

**Minutes from Chinatown Working Group Education/Schools Working Team
3/30/09** (three pages)

Next meeting: MS 131 Hester Street Wednesday, April 29 2009 (Hester/Forsyth near Sara Roosevelt Park). From 10am to 11:30am.

Attending: Rosa Casiello O'Day -Principal PS 42M, Danny Yip- PTA President PS 42M, Mary Chan- Parent Coordinator PS 42M, Thomas Yu-Director Asian Americans for Equality and Co-Chair of the Chinatown Working Group (CWG), Soo Baek- Program Director of ISS, Diane Chong –Parent Coordinator PS130M, K Webster- Acting Chair CWG Education/Schools Working Team, Lily Woo- Principal PS130M, Alic Hom-Principal PS124, Amy Hom-Principal PS 1, Jennifer Chang- Board Chair Chinatown Youth Initiatives, Jim Solomon – CB2 Board Member and Co-Chair CWG, John Lo- PS 130M PA Board, Yvonne Moy – PS 130M Board, Shirley Chin – AP PS 130M, Phyllis Tam – Principal MS 131, Kee Cheung Tang – Parent Coordinator MS131, Jerry Chan – CWG and CB2, Elisa Espiritu – Board Member Chinatown Youth Initiative

Introductions - name and organization or affiliation.

Overview and background of the Chinatown Working Group - Jim Solomon encouraged the group to go to the website to learn more about the coalition. He explained its open and democratic process. He emphasized that CWG is geared for action. It will gather the thinking of the different CWG Working Teams (on topics as diverse as Zoning, Cultural and Historic Preservation, Parks, Traffic and Transportation, Affordability, Economic Development, etc.). This information gathering will be prioritized by consensus of CWG for future implementation in order to help Chinatown to determine its own future. He encouraged the organizations present to join as voting members.

CWG website: <http://www.chinatownworkinggroup.org/>

We were reminded that the gathered group has more clout as a group. We are meeting to hear your concerns.

Notes: “What brought you here for this topic?” (Please, those who came, check and I'll revise):

-Education is the most important thing for my kids. I went to this school. How do we get more parents involved, how do we get busy, tired parents to take a bigger stake in education?

-It is important for Chinatown to self determine its own future. People who come to the meetings come because they assume their voices will be heard. We are creating a blueprint for implementation- not just another survey!

- I came because Lily Woo asked me to.

- I came to listen and to learn (speaker was reminded that she had things to teach too!)
- The intersection between community and school is a vital one. It has great potential to change a community for the better.
- Came to get ideas, how do I help my parents?
- I want to know what I can do to help our parents who face a daunting list of concerns. The overdevelopment of the neighborhood. A building was erected abutting our school and those classroom windows are now cut off from light, air and views that create an environment conducive to learning.
- I want to improve education. I want my children to be able to walk around Chinatown and be proud of it and its history.
- Traffic and streets around our school are critical safety issue. Over testing of ESL groups hard on this population in particular (4 different assessments just this month!). Enrollment of Kindergarten is chaotic and not logical. Need to return control to the principals. We (Chinatown principals) try to stay in touch to organize the chaos but it is very difficult. Brought the issue up to DOE but no action. Opened up two TAG classes as were requested but wound up only filling one. Had to consolidate. Lost time and teacher (ed.note?)
- ISS has been around a long time but I'm new so I came to learn how to help our parents better navigate the school system.
- CWG could give us more political clout. Each school tries alone to solve common problems particular to Chinatown. We have watered down communication amongst principals that used to be able to brainstorm and problem solve. Now split up between a number of divisions in the DOE. Six different Chinatown schools divided into four different networks! Other needs not met. Each of us spends time reinventing the wheel. Take translations for instance (see minutes of first meeting- ed.) Re: enrollment, we used to talk informally and resolve difficulties quickly. There is no logical neighborhood based planning. Children are bused from the Bronx when a child from across the street can't find space. Need other schools to be strengthened- not force children to suffer by being bused out of their communities to "better" schools. That puts the onus on the children when it should be on the system.
- Over testing is stressing our children. If you want good teaching, let us teach!
- I have a stake in every school in this neighborhood. I attended most of them. This is where I learned to speak English. I came to learn about the issues that are current now. I have been involved in fight to keep the building next to the school from going up that high.

- I too left Chinatown where I grew up and have come back. We are the only Middle School in Chinatown (MAT is K-12?). Because of its old reputation we have trouble attracting children from the community. No matter what happens in the Park that is near us, it is blamed on our students. We have 17 inappropriate Internet cafes very close to the school that attract our children. 34% of our children are ELL and a large percentage of our parents with little formal education (as well as second language issues). We need better support for our parents.

Thomas Yu (Co-Chair of CWG) gave a description of what a “guiding principle” was.

We then broke into three groups: Principals and Parent Coordinators, Youth groups working in the community, and Parent Association Board Members and other parents.

We came back to give a brief synopsis of the discussion.

Principals and Parent Coordinators:

- Institutionalize an increase the communication between Principals in Chinatown.
- Combat disenfranchisement of parents by working with 3rd party partners to help with issues around gentrification, lack of housing, evictions, language (ELL and ESL), translation, and other issues that parents in the community face. These problems create a situation where parents struggle with being involved with their schools or their child’s education.
- Affect State and local policies so they reflective of issues parents face here.

Notes from the “Principals” table (Thomas Yu):

- Need for principals to reestablish lines of communication and cooperation between schools despite artificial barriers created by new district system
- The way in which city currently re-assigns students from distant neighborhoods, while has good intentions, is detrimental to local youth who want to attend in the community
- Language access barriers does not allow for a level playing field for students and parents
- Over-testing of students, difficult with ELL students, unfair to use those tests as a comparison to other areas with proficient language speakers
- Affects “middle school choice” since “good” middle schools will be less likely to select low test scoring children from Chinatown
- Gentrification, housing and job loss have major impacts on student success. Need for political clout and outside partners to provide much needed social service help to families.

Youth Groups:

- If schools are set up to not be unified this makes it even more impossible for the Youth Groups who serve the community to unite. Access to key players has been difficult.
- Youth Groups often feel they are the only ones standing up for youth issues at forums.

- How do we get the word out to parents about what services are out there for their children?

Parents/Parent Association Board Members:

- Key issue is safety in and around schools.
- How do we protect schools from the fallout of gentrification (building over play areas, buildings that overshadow schools window light, businesses that cater to clientele that are unsafe around schools, etc)? Zoning and other issues.
- More free programs (ELL, ESL, etc.)
- More space for recreation during the school day
- Overtesting
- Shoddy construction work at schools.

Alice Hom brought up the lack of representation of local Daycare Centers. She will reach out. CWG apparently has reached out but anyone with connection/friendships would make all the difference. Their voice is crucial.

We closed asking what was helpful or what did you like about the meeting.

Future meeting locations:

April 29– MS 131 (see above) From 10am to 11:30am.

May – PS 124 TBA

June – PS 42 TBA

We will continue to meet in the daytime unless someone else can chair an evening meeting. But please send your comments and thoughts to us!