

PS110 - PTA MEETING
SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2018

In Attendance

Stephanie Arsham, Co-Secretary

Ms Cano-Amato, Principal

Shelly Garinther, Co-Secretary

Ms Raciunas, Assistant Principal

Amy Chalkley, Parent Coordinator

39 Parents

MS CANO - Hello everyone, thanks for being here today. That being said I received a phone call from the superintendent's office yesterday evening and we were told that the election could not be held until Monday. We decided to move forward with the meeting to help clarify any concerns that you might have and then we'll vote on Monday. So we'll hold another emergency meeting on Monday and elect new board members for the 2018-2019 school year. So, thank you.

So, first before I begin, I'll reading out of my notes to make sure I don't miss anything. I want to be very mindful of the facts that we have an amazing school community. It is one of the reasons that I have stayed this long. This is my 35th year at this school and the very fact that we're such a strong community has kept me here. We are very fortunate that we always had a good partnership with all our families and our PTA and this school because it is that very partnership that has allowed us to do all the amazing and wonderful things that we have been able to do for our children. Without it we would not have been able to accomplish everything that we have done over the last several years, particularly during my tenure as Principal. So that being said, let's begin.

This is what occurred in a nutshell and then I can go into more specifics. The new executive board of the 2018-2019 school year thought that the old executive board had inappropriately acted when they allocated \$11,500 to the Wellness In The Schools program, a program for the children here at our school, at the end of June. This program had been researched, presented, and the PTA wellness committee worked towards this program during the entire school year last year . Please, please, whatever you are hearing out here; money was not missing, money was not misappropriated, money was not stolen. What happened at the end of June, the very end of June, because of funding we received, funds in the PTA budget for Audubon Society, Theatre for a New Audience, and roll over money for the art teacher became available. So how wonderful, monies are available. The PTA old executive board, well within their rights as the existing executive board, decided to

allocate \$11,500 towards the complete Wellness In The Schools programs that we are doing this year, because only \$8,000 had been allocated thus far and the program costs close to \$20,000.

So - now I'm really going to be read off my notes:

Prior to the September 12th first PTA meeting of the year, the new executive board required confidential conversation after the meeting. Of course Ms Raciunas and I said 'yes'. During the meeting, the budget was presented and if any of you were here you would remember that. And if you were here, you would also remember that when the budget was presented, Tiffany McCannon the former PTA President, stated that the budget that was being presented was incorrect. That was the revised budget. And she said to the new board that there were correction made with regards to Audubon, Theatre for a New Audience funding, and art teacher rollover. That was stated at the meeting.

After the meeting, the administration met with new EB board members. They stated that they felt there was an irregularity in the budget with regards to the expenditure of \$11,500 for the approved Wellness In The Schools program. At that point, both Ms Raciunas and I, firmly stated that if there was some sort of miscommunication or misunderstanding on the new board's part then it would need to be clarified but in no way did we ever feel that something had been done that should not have been done. Because Ms Raciunas and I as well as outgoing board members and new board members we were very well aware, at the end of June, that this monies were available and we had agree to move forward so that we could then bring in the entire Wellness In The Schools program knowing how important nutrition and health is to this community.

At that point it was decided to do the following. To invite the old EB in for a meeting to discuss the concerns of the new EB board with regards to \$11,500 as well as Hannah Cinelli, one of the co-chair of the Wellness Committee which had coordinated the introduction of the WITS program into the school. In order to move this forward, and again, knowing that nothing had occurred, but we decided to ask for a refund of the \$11,500 from the New York City Department of Education/WITS program because the new board felt that it had not been appropriated properly. So I then called the DOE explaining the circumstances and they very graciously refunded the money, before we heard from the old EB board. Both Ms Raciunas and I felt that that was the very least that we could do for the new board because they were feeling very strongly about it. So we went ahead with that decision.

I then was instructed to call, as I said, called the WITS program - the money was refunded. I was also told to reach out to Tiffany McCannon to coordinate the presence of the old EB at the meeting on Monday September 17th 2018.

On Monday September 17th, the following assembled in the library for the meeting: the new executive board, the old executive board, Hannah Cinell and Lisa Leonard-Lee; Co-chairs of the Wellness Committee, and Jessamine Lynn; then President of the District 14 Presidents' Council. Jessamine is here as third party in case you have any questions. Jessamine sits on the Chancellor's Parents Advisory Council and has served as PTA President in the District for many many years as well as President of the Presidents' Council. She's very well versed in PTAs and the chancellor's' regs. So we invited her to that meeting and we invited her here today incase we had any additional questions. Thank you Jessamine.

During the meeting, the old executive board presented the correct budget that the new EB did not have at the time of the first PTA meeting, although it has been sent through the Dropbox. They explained the rationale about committing \$11,500 to the WITS Program and sending a check at the end of the 2017-2018 school year. The expenditure was covered by the accrued savings from Audubon, Theatre for a New Audience, and art teachers roll over funds. During the meeting, Rob Maher, one of the Co-Presidents, resigned.

After the meeting, second meeting was held with the intent of having the Wellness Committee answer any further questions about the WITS program. After this meeting, later in the day, Yasmin Elshafei-Olenich resigned as Treasurer.

On Tuesday, September 18th 2018, I contacted, Ms Raciunas and I, contacted the superintendent to inform her about the issue at hand.

On Wednesday September 19th 2018, Shannon Clare, who remained Co-President, also resigned.

On Thursday, Shelly Garinther and Stephanie Arsham, the remaining EB members, met with the administration to discuss how to proceed. The chancellor's regulations were utilized and the nominating committee of Spring 2018 was asked to handle nomination to fill the new vacancies. So in effect, while the new EB lost its Co-Presidents and its treasurer, the board is still in existence because both Shelly and Stephanie stayed on as Co-Secretaries so we did not have. Thank you ladies. So we did not have what's called a "non-existent PTA Board" because if that would have been the case it would have been a series of steps taken that we are required to take. Because both Shelly and Stephanie stayed on, it's a matter of filling vacancies due to resignations.

Flyers were on backpacked on Friday September 21st, 2018 and placed on the school Facebook page, stating that there were now vacancies on the new board because members had resigned due to personal reasons. The school community was notified that the election would take place this morning. I found out last night that we can't do them until Monday.

At this timeline was unfolding, it was also determined by the old executive board that a third party would be asked to come in to perform an audit of the budget to allay any concerns anybody still might be having, even though we, you as PTA have an audit committee. It had already been audited and nothing was found to be inappropriate. This request was made by the outgoing executive board to FACE, The Office Of Family And Committee Engagement and that is the office that oversees PTA matters.

So that is the entire timeline from September 12th to last night. At the end of the day, I feel that, again, miscommunication perhaps, misunderstanding perhaps. Had the new executive board reached out to the old executive board when they found this discrepancy because they weren't looking at the correct budget, but had information about this \$11,500 check because it had to be written during the summer or the end of the year, I believe that a lot of it would have been clarified. But the new EB felt very strongly that something really, I'm going to use the word sinister. I don't know what other word to use. I don't know if that was the right word so forgive me. At the end of the day, the \$11,500 was appropriated properly for your children, our children, so that we can continue with our nutrition and health initiative here at PS110. So that's it. That what happened. Yes?

Q - Can you please explain exactly what is the WITS Program?

MS CANO - Thank you for that. Hannah do you want to talk to that? I'm gonna hand it over to Hannah. I think you should come up and use the mic. I'm going to have Hannah and Lisa is here also because they are the ones that did all the research.

HANNAH - The Wellness In The Schools program, pardon me, I'm a little emotional about all this. WITS Program has its been existing for about 30 years and they have been working in partnership with the DOE to improve nutrition in cafeterias. So they've work hand in hand with the department of ed. They've created the alternative menu that we implemented four years ago. They do programs, what we had wanted to do is their flagship program but our kitchen is too small for it it turns out. But what we wanted to do was to invite the WITS chef to come into the school to work hand in hand with our staff to improve nutrition, get more kids eating hot lunch. Since our kitchen is too small WITS created a customized package for us that includes tastings which our kids did last year if you recall; they made vinaigrettes and yogurt sauces. So we're gonna do 3 tastings or 4 tastings in the school year and but also our cafeteria staff is going to do an onsite training 2 or 3 days to learn new methods, maybe not boiled broccoli but roasted broccoli, right. Then they will come to our school once a week for the entire school year to troubleshoot, to work on new recipes, to figure out ways that the cafeteria can be more efficient or expedient, get kids in and out. They are an

amazing organization. We've actually been working on this for close to two years. Actually we've been trying to get this program into the school since after we adopted the alternative menu. The Wellness Committee has been working on this for a really long time. And I'm super excited. I'm super super pumped about it. It's definitely, I just think it's awesome and I'm super excited for all the kids. Yeah?

Q - My understanding of it or I think something needs to be clarified is, I think it's great that this program is here. I'd like to know the percentage of students that eat school lunch and don't? Also the other thing is, was this voted on by the PTA? Because what I've heard is that this wasn't voted on. This is money that is for the parents to vote on. Was this program voted on at the end of the year? Because I thought I heard you just say that this was over the summer.

MS CANO - No, at the end of June.

Q - Ok, at the end of June But was this voted on?

TIFFANEY - Yes it was voted on. When we voted on the budget in June, the budget was approved by everyone there, which we had to have a quorum of 8 or more people. The quorum was 8. That budget line was in there. It was discussed in the minutes that are available for anyone. It was discussed that this number would fluctuate and that the budget would be presented again in September because budgets are a living document; grants come in, funds change, money comes in, we pay out money. When that was voted on, that budget line, WITS was also voted on. That was approved. So it was absolutely approved.

HANNAH - And to kids eating hot lunch, that's also something that we've been tracking for the last couple of years, tracking - we've done multiple surveys, we've done focus groups, we've invited, we've pulled kids from the cafeteria to talk about what they like what they don't like. We've been, it's been a couple years in the making.

Q - And is it standard, you said there were 8 people voting?

HANNAH - That's the minimum.

Q - That's the minimum.

TIFFANEY - In the Chancellor's Rules and Regs in order to pass the vote we have to have at least 8 parents.

Q - And that's standard? Where does that come from? Who creates that?

JESSAMINE - In the CRA 660 of the Chancellor's Rules and Regulations. If you go on the Department of Education's website, you can download a copy of the CRA 660 but it outlines very clearly what the minimum number of parents are to have a vote on anything, on any topic.

CHRIS - That seems ridiculous to me because there are how many students in this school and I know that teacher, parent involvement is really important and I wish that more parents came. It's unfortunate, it is. But seems really low for a vote to be passed for that much money for a program that only a percentage of how many who have school lunch. My kid doesn't eat school lunch.

HANNAH - It doesn't mean that there were only 8 people at June PTA meeting.

SHELLY - There were more. There were more.

Q - Well Tiffany said there was.

TIFFANEY - No, we met the quorum. At least the 8.

JESSAMINE - That quorum applies to budgetary matters but that quorum applies to approving minutes from the prior meeting. It's to hold a vote on anything but that is the minimum attendance required to have an official meeting.

HANNAH - Can I just clarify that the WITS program isn't exclusively for kids who are having hot lunch. I mean the bulk, I would say that more than half the money goes for tastings that 100% of the students in the school will benefit from. So the program is not just for kids having hot lunch.

Q - Can you tell us about the cooking class?

HANNAH - The tastings that we did a couple of last year. So a professional chef came to the school and visited with each classroom and they made some recipes, they read the recipe, they measured the ingredients, they put together a vinaigrette, they chopped up the vegetables, and then they had salad together. I think they also made a yogurt dip.

Q - Are all kids involved in this? Each class participates in this?

HANNAH - 100% of the school participates in - absolutely.

Q - I feel that there needs to be some more clarification and more transparency with this.

TIFFANEY - I just want to say that last year, this was discussed at several PTA meetings.

Q - Okay.

TIFFANEY - We introduced it to the parents in March. They had a presentation.

HANNAH - I think I've discussed it 5 or 6 times at PTA meetings.

AMY - Hannah can I also add? We actually discussed at the end of the year because I even made comments about I was inside the classroom, and how amazing it was because I actually worked with some of the children in the classrooms. I helped out. I thought it was an amazing program and I said that at either the May or June meeting.

MS CANO - Lisa, do you want to add more point on this so we can move on?

LISA - If I can also mention, just for background. Last year we did a survey to all the parents during parent teacher conferences and we found that after extensive effort that the only way get the entire parent body to communicate their thoughts on food in the school is to actually require them to fill out a survey during parent teacher conference because everybody is required to meet with their teachers to get their report card. We did the survey because we found out that the director of school foods was concerned about food waste and there was consensus with the school administration, that food waste would maybe be a better deterrent if we went back to the old menu which is chicken sticks and popcorn shrimp and things that our school community seemed to want to move past when we switched to the alternative menu. We put it out to the school community by interviewing 2,3,4, and 5th graders, Hannah and I met with a series of students and we also polled the parents. The feedback was that largely that we were still interested in the alternative menu. This was also a way to help conserve the alternative menu so that the kitchen staff would be able to cook, as well as make sure that the consumers, the children. If they don't know what kale is. Also a way to introducing new foods to the school kitchen staff and to the children. So that's a little bit of a background prior to getting this program up.

TIFFANEY - Can we also say that at the end of the school year the Office of School Foods came and talked to us, and that we were also in jeopardy of losing some of our precious kitchen staff. And so that was also one of the reasons why we were looking for other alternatives. I just want to say that the day that WITS

came in and did the labs, I had parents coming up to me. It was the only time that I didn't have to ask Mac what he did at school today. Like who made you laugh, who bummed you out. Like "We made vingerretes today". It was the only time all year and I heard that from several parents. Like it's a great program.

SARAH - Hey guys, my name is Sarah Duford, you guys might not all know my face but you all know my email address. So I have not served board, my son is in 1st grade. I'm a little emotional about this too because the old board is why any of you new parents are in this school. You visited all these schools. I know you did because you are in this meeting which means you are dedicated parents. Let me remind you that there are 500 at this school, look around at how many parents are here, that is 1000 parents. There are maybe 50 people in this room. So If you want to talk the number of people that are voting, everyone is welcome and encouraged to come to the PTA meetings. I work-full-time, Monday through Friday 9:30 to 5:30. I told my boss "I have to be at this meeting. I'm coming in late." I get it, people work. I was lucky enough when my son was in preschool here that I was working part-time. I planned the fall festival, with help, I planned the winter festival. with help. I'm not looking for applause. I am planning the fall festival this year because I love Tiffaney and Shelly and I love this school and it raises a ton of money for all for our kids. It raises money the kids that parents have never set foot in these PTA meetings because they can't or they don't have time or whatever. No judgment being made here. But just remember that if you're in Pre-k or you're in Kindergarten, you're at this school because of the legacy of the old board because they worked their, excuse my French here - their asses off. Tiffaney didn't leave this building for like seven days a week. Emilie, Shelly, Annie, Hannah and Lisa. All of these people have worked so hard for all of your children. So say what you will, like Ms Cano said, this money was paid for a super awesome program. My son brings his lunch four days a week. He is a very picky eater. He eats pizza on Fridays at 110. This program is for the kids, so even if 75% of the kids bring their lunch, those 25% of the kids are the kids that need this nutritional program the most, ok? And if anybody wants to volunteer for the Fall Fest email me.

MS CANO - Thank you Sarah. Yes?

Q- My child is now in kindergarten. I've probably been to every single PTA meeting. I'm in several committees. I volunteer in the library and now in the cafeteria. We're heavily the school. I'm heavily involved in the community. My husband as well. He single handedly raised \$11,000 for a Charity Buzz activity. He is constantly on the phone. He is constantly on his email. There is no way that you have to explain to me how awesome this is. My question per say is not what is the value in this. I think that what came as a surprise to us is that it felt like all this help that we've done. That we've, not I, that Michael has done in raising money for the school. It felt like to jump from \$8,000 that was allocated to \$11,500. It was a surprise. That was like, wow, that is a lot of money for all the days that we've done

stuff. I think that this program is great and you don't have to sell that. I just think that it's a real jump. Especially when my kid comes home every Friday and says that he watched Youtube because the computers are broken.

Q - Yes, can we talk about that please?

MS CANO - No we are not going to talk about that.

Q - Well it needs to come up because I don't want my kid watching Youtube videos and they are being told that computers are broken. You are lying to our children if you are saying that.

MS CANO - Excuse me?

Q - Well it seems that the teachers telling the students that the computers are broken. Why are they telling them that?

YULI - Let's stay focused on this topic. Let's adrese that important topic but let's concentrate on today's topic.

MS CANO - Can I just adrese this for one second. The wiring in the computer lab needed to be addressed and it is being addressed as we speak.

Q - So kindergarteners will be using the computers?

MS CANO - When the wiring is correct, then yes.

Q - I thought upper grades were using the computers just fine?

PARENT - No, that's not true.

MS CANO - No, that's not true.

Q - Ok, alright, thank you for clarifying.

TIFFANEY - So to speak to Allissia. When we made this decision after reflecting after looking at all the executive board minutes and all of the hard work that everyone has made. We made that decision. We were trusted servants of the school. We really thought that we were making the right decision and with the understanding that the budget was going to be presented in September. And all of that in the budget, it was so transparent that "this is what we paid for" and "that this is how we paid for". It is my understanding that executive board says that they didn't receive that budget. A simple phone call to me with transparency saying "There is \$11,500 missing. What's going on?" I would been able to figure out in two seconds that they were looking at the wrong budget, two seconds. I thought

that they had the right budget. I don't even know what to say. Like this has taken up two weeks of my life. I have a little one, like, I did not mean anything. It would have just been a simple phone call and I would have figured it out. But I didn't get a phone call. The last day before school started I was out with my kids. It was the first time in a couple of years that I wasn't here planning, getting ready. I got a phone call and no red flags were raised. It was like "Can you unpack this WITS thing?" I was at a kids fun house. It was crazy, I was holding my baby and I didn't think that it was a serious conversation. My conversation was really casual because I thought that they had the right budget. I get home to a bunch of emails that night and I was like "well something is going on". I wrote back and I said "Please give me a call". I still didn't understand what was going on here. There was no context. Seriously, if somebody would have said there is \$11,500 missing from this. I would have said in two seconds "Well what budget are you looking at", because our budget would not have shown that, the budget that Emilie put in the dropbox. So it really comes down to a miscommunication.

You guys worked with me. I feel like I'm super approachable. And I don't feel like... like I want to move on. Like right now things are not being done for our children. We have an amazing Fall Fest that we need to get planned and that is not happening right now. Parents are saying that they will not raise funds for our school because of this. Well it's a laughing matter, I get it. There are safeguards in place that you can't have an executive board just run off with money. Like for me to sign a check I have to have somebody else, another member of the executive board. I can't write a check. I put out a lot of my own money and for me to be able to get that money back, I have to have somebody else sign the check and write that check out. There are safeguards in place. You can trust your executive board, like transparency. It would have been completely transparent had the right budget been shown. If they had been working for the right budget this would not be an issue. I really do believe that. And guys we've got to get back to work.

MS CANO -

TIFFANEY - Absolutely, in fact in our bylaws and the chancellor's rules and regs, you can request to see anything in our books. I mean you have to set up a time to come and do it and like the treasurer would have to help you but our books are public documents for you to look at.

SHELLY - I think it's important to state also that there is an \$11,500 issue here, that was spent. That has now been returned to the school.

TIFFANEY - To the PTA.

SHELLY - To the PTA sorry. That WITS has very very kindly, and I don't think that Ms Cano stated it this morning. WITS when they heard the situation they said "we

are sending you the money back but we know how interested you are in the school and in this program and how implicated you are and we will do the full program for only \$8,000. So we are getting this awesome program. I volunteered for a day in that class. I am a trained chef. That woman was a trained shop. She busted her ass for it. Each class got an hour in there and that was just one cooking class. This will be four cooking classes They made vinaigrette. They talked about emulsion. She had the older kids read bottled vinaigrette labels into like have them recognize how things that you can't pronounce and going to your body and what about your truly how was that why should you buy the farmers market. It was awesome and the kids were so interested kids were like I don't need printed by the end of the day were they were actually getting in some more cleaning the place I'm at awesome that's amazing.

But all that to say that \$11,500 was spent in a way that the new EB thought was possible it is being returned and so now we are starting with a clean slate and can. There is no ill intent there's not like two years of Tiffany's life 25 hours a week in the school will not be erased by her taking one decision that was for the betterment of our children. Like it makes no sense.

TIFFANEY - In accordance with the rules and regs, it was a budget line. We wrote the check on the 28th, I don't remember but it was before we turned over the executive board. One thing I do want to say about the money that was returned, I personally feel that that money was recouped incorrectly and with that, WITS, who works on a shoestring budget, took a hit. So the correct budget is going to be voted on at the next PTA meeting and we will decide if we will give WITS the money that we told them that we were going to give them or like either way we're going to get wet but it's awesome.

Q - I just have one question. One PTA president resigned Monday and one president resigned Tuesday. What was explained by Tuesday?

STEPHANIE - We tried to resolve it internally with Ms Cano and Ms Raciunas first, the former EB and us. I guess there was not a really clear understanding about the situation. The presidents who resigned thought that it was something really missing and stolen, which it's not. They can't accept the idea that it wasn't stolen and maybe it wasn't on the schedule like they said. So Shelly and I stayed we stayed on because we realized there is nothing stolen so they resigned.

SHELLY - I think that there's a lot of hurt and yeah, it's for personal reasons. In their hearts they feel that they couldn't get over that and that's to each their own right. If you feel that that was a personal, I mean, then that's the right thing to do for you and that's that's OK too. They tried to do their best and they thought that this was wrong and the situation was resolved but even though the situation was resolved they still felt hurt, enough so that they didn't want to give their time in that

way anymore. Tu peux pas en vouloir à personne. You can't be upset at them for that.

MS CANO - At the end they followed their conscious and their heart. Which is exactly what I said to them when they came to me to tell me that they were going to resign. If you don't think that you can follow your heart and conscious. If you don't think that you can fulfill your responsibilities in any capacity in the right way then they did the right thing. At the end of the day we've presented the information as to the entire timeline. I think that Tiffaney or Sarah said it, we need to move on. Everyday that we have spent trying to unravel and get people back in the right place is a day that we have lost for all our 550 children. That is where the real work lies. That's why I still wake up every morning at 5:30am and I'm here everyday at 6:30am until 6pm because of those 550 children. We can't continue to talk about this and it will be talked about because that is human nature. So if you chose to remain in those conversations that is certainly your prerogative. Those of us who have been in it for the last two weeks, deeply, we are going to move on. We have a lot of great work ahead of us.

That being said, next Tuesday, we are the first New York City school that is going to receive the World Peace Flame. It is a peacemaking organisation. Information will go home at the end of the week but we are inviting all 550 children and their families in the park for a formal presentation of the flame that signifies that all the children in the school as leaders. They are leaders and peacemakers. October 2nd happens to be Mahatma Gandhi's birthday and we have been talking to the children about being peacemakers. So ladies and gentlemen, I need, we all need to be peacemakers. That is the message that we need our children to walk away with. There was a disagreement, a huge one. It has been resolved and we are going to move on because our children deserve it. We've lost momentum. I know we can pick it up again. Sarah has already been on, she stepped right in with the Fall Fest. That's a huge fundraising effort for this school and you know that those fundraising efforts are paying for all the things that your children are doing. We had to start the year at a deficit. I've been doing this for 35 years, the first year that I've ever had a budget opening at a deficit. That's how tight budgets are in New York City Public Schools this year. If it isn't for the collective effort from all of you, your children will not be able to continue with all the wonderful things that they here. As far as Ms Raciunas and I are concerned, the subject is closed and we are moving on and we are getting ready for that event on Tuesday. Information will go out. I hope you can join us. Sarah invited anyone who wants to get involved in the Fall Fest, October 20th. Unfortunately my niece will be getting married on October 20th so I will not be here but enjoy because it's an amazing event.

Thank you all for coming. And if you have any other questions or if you hear anything else out there and you're still concerned, please come to me or to someone else on the board because rumours are rampant. That's the way these

things go. They will die down because that's what happens with a rumour. But we have to get past the hurt and we have to move on. So thank you all for coming.