified to think that a program that had done her such good would be severely curtailed for students in future.

A woman in the audience asked the elected officials on stage in the school auditorium what they would do after speaking all those fine words. Constantinides said community rallying had to continue, and if door-to-door work was necessary he was up to it. Another woman said that having heard P.S. 122 would be the destination for students who would normally go to the overcrowded P.S. 141, she also heard a rumor that the plan was to eventually turn P.S. 141 into a charter school. That led to a lot of references about representatives of a school chartering organization who were recently on Steinway Street asking passersby

their thoughts about charter schools.

The Department of Education sent two young women to the meeting, and they seemingly came prepared to catch a lot of flak. It was more like a barrage of patronage, as they were constantly assured that the people of Astoria attending the meeting realized they, the DOE representatives, were only doing their job. That assignment consisted mainly of reading the gospel from headquarters and saying, when all else failed, that this plan wouldn't really go into effect until 2019.

There's no definite date when DOE will have any further announcements in the matter. A letter of appeal to Walcott went out the day after the meeting. The next chance to discuss the matter in public is at the Community District Council 30 meeting, to be held March 21 at P.S. 234, 30-15 29th Street.

LaGuardia Community To Celebrate Upcoming Pi Day

For LaGuardia Community College (LAGCC) mathematics professors and their students, March 14 is a time to celebrate. But, why? Because March 14 (3/14) is Pi Day, an event commemorating the mathematical constant pi (π).

Pi is celebrated on March 14 since 3.14 are the first three digits of the number pi, an irrational number that apparently can be calculated infinitely, and is useful when rounded off to calculate the area of any circle. LaGuardia students, faculty