

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE

DECEMBER 2007

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Gotbaum: Phoenix Officials Never Reached Out Following Daughter-In-Law's Death

December 04, 2007

In an extensive interview on Tuesday's "Inside City Hall," [Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum](#) says Arizona officials have never spoken to her after her daughter-in-law, Carol Gotbaum, died while in police custody in the Phoenix Airport in September.

Watch a clip from the interview by clicking on the Real Video link above.

Speaking to political anchor Dominic Carter in her first extended comments about the case, Gotbaum says Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon never contacted her in the wake of the incident.

Gotbaum also said of her daughter-in-law's death: "It was unnecessary and if someone had showed her a little kindness, it wouldn't have happened."

Reached by NY1, a spokesman for the mayor confirms Gordon hasn't spoken to Gotbaum about the incident and has no plans to do so.

See the full interview on "Inside City Hall" at 7 p.m. or 10 p.m.

Here is a transcript of two portions of the interview:

Carter: Have you heard directly from the mayor of Phoenix? Has the mayor called you? Has the mayor -- the mayor hasn't called you?

Gotbaum: No.

Carter: You are telling me from one elected official to the other, a common courtesy?

Gotbaum: No, I've heard absolutely nothing.

Carter: The mayor of Phoenix has not called the public advocate of New York city?

Gotbaum: Our mayor has been wonderful -- visited the family, been just totally supportive. Our mayor, Mayor Bloomberg.

Gotbaum: It was all unnecessary. Again, it was unnecessary and I think if someone had showed her a little kindness, it wouldn't have happened.

Carter: What would you have liked to have seen them do?

Gotbaum: Well, I would have liked it to have never had happened. And I would have liked someone to put their arm around her and say, you know, 'Let's go sit down and talk about this' and I think the outcome would have been different, Dominic.

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DAILY NEWS

News Blog



Elizabeth Benjamin
THE DAILY POLITICS



December 5, 2007

Randy Roast For Randi

In the wake of her recent public disclosure that she is a lesbian (a fact that was evidently not a secret, but also not something she had previously discussed so openly), a number of roasters at UFT President Randi Weingarten's 50th Birthday celebration last night couldn't resist ribbing her about her sexuality.

Mayor Bloomberg, for example, when discussing the similarities between Weingarten and others who share her Dec. 18 birthday, said:

"Like Christina Aguilera, she's a superstar performer (cue small shimmy from the union prez), like Robert Moses, she's literally changed the lives of 8 million New Yorkers, and, like Brad Pitt she really loves beautiful women."

Bloomberg also said he had puzzled over what to get Weingarten as a present, saying he knew enough to stay away from anything too pricey, joking: "I know how you hate merit pay." (See that clip after the jump).

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, one of several Democrats eyeing a run for the office Bloomberg will vacate in 2009, went one step further than the mayor on the gay front. While listing things that were popular back when Weingarten was born, Markowitz noted what he deemed must have been her "favorite" TV show: "Leave It to Beaver."

Markowitz's likely opponents, Council Speaker Christine Quinn (who is also openly gay) and Comptroller Bill Thompson, played it safe, avoiding any mention of sex and sticking instead to benign topics like Weingarten's effusive manner at press conferences (Quinn) and the fact that she is now eligible to join the AARP (Thompson).

Weingarten's chronic lateness was a well-visited topic, as was her close relationship with Schools Chancellor Joel Klein.

UFT's Brooklyn Borough Representative Howard Schoor suggested that Weingarten abandon her life

In a testament to Weingarten's clout, the list of roasters and attendees read like a who's who of Democratic and labor politics.

Sen. Ted Kennedy and former Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew both sent videos. ACORN's Bertha Lewis, with apologies to Margolies, referred to Weingarten as "my girlfriend." The Rev. Al Sharpton showed up wearing a beige-and-white-striped lounging set, a number of state senators and Assembly members were present (Schneiderman, Savino, Padavan, Glick), as were a slew of Council members (Yassky, DeBlasio, Katz, Lappin, Liu) - these are the ones I spotted, I'm sure there were more - not to mention Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and Peter Yarrow, of Peter, Paul & Mary, who sang "Happy Birthday."

The money raised at the roast went to support causes of Weingarten's choosing: The Council for Unity, the Justice Resource Center and UFT's elementary and secondary charter schools.

The NEW YORK Sun



Parents Press for ACORN Principal's Ouster

BY ELIZABETH GREEN - Staff Reporter of the Sun

December 6, 2007

URL: <http://www.nysun.com/article/67597>

The school accountability game is getting more intense: The city announced two more school closures yesterday, and students and parents in Brooklyn's Bushwick neighborhood are arguing a school's F grade means its principal should go.

Parents at the ACORN High School for Social Justice today are releasing a report describing a school where gang recruiting is ongoing; where just a quarter of teachers stay more than two years, and where even a low graduation rate, 37%, is propped up by many students who pass merely by showing up to class.

Morale is so low, the report says, that at last year's graduation the valedictorian, Sharifa Noble, stood up and declared: "ACORN has let me down." The remark prompted a chorus of boos aimed at the principal, Joseph Parker.

The president of the school's parent teacher association, Dawn Beckles, said Mr. Parker, a graduate of the city's vaunted Principal Leadership Academy, scares teachers with a "prison mentality"; the report said he refers to his administrators as "wardens."

The school's atmosphere suffered as Mr. Parker brought in a flood of inexperienced teachers through the city's Teaching Fellows program and failed to give them support, an art teacher, Maria Pascual, said.

Mr. Parker could not be reached for comment.

A Department of Education spokeswoman, Maibe Gonzalez-Fuentes, said school officials are mulling their options; like other schools rated F, ACORN could lose its principal or could be closed and reopened under a new staff and name.

The city yesterday boosted its schools closing list to eight, adding a Bronx elementary school, P.S. 220, and the Far Rockaway High School in Queens. Officials have said the total number of closures this year will be between 14 and 20.

The city's public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum, criticized school officials for sending the news to parents in fliers tucked inside their children's backpacks. Ms. Gotbaum said failing schools should be retooled in consultation with parents, through public hearings.

The community group that helped create the Bushwick school, ACORN, will call for Mr. Parker to be removed immediately at a press conference today, its executive director, Bertha Lewis, said. Ms. Lewis said she has been complaining about Mr. Parker to the city for two years.

DAILY NEWS

Queens high school, Bronx elementary school to close due to poor report cards

By CARRIE MELAGO
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Thursday, December 6th 2007, 4:00 AM

A Queens high school and a Bronx elementary school are on the chopping block after getting poor report cards, officials said Wednesday.

Far Rockaway High School, beloved by alums but suffering from low graduation rates, and Public School 220 in the Bronx were the latest schools to learn they're being shuttered.

Six other schools were told Tuesday they'll be closed or phased out as a result of poor performance on the first-ever report cards.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum yesterday criticized the administration for not consulting school communities or holding public meetings before making decisions.

"These closings have a devastating and destabilizing effect on the community," she said. "The DOE shouldn't make these decisions without input from parents and the larger community."

But Mayor Bloomberg defended the closures, saying the schools needed a new start.

"We just can't sit here and let a school that does not do what it's supposed to do continue on its merry way," he said.

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How not to become a slave to credit cards

Gotbaum wants new curriculum

By Michele De Meglio

The city Department of Education places a strong emphasis on English and math and now a politician wants financial literacy added to the mix.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum says the DOE should create a mandatory high school curriculum focused on financial planning to teach students about budgeting their money, investing techniques, and avoiding credit card debt.

The instruction is necessary because many students amass significant credit card debt when in college, giving them a financial setback as they begin their careers, Gotbaum explained.

According to the public advocate's office, one-fifth of college seniors with credit cards owed between \$3,000 and \$7,000 in 2005.

"Mounting credit card debt, little or no savings — these are realities facing New York City students, and in part because we're not giving them basic financial knowledge," the public advocate said. "It is critical for high school students to know how to make smart money decisions before they enter college or the workforce. The earlier we give students these life skills, the better off they will be."

The curriculum should teach teenagers, who can apply for credit cards at 18 years of age, to avoid high-interest credit cards, and to choose checking accounts instead of check cashing centers, which charge high fees, Gotbaum said.

Saving for retirement would also be discussed.

Brooklyn parents said high school students need to understand the ins and outs of credit cards before graduating.

"This is something that's basic knowledge that every individual should have," said James Dandridge, president of District 18's Community Education

and Canarsie.

"When you go to the colleges you see people outside hawking credit cards," he continued. "If you don't have that pre-counseling, you can definitely fall prey to predatory lending."

"I think they should get some kind of knowledge," said Mario Aguila, president of District 14's CEC, which spans Williamsburg and Greenpoint. "People just go into college and it's sign this application and here's a credit card. They have no idea what they are getting into."

The DOE says a new financial literacy curriculum is unnecessary because schools already offer money-managing instruction.

"The Department of Education has partnered with organizations to provide financial literacy programs, including North Fork Bank, Merrill Lynch and the non-profit Working in Support of Education (WISE)," explained DOE spokesperson Maibe González Fuentes. "Our high school curriculum is designed to prepare students for college and the workplace, and to enable them to be responsible citizens. Many offer a concentration of business courses that include financial literacy components."

Since these courses are taught during the school day, there's no need to create an additional financial curriculum," asserted Carmen Colon, co-founder and former president of the Association of New York City Education Councils and former president of District 13's CEC.

"It'd be a waste of time," she said.

"I can understand why Betsy Gotbaum thinks it's important," Colon added, but, "we're much more in need of career counseling and much more in need of engaging activities outside of the scope of the school day for our middle school and high school students."

DEC 6, 2007

Queens Tribune

Queens Deadline

December 6, 2007

Child Deaths In Shelters High In Queens

By JULIET WERNER

The Department of Homeless Services works with 150 non-profits and other organizations to provide shelter to New York City's homeless. As of 2006, DHS-approved shelters housed 7,117 families, including 12,597 children,

A report released by the Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's office last week shed light on the increasing rate of child fatalities in these homeless shelters. Of the City's 133 shelters that cater to families, only 12 are in Queens. However, 25 percent of child fatalities between the years 2004 and 2006 occurred in our borough's shelters. Manhattan's shelters accounted for 35 percent, the Bronx 30 percent.

Of the 20 children who died in that time period, 17 were 1 or younger and three were ages 1 to 5. According to the Public Advocate's Senior Policy Advocate Mark Woltman, the office chose to focus on those fatalities in order to highlight the danger posed to children not yet of school-age, those

who are not under the watchful eye of teachers, principals and social workers.

The Public Advocate's office did not want to point fingers at specific shelters. However, State records show Homes for the Homeless' Saratoga Interfaith Family Shelter and Salvation Army's Carlton House - both in Queens - were sites of child fatalities.

The report also outlined several recommendations. Firstly, Gotbaum proposed the Administration for Children Services create a shelter division of Child Protective Services in order to better monitor the pasts of families entering the shelter system.

Following the death of Nixzmary Brown in January 2006, ACS hired 20 veteran law enforcement investigators to supplement CPS staff. ACS recently proposed hiring 100 additional veteran law enforcement investigators, but the Public Advocate's office is recommending that ACS also create a program whereby CPS shelter divisions

in each borough receive borough-specific investigative expert consultants.

In addition, a tracking system was suggested so that numbers of cases of child maltreatment could be well-known and made available to the public.

Gotbaum was particularly fervent about the need for a risk-based assessment tool for families staying in the shelters in order to better allocate preventative services. Cases, both substantiated and unsubstantiated, should be taken into consideration.

Finally, Gotbaum suggested that DHS more thoroughly educate parents in the shelter system on the dangers of sharing a bed.

"Improper sleeping position and arrangement of infants was a frequent factor in the deaths of children living within the shelter system," the report read. "Half of the 20

child fatalities involved infants who died while sleeping in unsafe conditions, mainly co-sleeping with an adult in a bed."

The Administration of Children Services immediately came out with a statement, criticizing the Public Advocate's report.

"An ongoing working relationship with Children's Services would yield more accurate information instead of these reports that are often misguided and misinformed," ACS Spokeswoman Sheila Stainback said.

According to Stainback, ACS communicates regularly with DHS, investigates histories of neglect and abuse of families applying for shelter and provides adequate access to social workers. In addition, ACS said it has increased supervision of individual rooms and its education on the issues of safe sleeping Shaken Baby Syndrome and window guards

Queens Ledger



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Advocate: Shelters Are Killing Our Kids

By PHIL GURE

The office of Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum has released a report stating children in homeless shelters are dying at an alarming rate, especially those belonging to families with a history in the child welfare system.

At a press conference this past Thursday, Gotbaum said the number of deaths of children ages five or younger have been on the rise since 2003, with a total of 20 due to suspicious circumstances. Of that number, 17 of the victims, or 85 percent, were one year old or younger.

The deaths, five of which occurred in Queens' shelters and two in Brooklyn, have been attributed to physical abuse, accidents, or natural causes. By making suggestions to the Administration for Children Services (ACS), the public advocate said she hopes to change how the city deals with children in homeless shelters.

"We're trying to protect and support the children in the shelter system," she said. "Perhaps we can predict what causes these kinds of deaths.

So far, her office has recommended ACS create a shelter division of Child Protective Services,

which would respond to reports of child abuse and neglect within the shelter system. The public advocate would also like to see the agency track and report shelter-related child welfare statistics, and hire veteran law enforcement investigators with expertise in that field.

"The reason is so you can do a thorough investigating of those who may have a problem," Gotbaum said.

Following the death of seven-year-old Nixmary Brown in Brooklyn last year, ACS's existing investigative practices were deemed inadequate by the City Council. As a result, approximately 100 police officers have since been hired to consult with caseworkers.

Gotbaum also called on ACS to collaborate with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to create a risk-based assessment tool for families staying in the shelter system. The two agencies would look for risk factors such as parents abused as children, cases of substantiated or unsubstantiated child abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, and persistent homelessness.

One very important statistic is whether the family is already known to ACS. According to Gotbaum -



PUBLIC ADVOCATE BETSY GOTBAUM

who called the shelter system a perfect place to create bold new means of intervention, given children there are already under the city's care - only two of the reported 20 fatalities belonged to families who were not known.

"If a family is known to ACS, it should be a red flag," the public advocate said.

After determining risk factors, she said families can be referred to various preventive services. For example, individuals with a history of drug abuse can be provided counsel-

ing. The public advocate also noted seven of the deaths are suspected to be caused by improper sleeping position, specifically co-sleeping, in which both the parent and infant are in bed together. She called on DHS to distribute literature about the dangers of co-sleeping, and said shelter facilities are supposed to provide cribs.

"We have to sit down with parents and tell them, 'Do not sleep with the infant.' It's very dangerous," Gotbaum said.

The NEW YORK Sun



NEW YORK

City Could Boost Care for Employed Caregivers

By BENJAMIN SARLIN

Special to the Sun

December 6, 2007

Employers could face stricter anti-discrimination laws, as the City Council is considering legislation to expand protection of employees who also serve as caregivers.

Under a bill authored by the city's public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum, employees who are taking care of children, elderly relatives, or disabled family members would receive legal protections akin to those regarding race, gender, or religion.

The legislation will be discussed before the council's General Welfare Committee today.

Critics worry the legislation would create unfair dilemmas for employers and leave them overly vulnerable to lawsuits.

"Employers I think are scared of the idea that all of a sudden employees who have kids, which is a large percentage, will be able to raise legal questions if they want to break attendance rules or company policies," a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, Walter Olson, said yesterday. "It's very poorly defined in terms of what the employer has to do to have discriminated."

Council Member Bill de Blasio, the chairman of the

General Welfare Committee, said yesterday the bill was a necessary protection for working families.

"At some point in our lives, many of us will have to take care of a child or an ailing parent," Mr. de Blasio said in a statement. "People shouldn't have to worry about about losing their job on top of all of that, and they need and deserve the best protection and support the City can offer."

The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued guidelines earlier this year urging employers to take care to avoid discriminating against caregivers.

Gay City

WORLD AIDS DAY MARKED IN NEW YORK CITY

12/06/2007

As it has done every December 1 since 1995, Housing Works, the AIDS services group, maintained a vigil at the south end of City Hall Park and read what it estimated as more than 100,000 names of those who have died of AIDS. According to the city department of health, more than 92,000 New York City residents have died from the pandemic since it was first identified in 1981. Among those reading names were state Health Commissioner Richard Daines, MD, city Comptroller William Thompson, Jr., and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum.

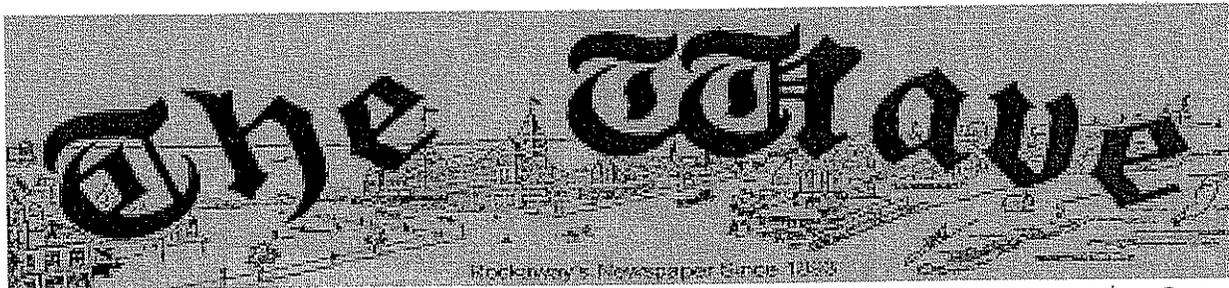
On a promising note, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn joined New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation president Alan D. Aviles (seen at the podium with Gouverneur Healthcare Services executive director Mendy Hagler and Manhattan Councilman Robert Jackson) for an announcement that the city's public hospitals have seen a 116 percent increase in HIV tests in the past three fiscal years, from 62,023 to 134,000. Dr. Thomas Frieden, the city health commissioner, has made increasing routine HIV testing a priority, citing figures that roughly three in ten New Yorkers who are HIV-positive first learn their status when they develop full-blown AIDS symptoms, meaning they had been living with an infectious virus for perhaps a decade or more without knowing it.

Advocates also held their annual march from the LGBT Community Center to Union Square on World AIDS Day, expressing both their anger and their commitment to continue fighting. The march followed a concert at the Community Center featuring a program of composers lost to AIDS including Chris DeBlasio, Lee Gannon, Deolus Husband, Robert Savage, and Nicholas Schaffner. The Downtown Chamber & Opera Players performed with Mimi Stern-Wolfe conducting and playing piano; Richard Barone on guitar and vocals; Gilles Denizot singing baritone; Kristin Norderval singing soprano; Andrew Bolotowsky on flute and piccolo; Michael Nicholas on violin; David Hopkins on clarinet and bass clarinet; Daniel Barrett on cello; and Alan Moverman on piano. The

ensemble performed the same concert again on December 2 at St. Marks in the Bowery.

- Paul Schindler

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December 7, 2007

FRHS Going... Going... Gone!

By Howard Schwach

More than 110 years after it began in a wing of PS 42 in Arverne, Far Rockaway High School is slated for extinction over the next two years. The school's present site will morph into a multi-school complex to be called the Far Rockaway Educational Campus, school officials say.



The first faculty of Far Rockaway High School, circa 1897, sits in front of the school.

"The school hasn't been serving student needs for years," Melanie Meyers, a spokesperson for the Department of Education told The Wave on Wednesday. "We are phasing out the school because drastic changes are needed in order for the school to serve students well."

Meyers said that the renamed educational complex would include several schools, including the two that already share the Ba: 25 Street building with FRHS.

They are the Frederick Douglass Academy VI High School, which enrolls 347 students in grades 9 to 12, and the Knowledge And Power Preparatory Academy VI, which enrolls 159 students in grades 6 and 7. FRHS currently enrolls 865 students in grades 9 through 12. Each of the schools has its own principal, administrative staff and teachers.

A new, small school, probably a middle school, will open in September 2008, officials said. It will be joined in September of 2009 by a new high school unit.

The phase out of FRHS will begin in September, when no new freshman students will be enrolled. It will take three years, officials say, for the building, and the name, to be completely phased out, because students who began at the school last September have the right to remain there through graduation. The last graduating class from FRHS will leave in June of 2011.



Students at the school in its early years show pride in FRHS.

The reaction to the word that the high school would be closing was varied.

One alumnus told The Wave that the school had been stagnant for years and that something drastic had to happen.

"All the school has graduated for years are felons," the alumnus, who asked not to be identified, said.

When told of the closings, however, Steve Berman, one-time Seahorse quarterback and a star pitcher on the baseball team in the 1950s, said that it was sad that a school with such a rich history was coming to an end.

"There is so much history there, Nobel Laureates, city championships, tens of thousands of alumni," Berman said. "You'd think that they could do something to keep the name alive."

A present staff member, who asked not to be identified, argued that the Department of Education had not done enough to help the school stay alive.

"There is a good core group of young teachers in the building who have been trying work with the kids," the staffer said. "From day one, however, all the support has gone to the other schools in the building. We were neglected, both physically and educationally. I think that this was the plan from day one. If so, they should have been

more honest with us. The DOE supports its pet projects and the rest of us are left out in the cold and then discarded."

"What's going to happen to the at-risk kids who go here," he asked. "What about the English language learners and the special ed kids who can't go to the small schools? What will happen with them?"

City Councilman James Sanders, FRHS class of 1975, said that his alma mater is "near and dear" to him, but that he would not "let his sentiment stand in the way if the DOE proves to him that the school must be closed."

Sanders said on Thursday that he was calling for an emergency meeting at the school with Department of Education officials to explain why it must be closed and why the community had no input into the process. He was still awaiting confirmation on meeting specifics at press time, he said.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum criticized the Department of Education for not consulting the impacted communities before making the cut. She argues that the DOE should have held public hearings in Rockaway before actually making the announcement that the school would be phased out.

"These closings have a devastating and destabilizing effect on the community," she said. "The DOE shouldn't make these decisions without input from parents and the larger community."

Mayor Mike Bloomberg, pointing out that the school received a D on its recent school progress report, said, "We can't just sit here and let a school that does not do what it's supposed to do to continue on its merry way."

Meyers said that all of the schools in the building would contribute to the present sports program and that the campus would field teams in several sports, as they do now.

Reader Comments

No comments have been posted. Be the first!

DAILY NEWS

DAILY NEWS 12/7/07

NY Minute

'90 slay retrial acquit

DAVID LEMUS, who spent 14 years behind bars for the 1990 slaying of a bouncer at the former Palladium nightclub, was acquitted by a jury yesterday.

Lemus and a second man, Olmedo Hidalgo, were convicted in 1992 of murdering bouncer Marcus Peterson, a 23-year-old Coney Island resident. But their convictions were overturned in 2005, and prosecutors opted to drop the case against Hidalgo.

**Barbara Ross
and Larry McShane**

Docs to poor burned

DOCTORS WHO treat the poor are getting short-changed on payments from health insurance companies, according to a report out today.

A study by the Primary Care Development Corporation found that city health-care facilities in struggling neighborhoods lose between \$28 and \$226 per patient visit for routine care, like physicals and the flu, because insurance companies don't cover the full cost. City Controller William Thompson and

Council Speaker Christine Quinn called for a reform of the system.

Kathleen Lucadamo

Poker slay suspect

A FLORIDA man was indicted by a Manhattan grand jury yesterday on charges that he killed 55-year-old Frank DeSena on Nov. 2 during a robbery of a private poker parlor near Fifth Ave. and 28th St.

The indictment of Steven Perez, 21, of Tampa comes three weeks after William DelValle was charged with the murder. DelValle was released after another grand jury decided there was not enough evidence to indict him.

Barbara Ross

Water liens, not hike

A THREATENED 18% increase in water rates was flushed away yesterday in a City Hall deal that saves consumers \$200 million in the next six months.

Under the agreement, the mayor won the right to issue water liens against property owners to collect unpaid water bills, which total up to \$590 million. Only 85% of water customers are paying their bills on a regular basis.

Frank Lombardi

Caregivers protected

PUBLIC ADVOCATE Betsy Gotbaum and city lawmakers introduced a bill yesterday that would protect New Yorkers who alter schedules to care for sick family members.

The bill is meant to close a loophole in the city Human Rights Law so that employers can't discriminate against workers who need flexible schedules to care for sick relatives. The Federal Medical Leave Act allows three months off in such situations.

Kathleen Lucadamo

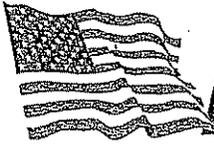
Train kills woman

A WOMAN riding between subway cars fell to the tracks and was crushed to death by the train in the Bronx last night, police said.

The victim was on a southbound 2 train when she slipped off between the E. Tremont Ave. and 174th St. stations about 10:30 p.m., a transit worker said.

Her name was not immediately released.

**Edgar Sandoval
and Tanangachi Mfumi**



NEW YORK POST

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CENTS

LATE CITY FINAL

Betsy: Watch for kid abuse

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum yesterday urged New Yorkers to report any suspected cases of child abuse in the wake of the death of Tkai Marcelle, 3.

"Someone heard screams and shouts at 3 a.m. We're asking New Yorkers to really think about the most vulnerable of all of us," Gotbaum said.

The girl was found beaten to death in her Bedford-Stuyvesant home Wednesday.

Her father, Jason, 33, has been charged with murder.

Frankie Edozien
DEC 10, 2007

Carrión to Run for Comptroller in 2009

Posted by Michael Clancy at 3:05 PM, December 13, 2007



By John DeSio

For the past few years Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrión Jr. has publicly flirted with the idea of running for mayor in 2009.

When he appeared at events with Mayor Michael Bloomberg, he would jokingly rattle off the exact number of days Bloomberg had left in his administration. But with a crowded field of heavyweight candidates like Rep. Anthony Weiner, Comptroller Bill Thompson, City Council Speaker

Christine Quinn and maybe even Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, pundits wondered just how Carrión would be able to blaze a trail to electoral committee.

With this morning's announcement that he would now begin counting down the days until Thompson left office, the borough president's political stock has risen dramatically, with top consultants practically declaring him the man to beat in 2009 in the city Comptroller race.

Carrión made his electoral intentions clear in a speech before the business-advocacy group the Association for a Better New York. Though he did not broach many financial issues that may face him as comptroller, he concluded his speech by ending his rumored campaign for mayor and starting his confirmed campaign to be the City's fiscal watchdog.

"Let me conclude by keeping my promise to end the speculation about 2009," said Carrión according to his prepared remarks. "That New York I describe needs good stewardship of its affairs. I have taken on increasing levels of responsibility to help build that city. As a student of cities and of the economy I am ready to take on even more responsibility. And so I have decided to run for...NYC Comptroller in 2009."

Carrión will face just as many opponents in the race for comptroller as he would have for mayor, if not many more. City Council Members Melinda Katz, David Yassky and David Weprin, as well as Assemblyman Jim Brennan, have all announced their intentions to run for the seat. Another City Council Member, Simcha Felder, is expected to run as well. But Carrión brings stature to the race, said Democratic consultant Hank Sheinkopf, president of Sheinkopf Communications, and begins the race in the top tier of candidates.

"He's very formidable," said Sheinkopf, who added that the Bronx beep is well-liked throughout the City, competent, and would be a minority candidate in a majority-minority City. All these things, he added, give Carrión an excellent resume with which to kick-off his campaign. "He can do what Fernando Ferrer was incapable of and win a Citywide election." Another Democratic consultant, Joseph Mercurio of National Political Services, agreed.

"He's a strong candidate. I think he's probably at the top of the field," said Mercurio, who put him in a group alone with Katz, with Yassky sitting right behind the two. Carrión, like Katz, is an excellent fundraiser, said Mercurio, and both will likely raise the maximum amount of money for the race. For more on Carrión's fundraising, read Elevator Diplomacy about how a family that owns a Bronx elevator company dropped \$30,000 into his war chest right after receiving \$5 million for "air rights" over their East 153rd Street property to make way for the renovation of an old pedestrian bridge to the new Yankee Stadium.

And with Carrión potentially cornering the market on voters from his home borough and Latinos across the City, he comes to the race with a strong base, especially against multiple candidates.

"He's cornering two constituencies, Hispanics and people from The Bronx, and that is a pretty big piece of the pie," said

DAILY NEWS

Join march against domestic violence

Thursday, December 13th 2007, 4:00 AM

Domestic violence is a despicable crime. And an increasing number of concerned Brooklyn residents have decided to do something about it.

This Saturday at noon, hundreds of them are expected to join the Central Brooklyn AntiViolence Coalition in a march against this terrible scourge. It will start at Borough Hall in Brooklyn and end at City Hall in Manhattan.

"We have been dealing with the issue of violent crime, all kinds of violent crime, for a long time," said activist Taharka Robinson, founder of the Central Brooklyn Anti-Violence Coalition.

"Domestic violence is a crime that happens every day, and that's what this march is all about."

Domestic violence is not an occurrence exclusive to Brooklyn, of course. It is a problem of epidemic proportions that affects mainly women but also children and seniors of all races, religions and social strata.

Factors such as cultural influences, immigration status, poverty and language barriers make a terrible situation even worse for immigrant women and children. All too often, they endure the abuse in silence.

This is why marches like the one stepping off in Brooklyn on Saturday, that help to raise awareness about this crime, are so important.

Once you know that more than 2.5 million women suffer physical, sexual or emotional abuse every year nationwide, the importance - and the urgency - of taking effective measures against a crime usually committed behind closed doors become evident.

In our own state, there were 50,088 reported cases of domestic violence last year. The abuse resulted in 133 homicides, 28 of them to children, according to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

Teens also are being increasingly victimized: One in five girls younger than 18 is in an abusive relationship - and the number is going up.

Caroline C. was one of those girls. Hard as it may be to believe, she told Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum that by the time she was 17, she already had endured three years of abuse at the hands of a violent boyfriend.

Grace Perez, a respected community activist who was the Violence Intervention Program executive director for many years, has an explanation for this kind of abuse.

"Traditionally, women have been treated as the property of men," she said. "And that's one of the reasons for domestic violence."

But although they are the ones subjected to the brunt of the violence, women are not the only victims. According to the Violence Intervention Program, 50% to 70% of men who abuse their wives and girlfriends also abuse their children.

The numbers are staggering: At least 3.3 million children ages 3 to 19 are at risk of parental violence every year.

Abuse of the elderly also is a growing problem. One of every 20 Americans age 65 and older is a victim of abuse. The exact rates are unclear because many victims don't seek help.

Yet there is agreement between law enforcement officials and social service workers that such abuse is a growing problem and that reported cases are likely just a fraction of the actual incidence of abuse.

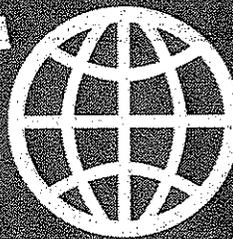
"As long as there is domestic violence, we will keep working against it," Robinson said. "And against all kinds of violence."

For information about the march, call (718) 773-5974 or (718) 771-0020, or e-mail ucg718@aol.com.

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NEW YORK • THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2007

Toxic turf concerns get Council hearing

PATRICK ARDEN
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MANHATTAN. Ten years after artificial turf began to appear in parks here, the City Council will hold its first oversight hearing on the subject this morning.

While the Parks Dept. says 77 synthetic-turf fields have been installed since 1997, all but a handful were put down under the Bloomberg administration. Another 23 are in design and construction. The city claims turf is more cost-effective than grass.

The vast majority of these fields belong to the new breed of artificial turf, composed of plastic blades

"Let's put a moratorium on new installation until we have more data."

Landrigan

poking out of rubber pellets made from ground up tires.

The City Council hearing comes amid a growing chorus of concern.

Last year a study by the Italian minister of health called synthetic turf potentially carcinogenic. Other studies have said the rubber contains polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which have been associated with cancer, and phthalates, which have been linked to allergies in children.

One survey of local parks by Rutgers University in 2006 found pel-

lets containing PAHs at levels considered hazardous by the Dept. of Environmental Conservation. That study was initiated by CUNY psychologist Bill Crain.

Crain's interest was sparked in 2005, when four acres of artificial turf were installed in Riverside Park at a cost of \$3.9 million. Crain was rebuffed when he tried to interest the Parks Dept., so he approached Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum. Now the city's Health Dept. is conducting its own research and expects to release a review next year.

When Crain's research came to light, Metro approached Mount Sinai's Dr. Philip Landrigan, an authority on environmental threats to children. He recognized the hazards of the chemicals, but could not judge the level of risk. Mostly he was worried about children ingesting the rubber crumbs or dust.

Now Landrigan supports the six-month moratorium on turf installation introduced by state Assemblyman Steve Englebright, D-Suffolk County. Englebright wants state-funded studies into the health and environmental consequences.

"I wouldn't rip up the fields," Landrigan said. "But let's put a moratorium on new installation until we have more data."

PARENTS, COUNCIL STILL ANGRY ABOUT SCHOOL GRADES

HELEN ZELON

Stakeholders vent, and the city's Chief Accountability Officer parries, at a hearing on the controversial new Progress Reports. > *By Helen Zelon*

The city Department of Education's school grading system, which has led to surprise high and low scores and the planned closure of some "failing" schools, received an F for frustrating and a C for confusing from advocates and lawmakers in a City Council hearing to examine the grading process last week.

Council's education committee heard from a top DOE official, city Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, education advocates and others on Dec. 10, five weeks after grades for some 1,200 schools in the system were made public, and at the end of a week when the first school closures were announced. The hearing ended with Councilmembers, parents and other stakeholders still wondering why all 14 schools slated to close are in the some of the city's poorest neighborhoods, confused about what the school "report cards" reflect about a school's quality, unclear about what factors the reports weigh and reward, and baffled at how some schools identified by the city and state as "top-performing" or "proficient" could have earned Fs and be destined for closure.

On top of that, many resent that they learned about the closures "by flyers stuffed in backpacks," as Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum testified at the hearing, rather than being involved in the decisions.

"The Department should not make these decisions without input from parents and the larger community," Gotbaum said, maintaining that despite legal obligations to "consult stakeholders before making changes," neither community district education councils (CECs) – the parent/community panels that oversee local schools – nor other parent bodies were invited into the decision-making process this fall.

Representatives from the principals' and teachers unions were not at the table, either. "They do not consult with us," testified Ernest A. Logan, president of the principals' union. "They make their own decisions and notify us. We're informed after the fact."

Committee chairman Robert Jackson, a Manhattan Democrat, confronted James Liebman, chief accountability officer of the DOE's Office of Accountability and the main architect of the progress reports. "Were CECs consulted prior to the determination of the closings?"

"CECs were not consulted before the announcement. They are being consulted now," after the fact, Liebman said. "The Chancellor and the School Leadership Team have the responsibility and the obligation to step in ... [in cases of] severe educational failure," he testified.

Some parents and school leaders view this as the latest sign that their voices don't count. Judging from the scene at the Council hearing, they're not wrong: After a three-hour hearing, parents and advocates were permitted to address the "panel," which by then consisted of Chairman Jackson, a legal counsel monitoring the proceedings, and 13 empty chairs. Councilmembers, eager to tangle with Liebman while television cameras were rolling, had left the chamber, one by one.



NYC Board Hikes Some Commuter Fares
By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press Writer
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DECEMBER 19, 2007

NEW YORK — The cost of riding the rails _ and driving into Manhattan _ will go up a little bit for the vast majority of New York's 8 million commuters.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority voted Wednesday to raise fares for monthly and weekly passes while keeping the single-use bus and subway fare at \$2.

Fares on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Commuter Railroad will also rise slightly as the agency seeks to offset \$6 billion in deficits over the next four years.

The last time the base New York City bus and subway fare went up was in 2003, when it was increased to \$2 from \$1.50.

Only 14 percent of subway and bus riders pay the \$2 single-use fare, but transportation officials argue they are among the poorest customers and are least able to afford an increase.

"Mom and Pop can still get on the bus or the train for two bucks," board member Norman Seabrook said at Wednesday's meeting. "I'm happy."

The rest of the bus and subway riders use either unlimited passes or bonus pay-per-ride MetroCards, and their per-ride costs will rise by about 10 cents.

The board voted to increase monthly unlimited-ride Metrocards to \$81 from \$76 and weekly cards to \$25 from \$24.

If a commuter takes the bus or subway to work five days a week plus one extra round trip per week, his or her fare with the 30-day card now works out to between \$1.46 and \$1.58 per ride. It will go up to \$1.56 to \$1.69 per ride under the new fare structure, which goes into effect in March.

On the suburban rail lines, fares will rise by about 4 percent. For example, a monthly pass from Tarrytown to Grand Central Terminal on Metro-North would rise from \$213 to \$221.

E-Z Pass tolls on MTA bridges and tunnels including the Midtown Tunnel, the Throgs Neck Bridge and the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel will go up by 3.8 percent.

The MTA had proposed increasing base fares but backed off last month after an additional \$220 million was found in its updated budget forecasts, with a portion of the funds coming from an increase in anticipated ridership.

Riders' advocates and elected officials decried Wednesday's vote.

"While keeping the base fare may help a tiny number of New York City residents who don't use discounted cards, the main beneficiary will be tourists who, let's face it, aren't the mass transit users who need a fare break," Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer said.

New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, speaking to the board before the vote, said, "New Yorkers cannot afford the increase. They just can't afford it."

Gene Russianoff of the Straphangers Campaign gave the board 4,000 anti-fare increase petition signatures tied up with a red bow.

MTA officials were unmoved.

"Today's vote is an important step in putting the transit system on a sound financial footing," MTA chairman H. Dale Hemmerdinger said. "It establishes the practice of smaller and more regular fare increases."

The New York Times

BLOG

December 20, 2007, 3:20 pm

A YIMBY Crowd Rallies on the Lower East Side

By MATHEW R. WARREN

It's not every day that a community rallies in support of a chain store. But that is what a group of Lower East Side and Chinatown residents did today, in support of the Pathmark at 227 Cherry Street. Call them YIMBY's. Yes in my backyard.

Of course, they are opposed to something — namely, the possibility that the supermarket will be sold for \$250 million to make way for luxury condos. About 100 demonstrators armed with petitions gathered at the store, holding signs that read “Stop Gentrification!” and chanting, “\$250 million for condos we can't live in, that's crazy!”

Harvey Epstein, a Lower East Side resident who is director of the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center, said, “If they put in luxury condos it's going to bring in higher income people. It will further spur gentrification and result in the displacement of our low-income people.”

The protest was organized by O.U.R. Waterfront (Organizing and Uniting Residents on the Waterfront), an alliance of community-based organizations. The demonstrators were joined by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, and representatives from the offices of State Senator Martin Conner and City Councilman Alan Gerson.

“As elected officials, it is our job to listen to the voices of the community and act in their best interest,” Ms. Gotbaum said. “We need this Pathmark to remain open as a symbol of our commitment to listening to New York's communities.”

The immediate area includes more than 20 public housing residences, and the Pathmark on Cherry Street has served the neighborhood's lower-income population for more than two decades.

“If I had to go someplace else, it would be at least six blocks away, and it would be very difficult for me,” said Gussie Lamar, 84, who lives just across the street from the supermarket and uses a wheelchair.

Not only would they lose a supermarket in an area with few consumer options, residents said, but they also depend on the Pathmark's affordable prices, which they said they would be unable to find at other locations.

Ed Novack, 71, a lifelong resident of the Lower East Side, held up a receipt that listed his total savings from using his Pathmark card for the year at \$1,116.03.

“I can't afford to go shopping anywhere else,” said Mr. Novak, who lives on a fixed income.

GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side), a community group, handed out surveys to residents for a report they plan to present the Community Board 3.

“Residents are generally kicked out of the process of deciding what comes in and what goes out of their community,” said Angel Seda, 26, a community organizer for GOLES, who was raised in the nearby Jacob Riis Houses. “This survey is a community assessment to show what the people want in area.”

Workers at the Pathmark declined to comment about the protest, but a manager, who would not give his name, said he had yet to hear anything definitive about the supermarket closing.

The New York Times

December 21, 2007

City Urged to Restore Stop on Extension of No. 7 Train

By CHARLES V. BAGLI

Two years after the Far West Side was rezoned for large-scale development, a growing number of elected officials, environmentalists and community groups are questioning the city's and state's plans for the area.

The city has set aside \$2.1 billion for the extension of the No. 7 line from Times Square to the Javits Convention Center and the West Side railyards, the rights to which the Metropolitan Transportation Authority plans to auction off for high-rise residential and commercial development. But in an effort to stay within the budget, the city recently eliminated one of two stops along the 1.1-mile extension from the current tunneling contract.

Representative Jerrold Nadler, the city comptroller, William C. Thompson Jr.; and other officials said in a Dec. 19 letter to Deputy Mayor Daniel L. Doctoroff that it was "imperative" that the city build that subway station, at 10th Avenue and 41st Street, as part of the extension, work on which began last month. Not doing so, they said, would "represent a failure to the area's growing residential population" and "puts at risk several million square feet of potential commercial and residential development."

Those officials suggested financing the station by diverting money from projects that could be put on hold temporarily, like building a tree-lined boulevard between 10 and 11th Avenues, from 34th to 39th Streets. Those projects are part of the city's larger vision for rebuilding the Far West Side.

"We're not going to give up on this," said Senator Charles E. Schumer, who initiated the letter. "Any urban planner would tell you that residential and commercial development follows mass transit. It will not only open up the northern end of the Far West Side, but also north of 42nd Street, where there is no mass transit either."

The letter was also signed by State Senator Tom Duane; Kathleen Treat of the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association; Gene Russiano of the Straphangers Campaign; Betsy Gotbaum, the public advocate, who is expected to run for city comptroller; and Representative Anthony Weiner, who, like Mr. Thompson, will probably run for mayor next year.

The letter brought a quick retort from City Hall. "It's time for Senator Schumer and his colleagues in Albany and Washington to step up to the plate with adequate capital funding for the M.T.A., so that they have the resources to provide the rest," said John Gallagher, a spokesman for the Bloomberg administration.

At a hearing Thursday about progress on a variety of West Side projects, Mr. Doctoroff said that the city had never planned to build the subway station at 10th Avenue and 41st Street in the first phase of the tunneling project. At the same time, officials said that the city was trying to bring down the cost of building the station, which could run more than \$400 million.

Mr. Doctoroff also said that the city had proposed splitting any expenses beyond the \$2.1 billion budget for the subway extension with the transportation authority. The two sides have yet to come to an agreement on cost overruns.

The hearing was sponsored by Assemblyman Richard L. Brodsky, who also signed the letter. He said the Far West Side represented the "last great visionary opportunity" for development in Manhattan, but he bemoaned the long-stalled \$1.8 billion expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center and the "controversial" financing for the subway.

Mr. Brodsky also questioned whether the transportation authority would ever get the money it needed for its capital budget from the pending sale of development rights over the West Side railyards. He suggested that it might make more sense to create a public authority that could finance and coordinate the West Side projects.

Mr. Doctoroff acknowledged some missteps, but vigorously defended the progress in redeveloping the West Side. "What you have is enormous success in planning and execution," Mr. Doctoroff said. "This is about the transformation of a forlorn area into one of the most vibrant commercial, residential and cultural areas of Manhattan."

As for the subway, he said it was necessary to attract development. Commercial developers have said the same thing, but residential builders have been active for some time on the West Side and do not see the extension as critical.

Patrick J. Foye, co-chairman of the Empire State Development Corporation, acknowledged that the convention center expansion plan that he inherited from a previous administration was "dead." He said it was unworkable and \$1 billion more expensive than had been previously stated.

The plan was devised by Charles A. Gargano, the top economic development official in the Pataki administration, and Mr. Doctoroff. Yesterday, Mr. Doctoroff conceded that most of the proposed expansion plans do not make "a lot of economic sense."

Mr. Foye said he hoped to complete a yearlong review in January and announce a plan to refurbish the existing Javits Center and to build a very modest amount of new exhibit and meeting space. "We inherited a mess," he said.

Lee Sander, executive director of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, said he expected the authority's board to select a winning bid for the railyards in March. Plans call for the development of 12 million square feet of residential and office buildings and retail space over the yards.

But Richard Ravitch, a former chairman of the transportation authority, testified that he was "dubious whether this process will produce any money for the M.T.A.'s current capital plan."

The New York Times

December 23, 2007

THE CITY BLOG

Do Right by the No. 7 Extension

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, still in his first term and eager to develop Manhattan's Far West Side, said the city would do what the state would not and could not do: finance an extension to the No. 7 subway line, and thus bring life to a nearly pulseless part of New York. Now, with the cost of the project skyrocketing, the city finds it needs help.

To hold costs at \$2.1 billion — about double the amount of early estimates — the city unfortunately wants to abandon a critical part of the plan, a shell that would allow the eventual building of a second stop along the 1.5 mile extension, at 10th Avenue and 41st Street. Removing the shell saves \$450 million, but makes the project a lot less appealing. The extension would hum along without a place for passengers to get on or off until it terminates at 34th Street and 11th Avenue, at the Javits Convention Center, where adjacent development is expected over the Hudson rail yards.

Subway service for the railyards, where developers are competing for the rights to build over 13 acres, makes sense. New development there would boost the city's revenue base, and that is ultimately good for financing mass transit. That was a laudable Bloomberg goal all along, and the completion of the extension as planned in 2013, even with just one strategic stop, will make it closer to reality.

But Senator Chuck Schumer, a longtime champion of development for the area, has reasons to feel there has been a bait and switch. Along with other elected officials, including Representatives Jerrold Nadler and Anthony Weiner, the city comptroller, William Thompson and the public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum, he is pressing for the city to finish what it started.

The city says it did not promise to build the 10th Avenue stop. But it did plan to build the shell, which is needed to hold down costs later if a second station is added (as it should be — a growing community there should be linked into the subway system.)

From the start, the city — and in particular, Dan Doctoroff, the deputy mayor — insisted that it could not wait for the state's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, with its chronic financial woes, to make the far West Side a priority. Mayors have just so much time to make things happen, and it doesn't take much research to see how glacially slow the M.T.A. can be in getting projects planned, financed and built. The Second Avenue subway, for instance, has had several groundbreakings over the better part of a century, including one in recent weeks, and bits and pieces of tunnel, built and abandoned, were long the equivalent of unused wine cellars. So the Mayor took the unusual step of underwriting the whole project.

Mr. Doctoroff now seeks a compromise. He says the city would pay half of the cost of the 10th Avenue shell, and the M.T.A. could pay the other half. The problem is that the authority, which just raised fares to make ends meet, is essentially being asked to divert money from other projects to bail out the city's undertaking.

Newsday

NEW YORK CITY

Gotbaum says NYC public schools test kids too much

4:18 PM EST, December 27, 2007

NEW YORK (AP) _ The city's public school students are facing too many standardized tests, many of which are mandated by the city but not required by law, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said Thursday in releasing an analysis of the tests.

"Our schools have turned somewhat into testing factories," Gotbaum said, emphasizing that her concern was that teachers were focusing on the tests at the expense of subjects not covered by the exams.

In her analysis, Gotbaum said city third-graders were taking 12 tests an academic year, including nine city assessment tests. Fourth-graders and eighth-graders had six city tests a year, she said.

Gotbaum said she wasn't against standardized testing, but "we don't need to go overboard" and she urged the city Department of Education to scale back.

Andrew Jacob, a spokesman for the Education Department, said Gotbaum was misunderstanding the city tests, which he described as "no-stakes evaluations in reading and math that pinpoint students' gains and weaknesses throughout the year."

"Any educator could tell her that knowing what your students have learned and where they have weaknesses is fundamental to teaching and learning," he said.

He also added that city schools are focusing on other areas. "In the past year alone, the city has launched a major new arts initiative as well as its first-ever science core curriculum, and won a national award for its physical education program. We will begin implementing a core curriculum in social studies next year," he said.

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The



Sun

Testing Schedule Of City Schools Is Criticized

By ANNIE KARNI
Staff Reporter of the Sun

Critics yesterday assailed the city's Department of Education for turning public schools into "test-prep factories" and compelling many students to take a standardized test as often as once every three weeks, according to a new analysis of the city's testing schedule.

A report by the public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum, shows that only two of 12 tests that third- and fourth-graders take annually are required by law. The rest are city-mandated assessment tests that prepare students for state tests. Eighth-graders take between 11 and 12 tests a year, or one every four weeks, according to the report.

"The DOE is trying to take credit for improving test scores, but all they are doing is teaching kids how to take tests," Ms. Gotbaum said at a press conference.

Last month, students in New York City also showed virtually no gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the "nation's report card," Ms. Gotbaum said.

Students and parents yesterday urged the city to focus more on subjects that do not appear on standardized tests, such as history, arts, dance, and geography. "We should focus on developing well-rounded students with a complete education, not just creating a generation of professional test takers," a member of the Community Education Council for District 22, Christopher Spinelli, said.

The president of the teachers union, Randi Weingarten, said in a statement that a growing number of teachers said excessive focus on standardized tests was harming students' full development.

A spokesman for the education department, Andrew Jacob, defended the testing and said the city used no-stakes evaluations in reading and math to keep track of student progress throughout the year. "In trying to make a bogeyman of testing, the public advocate appears to oppose every measurement of student progress the city might administer from pre-school through 12th grade," Mr. Jacob said in a statement.

12/28/07



Testy Betsy to Ed bigs: Assess this

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and parent leaders blasted the Department of Education yesterday for forcing students as young as 8 to take tests every three weeks.

Gotbaum called on officials to scale back on the 10 annual "nonessential" math and English assessments required of students in grades three to eight to free up time for subjects like history and the arts.

"Our kids are stressed. They have a lot of pressure on them, and you can feel it as a parent," said Judith Amaro, president of Manhattan's District 6 Community Education Council.

The criticism has increased as state and local governments have ramped up their reliance on testing to measure student progress. Two months ago, the city, for the first time, assigned A through F grades to middle and elementary schools, rating them on student gains and performance on state tests.

Critics say that such emphasis has made the assessments high-stakes practice tests.

The department disagrees.

"Any educator could tell [Gotbaum] that knowing what your students have learned and where they have weaknesses is fundamental to teaching and learning," said an Education spokesman. Yoav Gonen

DEC 28, 2007

Schools too test-y, Gotbaum says

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The city's public school students are facing too many standardized tests, many of which are mandated by the city but not required by law, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said yesterday in releasing an analysis of the tests.

"Our schools have turned somewhat into testing factories," Gotbaum said, emphasizing that her concern was that teachers were focusing on the tests at the expense of subjects not covered by the exams.

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NEWSDAY PHOTO, 2004

**Public Advocate
Betsy Gotbaum**

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downtown express

Volume 20, Number 33 | The Newspaper of Lower Manhattan | Dec. 28, 2007 - Jan. 3, 2008

"Support businesses and organizations that support Downtown Express"



Photo by Ginny Browne

Neighbors rallied outside the Lower East Side Pathmark last Thursday.

Hell no, store won't go, protestors hope

By Julie Shapiro

Waving colorful signs and shouting even more colorful slogans, 75 people turned out last Thursday to protest the rumored closure of the Chery St. Pathmark.

The crowd gathered in front of Pathmark with a banner reading "S.O.S. Save Our Supermarket" and alternated between spirited chants and speakers.

"If you take this away from us, where are we going to shop?" a mother of four shouted into the megaphone. "We've got nothing... We cannot afford to live around here anymore."

Marquis Jenkins, the rally's M.C., stood atop a stepladder riling the crowd. His voice getting hoarse, Jenkins lead the crowd in chants. "Whose streets?" he called out. "Our streets!" they shouted back. "Whose Pathmark? Our Pathmark! Whose community? Our community!"

"This is a symbol of what's happening in our community," Marquis told the crowd. "Say 'No' to new development."

site have worried customers all fall. Contractors took soil samples on the site a few months ago and employees had told customers that the store would close. The store sits beneath the Manhattan Bridge and adjacent to several public housing projects. The protestors were worried about what they see as the worst-case scenario: high-rise luxury condos.

"We don't need no more condos in this neighborhood," Eric Latorre called into the megaphone. "It'll be a sad [day] if we see a wrecking ball smash this place down." Latorre, who lives at Pike and Cherry Sts., has been coming to Pathmark since he was 16 years old, and especially likes that the supermarket is open 24 hours.

"We see gentrification and luxury developing everywhere," shouted Esther Wang, from the Chinatown Tenants Union. "Say 'No' to the closing of Pathmark, say 'No' to the loss of affordable services and say 'No' to gentrification."

In a separate effort, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver met with A & P executives two weeks ago to advocate for the supermarket.

"I let them know that this community wants us to retain a Pathmark supermarket," Silver said in a telephone interview.

"What we need is more, not less."

Silver said A & P officials didn't tell him what the chances are the store will remain open.

"They understood I was not looking to wait months," Silver added. "It was clear to them that this was something important." Silver said people should keep shopping at Pathmark to encourage the store to stay open.

A & P and Pathmark executives did not return calls for comment.

At the rally, Betsy Gotbaum, the city's public advocate, took the megaphone to tell the crowd that she, too, has shopped at Pathmark over the years.

"The Pathmark supermarket is much more than just a place to buy food," Gotbaum said. "This Pathmark is an anchor for the community."

Paul Nagle, Councilmember Alan Gerson's spokesperson, attended to represent Gerson, who was home sick in bed. Nagle told the crowd not to take Gerson's absence as a sign of his apathy. "He's really down with this cause," Nagle told them. A representative of State Sen. Martin Connor also attended.

When Jamel Williams and his saxophone took the stage, someone from the audience referred to an unconfirmed developer rumor, calling out, "Play a funeral tune for Donald Trump." Instead, Williams played the more festive "Winter Wonderland" a few days before Christmas.

Later, Williams accompanied several of the organizers in an original composition: "For the Holidays at Pathmark," sung to the tune of "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The lyrics include a true love who shops at Pathmark, bringing home 11 pounds of green beans, 10 cans of eggnog, and so on. Rather than the partridge in the pear tree, the chorus reached a crescendo at "No development luxury!"

After rumors circulated about Pathmark's land being up for sale to developers, OUR (Organizing and Uniting Residents) Waterfront Alliance, a project of several Lower East Side and Chinatown groups, decided to get involved. Pathmark officials, though, wouldn't give them any information.

"We kept coming up against a brick wall," said Ginny Browne, economic development organizer for Good Old Lower East Side. "So, rather than wake up and read in the paper that it was sold, we wanted to be proactive, get out there, and put pressure on Pathmark."

Pathmark is "an example of what we stand to lose" in the East River Waterfront development, Browne said. While Browne is excited about the open space in the waterfront plan, she doesn't want to see the new pavilions along F.D.R. Dr. filled with high-end cafes and expensive retail and services.

"We want it to be developed in a way that speaks to the needs of the current community," which includes the 30,000 public housing residents, Browne said. "We need to fight for development that meets our needs, not development that pushes us out."

Ed Novak, 71, who was born in the Two Bridges neighborhood and has lived on Henry St. for the last 53 years, said the other local supermarkets are terrible.

Novak recalled the neighborhood's strong Jewish, Italian and Irish population, but the crowd at Thursday's rally was predominantly Chinese. Several speakers used translators, and most of the signs included both Chinese and English.

The chants focused on unity and mirrored the crowd's diversity.

"Black, Asian, Latino, white," the crowd shouted. "Communities together, fight, fight fight!"

Paul Newell, of Division St., has lived Downtown his whole life and told the crowd that not all of the neighborhood's changes are bad.

"But when development comes and takes away access to affordable food, it's not okay," Newell said. "This is madness. It's poor planning, poor government, and it's not helping our community."

Annie, 21, and Diana Woo, 20, two sisters who live in Rutgers Houses, were home from college on Christmas break when they heard Pathmark might be closing.

"We're at Pathmark all the time, especially when there are really good sales," Diana said as she chalked "Save Pathmark" messages on the sidewalk. At Cornell University, she has to take a 20-minute bus ride to get food, and she always boasts to her friends about the supermarket back home that is right across the street.

"It's convenient and really affordable," said Annie, who goes to SUNY-Binghamton. "I don't know

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Third Graders Take 12 Standardized Tests Every Year

by Sarah Ryley (sarah@brooklyneagle.net), published online 12-28-2007

That's Too Many, Says Gotbaum

By Sarah Ryley
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

CITY HALL — The typical Brooklyn third grader attending public school is required to take 12 standardized tests during the school year, or one every three weeks, according to an analysis released yesterday by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum.

She said city schools have "turned into test prep factories" rather than places that make kids excited about learning, and is urging the city Department of Education to scale back their assessment tests.

Only three tests a year for third graders are mandated by the state. The rest are city assessment tests used to prepare students for the high-stakes state tests that, if failed, can cost schools critical funding or the principal's job, and can lead to school closures. According to the analysis, students learning English or in a dual language program are required to take more tests, up to one every 10 days.

The average fourth grader takes 10 to 12 standardized tests per year, in addition to the typical quizzes and exams that accompany coursework, and the average eighth grader takes 11 to 12 tests per year. The results of the city's assessment tests are used to tailor interventions in an effort to increase the student's score on the state tests, the results of which are used to determine if penalties are in order under the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind Law.

"It affects the students because they lose their interest in learning, especially the boys. They get frustrated because everything is tests, tests, tests and there's nothing there to engage them," said Lorraine Bridges, parent of an eighth-grade boy and president of the President's Council.

She said a good portion of her time is spent helping her son prepare for tests, although starting in sixth grade she also started helping him with more projects, presentations and papers.

"Sixth grade was a big adjustment year for him," said Bridges, adding that she recently enrolled her son in outside music classes to help engage him in other subjects that aren't taught as much in schools now that the focus is on testing.

"The [Department of Education] is trying to take credit for improving test scores, but all they are doing is teaching kids how to take tests," Gotbaum said in a statement.

"This doesn't make kids excited about learning, and it doesn't lead to good education. Excessive testing and teaching to the test is clearly failing to improve our children's education."

She said improvements in state test scores since the additional city assessment tests were added are nominal.

Her spokesman, John Collins, emphasized that Gotbaum isn't against using standardized tests, but called the current barrage of tests youngsters are confronted with "excessive." He said it takes teachers a week to prepare students for the bigger tests, then another week to review them.

"In trying to make a bogeyman of testing, the Public Advocate appears to oppose every measurement of student progress the city might administer from preschool through 12th grade, even those that students choose voluntarily or that are in different languages or that involve only a tiny fraction of city students," said Andrew Jacobs, spokesman for the Department of Education, in a statement. "Any educator could tell her that knowing what your students have learned and where they have weaknesses is fundamental to teaching and learning. To help perform that core instructional function, our teachers use no-stakes evaluations in reading and math that pinpoint students' gains and weaknesses throughout the year."

He added, "Building reading and math skills is part of a rigorous, well-rounded education. In the past year alone, the city has launched a major new arts initiative as well as its first-ever science core curriculum, and won a national award for its physical education program. We will begin implementing a core curriculum in social studies next year."

NEW YORK POST

MORE HIV 'GUINEA PIG' KIDS

By DAVID SEIFMAN

December 29, 2007 -- The number of HIV-infected foster kids under the city's care who may have been steered into experimental drug trials in the 1990s has grown to 773, a report says.

The Vera Institute of Justice, which is probing the clinical trials, says 59 potential cases were added between July and September in response to data found in old case files. When the review began in 2005, the caseload was estimated at 465.

The Administration for Children's Services hired Vera in response to 2004 Post articles exposing the practice in 2004. Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, who's called for independent oversight over ACS, says the new numbers prove her point.

Vera is preparing a report on whether proper enrolling and monitoring procedures were followed.

Newsday

NEW YORK CITY

With strike over, it's time to fix Access-a-Ride

Sheryl McCarthy

December 31, 2007

Now that the drivers for the city's Access-a-Ride system have ended their strike, the thousands of physically disabled and elderly New Yorkers who were left stranded for a week and a half will have service again. But that doesn't mean it'll be good service.

Hopefully, the publicity generated by the strike will shed light on a transportation system for the disabled that is desperately needed, but highly dysfunctional.

"The drivers have been terrific," said Lois Lazarus, an Upper West Sider whose cardiac, back and breathing problems have her relying on Access-a-Ride to get to medical appointments, physical therapy visits and court. She was pleased that the drivers have reached an agreement they can live with. But her experiences with Access-a-Ride since she started using it a year ago make her depend on it "as little as possible."

When she had a physical therapy appointment last January, the van showed up so late, she was late for her appointment. When it didn't return on time, she had to keep calling the service, she said. "They finally said they would send a black car - one of the private cars who will pick you up at the same price. ... It took over an hour, and I'm sitting outside in the cold waiting for this car."

When Access-a-Ride picked her up for a 10 a.m. court appearance last October, it took so long to get there that when she arrived, the court had recessed for lunch.

Her complaints seem to be typical of those experienced by the more than 18,000 people who use the service daily. Late pickups. Being shuttled all over the city in an illogical way to make other pickups. Arriving at appointments late or missing them altogether. Getting stranded for hours, if, in fact, the driver returns at all. Frantic telephone calls to ask when they're coming, only to be told the driver is right around the corner, when in fact he's not.

It's a terrible way to treat people who are too old or infirm to ride the subways or buses or use the majority of taxi cabs. Intended to make their lives easier, Access-a-Ride instead becomes another cause of stress.

Public Advocate Eetsy Gotbaum was at her doctor's office two weeks ago, on a rainy, miserable day, when she noticed two elderly women who were on the phone trying to reach Access-a-Ride.

"They had been waiting for four hours," Gotbaum said, "and there was no way they could get back to Far Rockaway on their own."

Gotbaum got on the phone, explained who she was, and was able to get a supervisor to divert one of the system's private liveries and promised that it would be there in a half-hour. Whether it showed up or not, Gotbaum doesn't know.

Access-a-Ride is a fabulous idea in a city where only a fraction of the subways are accessible to the disabled and where you can wait on the street all day without seeing a single wheelchair-accessible taxi go by. Call 24 hours in advance, make an appointment to be picked up, for the same \$2 fare as the bus or subway.

But the execution is not so fabulous.

"It's a very hit and miss, sporadic system," said Gotbaum, who said she hears complaints about it all the time. After attending a community meeting in southeast Queens two months ago, where people were "ranting and raving about Access-a-Ride," she wrote to MTA officials, asking for a meeting to discuss how the system can be improved. She's still waiting to hear.

Meanwhile, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer's office is conducting a study of the Access-a-Ride system, but refused to talk about it until the data are in.

What seems clear is that the system needs more vans, a more sophisticated dispatching system than having dispatchers talking to the drivers over walkie-talkies, and it needs to end the ridiculous practice of making customers wait outside in all kinds of weather to be picked up.

All of this is ultimately the responsibility of the MTA, which contracts with 14 private van companies to provide service.

Thomas Charles, a spokesman for New York City Transit, which is under the MTA, acknowledged that there are problems with the system due to the vagaries of traffic, weather, drivers and customers who aren't ready on time. He said the MTA is rolling out an automated tracking system with a global positioning system and a map guidance system that will allow dispatchers to communicate better with the drivers, confirm their locations, verify no-shows and direct drivers to where they're supposed to be. The system will be totally in place by next fall, he said, plus the fleet of 1,700 vans will be increased to 2,000 by next year. I might add that the MTA needs to appoint a consumer affairs officer or ombudsperson whose sole job is to respond to Access-a-Ride customers.

"If you have a complaint, you're supposed to write the MTA," Lazarus told me. "But they don't respond. Not at all."

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