

Christine Loughlin, Interim Acting D3 Superintendent
NYC DOE
154 West 93 Street
New York, NY 10025

December 2, 2019

Dear Superintendent Loughlin,

We are parents of children at PS166 in class K102 and are contacting you regarding some specific concerns we have for our class as well as the overall school. It is our understanding that you aren't able to meet with us to discuss these issues in person so are hoping to engage in a dialogue this way.

Our current objective is to understand what systems of accountability are in place to improve our school with regard to these primary concerns:

- Retention of high quality teachers including those with longevity at the school
- Principal Mastriano's leadership and communication skills
- School climate: Administration + Teachers/Staff + Students + Parents/PTA

We understand that you are working on the issue of 'trust' with Principal Mastriano, which given the School Quality Guide [statistics](#), particularly in the area of Teacher-Principal Trust, seems exceedingly prudent and is reassuring. Additionally, although the statistics for Parent-Principal Trust are not as dire, they are also well below the district average and do not yet reflect the departure of many teachers over the summer or the removal of Ms. Julie Stone from K102 this fall.

Given the typical school hierarchy, Principal Mastriano's words and actions are of utmost significance to the climate of PS166. In addition to what we've personally experienced this school year, it has also become apparent that our frustrations and disappointment with the principal's leadership are not recent developments and are shared by others throughout the school. We have heard of and seen a pattern of evasiveness, obfuscation, and lack of empathy which when coupled with the loss of many great teachers has resulted in an accumulation of mistrust.

In addition to these insights, we have gained the perspective to know how fortunate we are to be part of a school that is academically very successful and rich in its curriculum (for which Principal Mastriano deserves great credit), substantially supported by legions of parents and a vibrant PTA, housed in an incredible building, and filled with engaged students, staff, and teachers. It is because of this achievement, passion, and commitment that we are driven to engage with you regarding solutions for the above concerns.

For your reference, and to contextualize how we got to where we are today, we have included a timeline of key events from the past 2+ months at the end of this letter. From attending PTA meetings and other discussions, we have learned that the PTA, SLT, administration, and you are working towards improving the teacher-principal relationship and overall communication approach. We also understand that improving trust cannot be done overnight and is a highly complex endeavor. However, we believe that

publicly addressing the following questions will drive the PS166 community towards the goal of improving not only trust with Principal Mastriano, but the school as a whole. We look forward to your responses as well as hearing any other ideas or strategies you may have.

Actionable questions:

- (Retention/School Climate) What new systems are in place to facilitate teachers and administration working together to address concerns and frustrations?
 - Are these internal or lead by you?
 - Will these be shared with the parents? How?
 - How will the success of them be measured?
- (Retention/School Climate) Besides the annual DOE survey, what metrics are in place to measure teacher morale intermittently throughout the year?
 - Will those results be shared with the parents? How?
- (Retention/School Climate) How will you know if teacher morale / turnover is improving? Do you have a goal or benchmark? If teacher morale does not improve over the next year, what will you do?
 - Will this be shared with parents? How?
- (Retention/School Climate) 'New blood' is helpful in any organization, but in balance with the stability and leadership that often comes from those with experience and longevity. How is PS166 being supported in light of so many teachers leaving + new teachers?
 - What has your role been in this?
- (Retention/School Climate) Does the DOE conduct exit interviews when a teacher leaves or transfers?
 - Has it been truly looked into why so many teachers are choosing to leave PS166?
- (Leadership/School Climate) Ms. Emily Hogan (Ms. Julie Stone's replacement in K102) shared with parents three weeks ago that she is having behavior management issues in the classroom. (Likely due to her abrupt entry and curriculum already moving at pace.) How is classroom K102 and Ms. Emily Hogan being supported in light of Ms. Julie Stone's removal?
 - What has your role been in this?
 - Are there DOE best practices for teacher replacements?
- (Leadership/School Climate) Many parents of K102 feel that the letter they received re. Ms. Julie Stone's removal, the subsequent meeting with Principal Mastriano, and additional letter were too little, too late. I.e. confidence was not rebuilt in the administration or DOE. Is anything being done to repair the relationship with K102 parents?
 - What is being done to improve timely communication on urgent topics?
- (Leadership/School Climate) Gaining knowledge via word-of-mouth isn't an effective means of communication, as it also undercuts an environment of transparency and accountability. What is

being done to share with all parents that you, the SLT, and the PTA are working with Principal Mastriano on her leadership skills?

- What will be the markers of progress?
- What can parents do to support this?
- (Leadership/School Climate) Given the low trust, and the nature of a hierarchy, many parents do not feel comfortable going directly to the Principal or Assistant Principal with concerns. What would be your recommendation for them to raise concerns? How should they proceed if their concerns go unaddressed?

Additionally, please find attached letters from parents sharing their personal experiences regarding the above listed concerns as well as the value Ms. Julie Stone added to the school.

We sincerely appreciate your time and attention in reading this letter and thinking about our concerns. Please don't hesitate to be in touch with any questions. We look forward to your reply by December 16th.

Sincerely,



Justine R. Vlasto & Annie Himmelsbach

Supported by fellow K102 parents:



Timeline briefly recapping key events, September, 2019 - present

- Thursday, September 12th - Back-to-school-night + PTA meeting that followed
 - Many parents learned for the first time how many teachers were new to the school; Principal Mastriano offered a fairly topical explanation with not a lot of empathy for the natural concern parents would have at this news.
 - We were introduced to you as the acting D3 superintendent.
 - We learned from our children's teacher, Ms. Julie Stone, that she had been at the school 22 years.
- Thursday, October 3rd - Principal's Coffee talk
 - Principal Mastriano brushed over a question regarding teacher turnover.
- Monday, October 21st - Ms. Julie Stone removed from K102
 - Ms. Emily Hogan began teaching in K102 - the children were not given an explanation re. where Ms. Julie Stone was or what was happening.
 - Parents were notified with a 'red folder / backpack' letter from Principal Mastriano that Ms Stone had been removed from the K102 classroom; not all children received the letter
 - Beyond the shock, parents found the content and wording of the letter very confusing and attempted to reach out to the Vice Principal Anav Cohen and Parent Coordinator Deborah Markewich for further explanation - they were told they had no more information to share.
 - Classroom representatives emailed Principal Mastriano requesting an emergency meeting with all class parents.
- Tuesday, October 22nd - Meeting with Principal Mastriano scheduled
 - By late morning a reply had not been received from Principal Mastriano so the Parent Coordinator was contacted; parents found it frustrating that the principal was not immediately responsive or proactive in arranging to meet with us.
 - A meeting time of 2:00 PM the following day was offered - this was not convenient for most parents; 8:00 AM two days later was agreed to.
- Wednesday, October 23rd - CEC3 meeting
 - 3 parents presented concerns to the board and yourself regarding: 1) The removal of Ms. Stone from K102; 2) The lack of information communicated to parents and children about her removal and the ensuing confusion/disruption; 3) Principal Mastriano's poor management and DOE trust ratings; 4) The teacher retention issues at PS166 and the lack of a substantive explanation.
 - You shared that you were aware of the issues and were working with Principal Mastriano as well as the PTA presidents on 'trust' as related to the principal.
 - You shared that the letter we received from Principal Mastriano was drafted and approved by DOE legal.
 - CEC3 Board President Kim Watkins and other board members acknowledged prior awareness of the significant teacher turnover at PS166 and concerning statistics.
- Thursday, October 24th - Parent meeting with Principal Mastriano
 - PTA presidents, Vice Principal, Parent Coordinator, and school counselor were also present.

- Principal Mastriano began the meeting with essentially no explanation, apology, or empathy regarding Ms. Julie Stone’s removal before introducing Ms. Emily Hogan.
- Many questions were directed to Principal Mastriano regarding the disruption for the children, very poor communication with parents, what was going on with Ms. Julie Stone, and overall change-management shortcomings; she did not seem prepared for the level of frustration expressed by parents nor how to provide meaningful answers re. DOE processes even if they are shielded.
- Ms. Emily was present for the entire meeting after introducing herself; many parents found it concerning that in addition to her suddenly being assigned to a new class, she was witness to hearing how upset parents were about Ms. Stone’s removal; even if the frustrations were not directed at her, this was awkward at best and reflected poorly on the Principal’s leadership; parents reached out to Ms. Emily Hogan afterwards to specifically reassure her of their support and that it wasn’t meant personally.
- Principal Mastriano was asked about teacher turnover at PS 166; in part of her explanation she said that when someone comes to her and asks for a transfer her first response to them is saying that she’ll support them in going wherever they want to go; it was concerning to hear this vs. ‘What can I do to help you stay?’; this also seems to indicate that by the time someone requests a transfer she knows they want out.
- Vice Principal Cohen explicitly, and Principal Mastriano generally, said they weren't 100% comfortable with the letter we received; this came out later in the meeting and was particularly concerning since they had made no attempts to do anything about it prior to the meeting with us, which we initiated; even if the details of the case couldn’t be discussed there is much more that could have been done in anticipation of parents wanting more information and knowing how disruptive removing a kindergarten teacher would be, let alone Ms Stone.
- Tuesday, October 29th - Email from Kristen Berger
 - In follow-up to communications with Kristen as the PS166 CEC3 liaison and our request to meet with you, we learned that you wouldn’t meet with us to discuss our concerns further.
- Monday, November 4th - PTA President’s Coffee Talk (K-2)
 - In this meeting, we learned that:
 - PS166 is a D3 high-touch school
 - PTA is highly involved in coaching Principal Mastriano on communication
 - Schools will now be rated on Social Climate in addition to ELA and Math education and the SLT is involved in making progress on this front
 - Superintendent (you) have been meeting with PS 166 teachers to discuss their concerns
 - At some point an outside coach was possibly hired for the Principal