



## Central Park East I Elementary School

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September 13, 2019

Dear Families,

CPE1's mission is to teach students to become "thoughtful citizens of a democratic society." Staff know we cannot ask children to do anything we would not do ourselves. So, for our classrooms to spark vibrant democratic thinking, the adults of our community have to think democratically. This letter is all about adults' democratic engagement, including yours.

### **CPE1 Faculty Council**

Twice a month, our whole staff meets for faculty council. Any staff member can add onto the agenda. We talk through decisions big and small, from matters of budget and programming to what time attendance should be delivered to the main office.

People outside our school usually seem surprised that the principal's vote counts the same as everyone else's. In fact, last spring, I wrote up a proposal for a faculty council vote... and lost. I still believe in my idea, so I hated losing. I also love that I lost. Do you want *your* child taught by adults who have no say in what's best for learning? Do you want the people teaching critical thinking to your child simply to follow orders? Do you want your child to learn to resolve conflicts from a group of voiceless adults?

The debate can be exhausting, but it usually helps our staff reach more careful decisions. Faculty council has taught me that democracy isn't all about getting others to vote for your interests. Democracy empowers others to change your mind.

### **Showing Up at School**

Your child attends CPE1, so you are part of the CPE1 Parent Association. The PA encourages everyone to participate actively. Try to come to PA has monthly meetings (including September 19 at 6:00) to get formal updates on the PA's work on behalf of learning at CPE1. In addition to sharing information, the PA encourages families' questions and comments. The most supportive resource often is another CPE1 family, and the more families bring to discussion, the better they support each other.

While PA meetings follow a formal agenda, the conversation at a community coffees is much more free-flowing. Once a month, right after drop-off, families gather in the library to ask questions and talk about the progress of our school. I participate in those conversations. I appreciate community coffees as another CPE1 discussion that helps me think more about our school.

### **Showing Up Outside School**

CPE1 is part of Community School District Four, which stretches across East Harlem. The district office can offer assistance and set priorities for all of its 23 elementary and middle schools, including ours. We should stay connected to other schools in the neighborhood and have a presence at public meetings.

This year, CPE1 parent Kaliris Salas-Ramirez will begin a two-year term on the district's community education council (CEC). The elected parents hold monthly meetings with the superintendent to review the state of schools and district-wide educational programs. The superintendent has expressed a hope that more families will attend these public meetings, so pencil in 6:00 on October 16, November 20, and December 11 for the next few CEC meetings. Wear your CPE1 t-shirt so everyone knows where you're from.

This Saturday, September 14, from 10:00 to 1:00, every school will have a table at the District Four school kickoff fair. Drop by 160 East 120 Street between 10:00 and 1:00, and once again, wear your CPE1 t-shirt.

### **Politics, Funding, and Better Schools**

New York City schools can apply for small grants to improve their physical space. Borough presidents and city council members award "Reso A" funds to schools in their neighborhoods. This summer, we learned that Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and City Council Member Diana Ayala teamed up to fund a project for CPE1.

You can picture the adult restroom in the middle of our hallway. It's a mid-sized space with two stalls and one sink. Thanks to Borough President Brewer and Council Member Ayala, this space will be remade as two single-occupancy restrooms. Single-occupancy restrooms will help us meet the New York City Department of Education's guidelines for supporting gender-expansive students. Schools must accommodate "any student who expresses a need or desire for increased privacy." But once single-occupancy restrooms have been created, no child or adult will have to ask. Human rights should not depend on individual requests.

Our borough president and council member are helping to create a more inclusive school environment. That goes back once again to a democratically engaged school community: my first idea was for a different bathroom project, but Marilyn saw how to divide one bathroom into two, and faculty council agreed that our grant application should focus on that project.

The construction of more equitable restrooms emerged from equitable discussion. In schools and everywhere else, democracy counts.

*-Gabriel*