

Hello, my name is Alysa O'Shea, and I am an elected parent leader in Queens, NY. I currently serve as Queens Representative #1 on The Citywide Council on High Schools (CCHS), an advisory body that is responsible for evaluating and commenting on educational policies that involve New York City public high schools. Prior to this position, I served as the Queens Borough President's Appointee to Community Education Council District 27 from 2019 through 2021. I am also an active PTA member at Townsend Harris High School, where my child is currently attending 10th grade. I volunteer as the PTA THHS Alumni Liaison. In addition, I am co-secretary of PLACE NYC (Parent Leaders for Accelerated Curriculum and Education).

In my professional life, I have been a member of the NY Hotel Trades Council (HTC) for many years. In general, I am a strong union supporter; however, I am dismayed at the undue influence that the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has had on school closures and remote learning decisions during the pandemic. In my opinion, a decentralized governance would mean effectively ceding control to the UFT. Evidence from the last two years has personally convinced me that this is not in the best interest of public school families and students.

My experience as a parent leader during the administration of Mayor de Blasio and his chancellors was disheartening. I watched as the Mayor attempted to dismantle specialized high schools and Gifted & Talented programs throughout the city, instead of expanding them in much needed geographic areas like Queens. In the past year, advanced math and AP offerings at our public city high schools have also been targeted for removal.

The Bridge Program at Townsend Harris High School at Queens College was defunded during Chancellor Carranza's leadership. I am a single parent supporting my child on a lower-middle income hourly wage. We were counting on this program to help alleviate the heavy burden of college tuition down the road. THHS is the crown jewel of the NYC DOE, and I have asked myself many times why would the former Mayor and Chancellor want to destroy it?

Community Education Councils (CECs), Citywide Councils and the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) are often dysfunctional and ineffective. Many members bring political agendas to the table; in the name of virtue signaling, they deliberately prevent cooperation and collaboration between council members.

Often, well-meaning parent volunteers quit in frustration. I have discovered (especially on the CCHS) that NYC Department of Education's Family and Community Empowerment (FACE) team does not support elevating parent voices; instead, FACE creates bureaucratic roadblocks focused on preventing actions from moving forward that may act as checks and balances on the DOE. Real support and additional funding should be provided by the NYC DOE to these councils, and FACE should be revamped to truly serve all parent volunteers (not just those that adhere to the political agenda put forth by the Mayor and Chancellor).

So where does this leave us? I would like to see increased accountability and transparency. If mayoral control is renewed (as Governor Hochul has indicated her support for), engagement with community stakeholders, especially elected parent leaders, is crucial. Specifically, I would like the Panel for Education Policy (PEP) to add an additional member appointed by the CCHS, which represents approximately 320,000 public school students (roughly one-third of the total) who currently have no voice on the PEP. I co-authored a resolution passed by quorum at our December 2021 CCHS meeting demanding this. I would also like to see all CEC resolutions voted by the council majority to be acknowledged by the PEP, as these documents represent parent council voices. I would also like all contracts presented for consideration by the PEP to include the number of students served and the cost/expense per student to be disclosed prior to member voting. I personally believe that all PEP members should be current parents or guardians of children in the public school system so that the votes they cast directly affect their own families.

There are many motivated parents willing to commit their time and energy to bettering our school community. With the proper support by NYC DOE, the Mayor and the Governor, I believe we can make this system better. Please support our elected parent members and councils, as we are counting on you to continue to value and elevate our voices from the grass roots level.