

September 20, 2011

**RE: WILSON AVENUE SCHOOL PARENT ACTION COMMITTEE**

Dear Superintendent Anderson and Commissioner Cerf,

We the parents of Wilson Avenue School children are deeply concerned about the current situation impacting our children's education. We have several immediate as well as long term issues we would like a response to and consideration by your agencies. Most importantly we want our children to return safely to the Ironbound for their full education. As parents, we also want the ability to participate in a meaningful way in the decision making process that directly impacts our children. We respectfully request direct responses to the issues listed below and a meeting with the representatives of the Newark Public Schools Superintendent and the State Department of Education along with our Parent Action Committee leaders to meaningfully discuss the concerns, questions and issues detailed below.

1. **Lost instructional time and Busing issues**

- Busing children continues to reduce the amount of instructional class time due to late starts and early dismissals. The School District still does not have in place a system of busing which delivers and picks up children in a timely fashion.
- a. Last year buses were provided police escorts to facilitate faster travel times to and from the schools – can this be provided?
  - b. Children are currently waiting outside Quitman St School to enter the building in the morning because they have to wait for the student body to finish their breakfasts. Wilson Ave children are also eating late in the day at Quitman St School because of long wait times with the existing student body. These delays must be addressed so that there is a seamless transition from unloading buses in the morning into the school classrooms and lunch rooms.
  - c. There is no clear, systematic grouping and orderly boarding and drop off system at the school sites. While busing is occurring, the district should have in place a systematic way to group children by classes so that they board and dispatch to their classrooms quickly and efficiently. There should be clear point people in charge of loading and unloading children and handling any concerns from parents on site.
  - d. Parents want to see an inclement weather plan for when children are expected to wait outdoors for loading and unloading buses – how are tents to be staged, etc. on site?
  - e. What happens in the case of a bus accident in the course of the transportation of children to and from school?

We want to see the State and School District consider alternatives to busing which would bring children to sites in the Ironbound where they can walk to school instead of being

bused to far off locations. We want to see an exploration of sharing other school sites where space is available such as East Side. We want you to explore the possibility of setting up classroom in trailers on vacant lots or locating vacant buildings for lease that can house the children within the community temporarily. The money used for bus contract can be put to better use housing children in nearby locations.

2. **Children continue to lose out on critical educational and enrichment activities** that are critical to their academic performance. There are basic classes and supporting extra-curricular activities that have completely been denied our children.

- a. Parents want the School District to provide mandated classes, particularly special education classes, speech classes, tutoring, counseling, physical education, music, and other essential services, many of which are required by law. The District should ensure that children who are need special classes are still receiving those in their new environments.
- b. We want the School District and the State to monitor and evaluate the performance of children during this two year period when so much has happened to distract children from learning.
- c. Parents of eighth grade students are concerned about the ability of students to prepare for and graduate into high school. We want to see the school district provide assistance or counseling to these students.
- d. Parents are also concerned that the homework assignments for children have increased with little support in the classroom due to a decrease in class time.
- e. Parents want a commitment from the School District on providing opportunities for children to receive: **Recreation, Sports, Field Trips, Tutoring, Clubs**
- f. The District has instituted an explicit policy of denying transfers to children from Wilson Avenue School to other nearby public schools. This is a direct violation of the No Child Left Behind Law and should be retracted immediately. If a nearby school has the capacity to take a Wilson Ave School student they should not be denied simply on the grounds that they are from this school. In fact, absorbing as many children into nearby functioning schools should be considered whenever possible to minimize the amount of instructional time lost to busing.

3. **Lack of open, transparent and meaningful parental involvement.**

The District and the State have made critical decisions about our children's education with little communication or consultation with parents to date. There has been no attempt by you to meaningfully engage parents in issues that directly impact our lives and our children's well-being. There has been no mechanism put into place to address the extensive and legitimate questions and concerns parents continue to raise about the situation.

- a. The School District and the State representatives should commit to meeting with the Parent Action Committee on a regular basis to provide updates and respond to concerns.

- b. Furthermore, the District should have lead point people in place ready to answer phone calls and emails or meet in person with parents who have very specific concerns.
- c. A hotline number or website should be established with emergency contact information.
- d. Letters should be mailed to every parent in Portuguese, Spanish and English with all the necessary contact information. Parents currently have no contact information for St. Anthony's or Quitman St School. Emergency phone numbers and contacts should be listed for both locations, along with directions to and from the school to help parents locate the facilities in cases of emergency.
- e. Parents want to know how to retrieve their children in the case of emergencies in the middle of the day if they have no means of transportation. Parents have been contacted by school nurses with sick children who cannot get home unless parents can come to the location to pick them up, which for many parents is impossible without a vehicle. Buses should be made available to transport sick children back home when necessary.
- f. Any parent with a child that has a record of previous medical conditions should be contacted directly to assure them that the health records and monitoring for their child continues in the new school environment.

4. **What is the process for the cleanup and repairs of the school?**

- a. Parents want to be fully informed of the plans for repairs at Wilson Ave School and want to ensure that the school is completely safe to occupy prior to reopening.
- b. The State should share the results of their assessment of repairs with all parents and review the potential clean up options with parents.
- c. Parents want to know the extent of the repairs, the plans for remediation and the timeline and costs that are anticipated.
- d. Parents also want to an objective third party consultant to review the condition and safety of the building prior to allowing children to return.
- e. Parents want a commitment that ALL necessary repairs will be completed and financed so as to ensure this situation does not occur again in the future.
- f. Parents want to know more about the possibilities for new school construction for Wilson Ave School in the future.

CC:

Mayor Cory Booker  
Assemblyman Albert Coutinho  
Senator Teresa Ruiz  
Eliana Pintor, Newark School Board President  
Councilman Augusto Amador  
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