



Central Park East I Elementary School

1573 Madison Avenue ♦ New York, NY ♦ 10029 ♦ 212.860.5821 ♦ www.cpe1.nyc ♦ Gabriel Feldberg, Principal

January 17, 2019

Dear Families,

Behind this letter is a more official letter. That letter delivers formal news. This letter adds context.

Today, the state education department announced accountability ratings for all New York public schools. CPE1 is now a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school. We have that title because of how New York State calculated last year’s standardized test scores. The state determined that CPE1’s scores are among the lowest two percent statewide.

‘Lowest two percent’ sounds shocking. Please read slowly: you deserve an understanding that goes beyond the label.

Are CPE1’s State Test Scores Really That Low?

The image below comes from the New York City Department of Education’s School Quality Snapshot for CPE1. Do you see that “50%” to the right? That means half of CPE1’s third, fourth, and fifth graders who took the state language arts exam scored high enough to meet state standards.

Performance on State Tests

English
50% met State standards on the State English test; the average score at this school was 2.8 out of 4.5
Comparison Group: 46%
District 04: 40%
City: 46%

Fifty percent is not among the highest percentages in New York. But, 50% is higher than the citywide average, which was 46%. Fifty percent is higher than the average of schools in our district. It’s higher than our “Comparison Group,” fifty other elementary schools from around the city with student populations similar to CPE1’s. Our 50% may not be especially high, but in New York City alone, 737 elementary and middle schools scored lower. So how could we be in the lowest two percent?

How New York State Calculates

To understand the state's formula for rating schools, try this old-fashioned word problem.

Mr. Lee's class has ten fourth graders. Mr. Lee planned a quiz for first thing Thursday morning. The school bus breaks down, and many students arrive very late.

Irma gets a 90% on the quiz, Jackson gets a 70%, and the other eight students come too late to take the quiz. What is the average score in the class?

How you count the kids from the school bus really changes the answer. You could approach the question in two ways:

The Average of Quiz-Takers

Irma and Jackson = Average

$$\frac{90\% + 70\%}{2} = 80\%$$

The Average of Everyone

Irma, Jackson, and Eight Bus Kids = Average

$$\frac{90\% + 70\% + 0\% + 0\% + 0\% + 0\% + 0\% + 0\% + 0\% + 0\%}{10} = 16\%$$

If you decide *average* includes only the students who took the quiz, then you add up Irma's and Jackson's scores and divide by two. That gives a class average of 80%. But if you assign a zero to each of the eight kids who did not take the quiz, then the average suddenly drops to 16%. Making the students who did *not* take the quiz part of the average makes the whole class flunk.

In prior years, New York State more or less used the method on the left. This year, for the first time, the state is using a formula more like the one on the right: students who don't take the exam are counted as scoring at the lowest level.

Many CPE1 families feel strongly about testing. Some definitely want their children to experience the challenge of a state exam. Others have opted their children out of state exams. Last spring, our third, fourth, and fifth graders were like the class in the word problem above: about 80% did not take the exam. Last year, the state would have evaluated CPE1 based only on the students who took the exam. This year, including students who opt out of exams made CPE1 a New York State Comprehensive Support and Improvement school.

What's Definite

The state made its announcement today, and this letter was written quickly. In the coming weeks, the city's Department of Education will share more information with me, and I'll share more with you.

I do know that we'll keep the CSI status through at least 2020-2021. To return to good standing with the state, our test school's test scores have to meet state targets for two years in a row.

I know the state does not have a process for closing or taking over schools within the first few years of CSI status. I'm not at all worried about that right now.

I know that, so far, opt-out students are counted at the lowest level only for schoolwide accountability. In students' individual academic records (and middle school applications, etc.), opting out is counted not as a low score, but as no score at all.

We'll know more by next week. We had a community coffee scheduled for the morning of Friday, January 25. If you can stay around school after drop-off, we'll talk more about being designated CSI.

What's Probable

Very soon, our new state status will give some additional money to spend this year. I think – *think* – we'll have some extra funding at the start 2019-2020, too.

CPE1 *probably* have a formal state review next year. We'll be monitored closely. As principal, I probably will have to attend more meetings and provide more paperwork. Also, our teachers probably will have some new documentation demands that come with more state and city monitoring.

What's Promised

I promise that you'll recognize CPE1. Serious situations are no excuse for weak change. Our classes will continue, in the words of CPE1's mission statement, to "represent the developmental needs of every child as well as their interests, strengths, and passions."

I promise that we'll grow. If more resources and support are coming to CPE1, our staff will be collaborating to make the most of them.

I promise to watch my words. Phrase like “low-performing” and “failing schools” and “worst schools” carelessly insult school communities that share our CSI designation. I couldn’t recognize *our* school through that language; all schools deserve to be described fairly and accurately.

I promise to reject falsehoods. Some people outside CPE1 have started a rumor that opting out is for ‘rich’ schools. It’s true that a few years ago schools in some affluent communities, such as Chappaqua, got lots of attention for their high opt-out rates. But you sort through the state education department’s data, you’ll find 248 New York districts where 70% or more of the students opting out last year were classified as “economically disadvantaged.” New York City’s District Four, right here in East Harlem, is among them. Our CSI status won’t be used to create divisions or spread fake facts.

I promise to honor families’ choices. This school won’t praise families who chose testing, or blame families who opted out, or vice versa. CPE1’s draws strength from our diverse beliefs. I’m equally proud to be connected to the CPE1 families that opted into and out of state exams.

We’ll be sharing more as we get it. Please do come to our community coffee on January 25. I wouldn’t wish CSI status on any school, but I couldn’t imagine a better school for talking about it and tackling it.

How lucky to be at CPE1.

—Gabriel



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Dear Parent or Guardian,

The New York State Education Department has designated our school, Central Park East I, a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school. This means that according to State criteria, our school has not performed as well as other schools in New York State. This designation is part of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which includes programs to ensure that students and schools improve. Our Schools Chancellor and all of us at the NYC Department of Education are committed to helping our school improve, and we would like to partner with you, our parents, to make our school the best it can be.

With these goals in mind, we regularly review our school's education programs to provide the highest quality instruction for your child. Programs will continue to be put into action in our school to make this year a successful experience for your child.

I invite you to attend a meeting at our school on January 25 at 8:35 to learn more about our school's CSI status and to discuss any questions you may have. Your partnership is important to the success of our school and we also want to hear your suggestions for steps we can take to improve. Please plan to attend. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership. Together, we can help all of our children thrive.

Sincerely,

Gabriel Feldberg, Principal