

Parents Association General Meeting, June 18, 2009

Ms. Chory gave an overview of recent events and accomplishments including: the graduation that day of 99 students, the fact that 78% and 89% of students were on or above grade level on the ELA and math exams, the many programs that operated in the school throughout the year – among them Studio in a School, Oasis, Book Pals – and the School Leadership Team’s recently drafted and agreed upon vision statement for the school. She thanked parents for their participation, volunteerism and financial support and also thanked the parent members of the SLT. Ms. Chory alluded to the growing pains of the past year, particularly with regard to communication between the administration and parents, and expressed her hope that both parties were ready to move toward a new era of growth.

Ms. Chory indicated that the Ms. Rosa, the Parent Coordinator, is still distributing the ARIS letters and that she has received some training that will enable her to answer at least some parents’ question. The remaining letters that are not picked up in person will be mailed to parents. Ms. Chory announced that the Open House dates for the coming school year and the grade supply lists will be posted on the school’s DOE Web site. Parents of incoming pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students will receive letters with instructions over the summer.

Ms. Chory stated that she would answer the questions about de-tracking that James Goldwasser submitted to her on behalf of the School Leadership Team and then take additional questions from the audience. She said that she was unable to determine exactly when tracking began at PS/IS 187 though it appears to have been sometimes in the 1970s. In 2002, the accelerated and two sister classes were initiated. She said that the administration was committing funds to focus on differentiated instruction and that the school is responsible for meeting the needs of students with different learning styles.

Ability grouping will remain in grades 5 through 8 though the grouping will be done by subject matter for grades 6 through 8 rather than across the board as has been the practice to date. Ms. Chory has hired a programmer who will be looking at test score data and making recommendations with regard to placement in English, math, social studies and science. A definitive decision has not yet been made on whether the same structure will be maintained in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Ms. Chory emphasized that the programmer is not making the ultimate and final decisions on placements and that the analyst’s recommendations will not be accepted without careful review. In response to a question on what differentiation means and how teachers have been prepared for it, Ms. Chory indicated that four years ago all of the students were using the same books (Basel readers) and now teachers are using different approaches such as the workshop model, just right books, STAR reading, etc. She cited an 11% increase in literacy as an indication that the school is on the right course. Teachers have been receiving professional development in math instruction through the Aussie workshop program.

Ms. Chory was asked about the timing of her decision to eliminate ability grouping in grades 3 and 4. She indicated that her decision was motivated by the fact that some parents needed to know whether ability grouping would remain in place since it would inform their decision on whether to place their children in gifted and talented programs. Ms. Chory was asked several times for clarification about the 3 year professional development plan that was referenced in the letter sent home to parents and Ms. Chory spoke of the implementation of reading and math workshops and indicated that reading and writing scores were showing the effectiveness of the professional development which, in turn, was the rationale for the decision she made with regard to eliminating tracking before the end of the three year plan.

Ms. Chory indicated that a goal of the GE grant is for all 8<sup>th</sup> graders to take the algebra regents exam within four years. Currently, there are two accelerated 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes that take the exam. Ms. Chory further indicated that 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will learn about the new grouping system by the following week. Several concerns were raised by parents, including: the speed with which the decisions are being made and the changes implemented, the possibility that teaching to the test will become more pervasive and that science, technology and social studies not be overlooked in the effort to focus on and improve the basics of English and math. Ms. Chory indicated that the school is investing in new resources for the teaching of all subject matters and that she does not have all the answers right now but that she and everyone else is going to work hard and ask for help. Ms. Chory and Ms. Marrero were thanked and they left the meeting.

The minutes from the May general meeting were approved. Carlos Brito gave his treasurer's report highlighting the fact that the PA exceeded the projected income by \$4,000. He pointed out new income categories in the budget, including the cookbooks, tote bags and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade CD sales and also indicated that some additional income is expected from Title I reimbursements which cover expenses such as babysitting at meetings and refreshments. He also pointed out that some expenses were not anticipated such as Studio in a School. He indicated that as of the previous day, \$12,273.59 would be carried over and that there were no major remaining expenses. He announced that the books need to be closed by next Friday so any outstanding receipts need to be submitted. Tory Frye mentioned the possibility of getting assistance from the Office of Family Engagement with implementing an accounting system that will accommodate year found fundraising and monies trickling in (e.g. Innisbrook online sales).

Judy Prosper will be the chair of the fundraising committee next year and her role will be that of supervising and keeping track of projects which will each have their own coordinator. Amy Ogata and Kate Forbes-Dallimore will chair the environmental committee again and Ms. Di Mauro is seeking volunteers to chair the hospitality and community liaison committees. She stated that she has recruited coordinators for the Staff Appreciation Dinner and the Spaghetti Dinner which will take some of the burden off the hospitality committee chair. She is hoping to fill these positions before the beginning of next year. Ruth Lilienstein-Gatton and Jeanine McAdam will continue chairing the grant writing subcommittee and Susan Saar will continue chairing the fitness and nutrition subcommittee. Ivelisse Suarez-Levine will be responsible for collecting Box Tops and Stacey Linden, Jessica Shapely and Ruth Lilienstein-Gatton will continue as the class parent representative coordinators. The Innisbrook sale has volunteer coordinators lined up and Kathy Brito will oversee the school photos.

James Goldwasser gave a report on the most recent SLT meeting. He indicated that Navi Stoller gave a very positive report on Studio in a School and the SLT voted to endorse the program. Ms. Chory provided some details on the budget including a \$300,000 reduction. Mr. Goldwasser stressed that the budget is very fluid and that some of the funds may be restored. One outcome of the budget cuts is that the Collaborative Team Teaching kindergarten classroom was cut. He indicated that Ms. Chory spoke about her decision on ability grouping in grades 3 and 4 at the meeting and that her comments and responses to questions were similar to those presented at the general meeting. Leonisa Ardizzone interjected that the SLT subcommittee on tracking is going to develop data constructs and rubrics to use moving forward and that the immediate focus of the subcommittee in its meeting the next day would be on getting a more concrete indication of what will happen in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and on developing a survey of teachers to assess their perceptions about their readiness for the upcoming changes.

Parents expressed confusion and uncertainty about the changes Ms. Chory announced with regard to ability grouping in the intermediate school. It was unclear to some parents whether there would be ability grouping across all subjects and not just English and math. Some parents expressed concern about how the changes would be communicated to students and how they would react and feel. Parents were encouraged to call and send email to Ms. Chory to get further clarification and register their concerns. It was noted that Ms. Hozumi will be out for the remainder of the school year.

Francesca Di Mauro reported that at the end of the previous SLT meeting she was given a list of the administration's priorities with regard to PA fundraising. The SLT voted unanimously to endorse Studio in a School as a top priority for the coming year. The SLT, however, did not have a chance to discuss the other programs on the list at length so it approved the presentation of the list with the understanding that it will be discussed in the fall.

Ms. Di Mauro communicated the unfortunate news that SiAS will not be returning to the school in the fall because the organization lost the subsidy that enabled it to operate the program at PS/IS 187. Studio in a School will use its remaining funds in schools where they have longer standing relationships. Friends of 187 had agreed to donate \$10,000 toward SiAS but that decision is no longer relevant.

Francesca Di Mauro asked the membership to take a vote on a proposed slate of fundraisers for the upcoming year including: Innisbrook, two movie nights (one in October and another in March), school photos, a dance night for parents and students, a health fair in May, a flea market, a calendar with children's art, poetry and photography, clear backpacks with the 187 logo, eco-totes, bake sales, a 187 for 187 day (when businesses on 187<sup>th</sup> street would be asked to donate 18.7% of their revenues for one day)

and advertising in the Backpack News (pending legal approval). A motion was made and seconded to approve the slate of potential fundraisers to fundraise for programming, operating expenses and the wish list. The motion was approved unanimously.

The clear backpack sale was discussed since the membership needed to vote on whether to allocate funds toward this fundraising activity which would take place before the beginning of the next school year. An upfront expenditure of \$1,074 would be required for the purchase of 100 (minimum) backpacks and water bottles at a cost of \$7.75 per backpack and \$2.99 per bottle. The items would be sold for \$17 and \$6, respectively, for a potential profit of \$1,226. The school would provide mailing labels to the income kindergarten families and the PA would have to cover the cost of postage. A motion was made and seconded to fund up to \$1,200 in expenses for the clear backpack sale. The motion was approved unanimously. Sue Seitner and Margaret Jelinek were thanked for coordinating this fundraiser.

Judith Michael asked for a vote on whether to make the e-group un-moderated. She explained that for reasons that are not clear, members who joined after 2005 are moderated while those who joined before are not. She proposed that the e-group be completely un-moderated with the provisos that anyone can chose to be moderated and that those who violate the e-group rules will be automatically moderated. Individuals will still have to apply for membership. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously to make the e-group un-moderated as per the conditions outlined by Judith Michael.

Francesca Di Mauro thanked everyone at the meeting as well as those not in attendance for their hard work and gave special thanks to Kathy Brito for her ongoing presence in and help to the school, to Leonisa Ardizzone for her leading role in the establishment of the 501c3 and the Oasis after school program, to Tory Frye for her many contributions, to Stacey Linden for teaching the Family Yoga Nights and to Joey Brenneman for overseeing the elections. Ms. Di Mauro was presented with flowers by the parents as a token of appreciation.