

Chinatown Working Group Education/Schools Working Team:
2/23/2009

Present: Phylcia Chan (PA Co-President, PS130), Miriam Chan, Elisa Espirito (Board Member Chinatown Youth Initiative) s, Selena Chin, John Lo, Diane Chong (Parent Coordinator PS 130), Yvonne Moy, Lisa Wong, Principal Woo PS 130, K Webster (acting Chair)

Identify three guiding principals:

We brainstormed on the issues in the community re: education/schools. We did not come up with overarching guiding principles. It was an excellent, informative and friendly discussion with groups that care about the issue. A good start.

Problems:

- Many parents were distressed by the loss of open space. The buildings going up are too high; choke off the light for children.
- Luxury buildings are pushing out low and moderate-income families. Want to see a limit on hotels. Parents miss the small “mom and pop” stores and the level of friendliness in the community.
- Losing Title I designation for low-income schools due to rising income of incoming parents.
- Overbuilding creates overcrowding in schools. No infrastructure to insure enough schools for the amount of new children.
- No parking for teachers and staff who can't afford to live in Chinatown and who must commute long hours early mornings and late evenings. Now even the lots are requiring a permit to park.
- Families coming from China are in culture shock. Don't understand what is required in this new environment.
- Parents send children to China to be raised by grandparents. Children later come here and have difficulties in adapting.
- Parents work long long hours and entrust their children to after-school programs and grandparents. They lose their connection to their children. Have to rely on everyone else to raise their children.
- Children are raising themselves on the Internet. Parents don't understand this medium-further erodes family.
- Children lose contact with their birth culture as they work to assimilate into western norms. Parents encourage assimilation to “get ahead” but lose their children in the process.
- In middle and high schools parents are contacted through email (if they have it). Information sent home isn't translated. No personal contact anymore with the school and their child in the school.
- Students and parents often don't know where to find resources or what resources would be a good match for them or their child.
- Now with the economic downturn more children in public schools.

- Due to “No Child Left Behind...” we have children who are sent from far off neighborhoods to enable them to come to a “good” school. Causing overcrowding and lack of neighborhood and family connection. Leaves those children feeling their communities aren’t as good. Due to long commute/busing, these children can’t come early or stay late for needed interventions. Parents can’t come in for conferences/consultation.
- Chinatown schools have improved dramatically over the years; however higher performance results in less funding for support services even though the children may need to have continued services to continue to do well. Some take more children to obtain enough funding to maintain resources.
- Over-testing. It fundamentally derails a child’s own motivation. They learn about testing instead of the subject. Teachers cut down on other essential learning tools: school trips, celebrations, etc. in order to practice for tests.
- In the Chinese immigrant community, parents can become overly concerned about tests as the way the child can “make it out” of poverty. No childhood left. Children stressed.
- Kindergarten procedures are irrational. Due to new procedures that are complicated, neighborhood children are not inducted in a sane manner and schools are having difficulties projecting actual registers. Schools can lose teacher positions if they don’t figure out “the system” and meet their register projections.
- Translation. DOE sends out information, but the Chinese translation can come days later. Puts pressure on schools resources as each school has to pay for their own translation in order to meet deadlines for dissemination.
- When District 2 was an intact district, the Chinatown schools used to work very closely together to address the common needs of the students in the community. After the Department of Education restructuring, Chinatown schools (like their Community Boards) were split into several networks that were independent of each other. What used to be an informal resource and information sharing was shattered and still affects schools today.

From Teachers’ viewpoint:

- Over crowded classrooms.
- Shortage of materials for classrooms.
- Too much testing.

Solutions:

- Parent workshops on childrearing here in the states. Need workshops in dialects of the community (Fukinese, Cantonese, Mandarin)
- Parents need peer support groups.
- Access to ESL classes on weekends, evenings (at different times). With childcare available.
- Principals given an opportunity to meet and discuss issues in Chinatown.
- Parent Associations given a chance to meet to discuss issues in Chinatown.
- Parent workshops to explain how schools work (in languages spoken). For instance help with navigating the middle school and high school moves.
- Classes for parents on using computers, understanding the Internet and Internet safety.

- Preserve culture by offering activities in schools and community that sustain them, especially generational activities.
- Organize parents in and out of schools. (Example: Lisa at PS130 stands in front and talks to parents before they head out for their busy day).
- Periodic meetings with Principals and Parent Associations to share best practices. What works/ what doesn't.
- Central clearing house for information and resources on cultural activities, tutoring, etc. Match resources to students. Determine: Are they safe? Are they good?
- Set up community spaces (since we are losing so many) near the young people's homes so they can meet and (hopefully) interact with their parents.
- Smaller classroom sizes, more materials, less testing.
- Build more schools.
- Fewer tests: beginning of the year, midyear check point, and end of the year. Tests should be used as a useful assessment tool only. Accountability is good but not 5 tests a year.
- Make schools in every neighborhood good! So children don't have to be bussed out of their own communities.
- Return kindergarten enrollment to the local schools.
- Have a way for Chinatown schools to rotate translation costs and services so schools are not all burden. Or don't send out directives if there is no ability to translate them in a timely way. It defeats the Mayor's intention to have translation available.
- Find a way to have Chinatown schools be able to meet collectively to share resources – difficult because the splits are now institutionalized.

2) Select Chair(s) for the next meeting. We couldn't decide on a new chair so K Webster agreed to chair the next one.

3) Principal Woo agreed to host the next meeting at PS 130 on a Monday between 10am to 12pm (we can find an evening venue that works for the group at some later point).

Outreach: We need broader input. We hope to send out these minutes to get others thinking about the issues. If people can't attend meetings, at least we could hear from their vantage point.

Principal Woo will send out to the various Chinatown school Principals for the input and thinking.

Elisa (from Chinatown Youth Initiative) will contact other Youth programs (University Settlement, CPC, Henry Street Settlement, etc.)

Diane Chong will send out to other Parent Coordinators in Chinatown.

Others will send out to people they know who might have interest.

More teacher input would be useful.