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## POLICY

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## Reports

### Waiting for Your Call...

A Survey of New York City Department of Education  
Parent Coordinators by the Office of the Public Advocate

November 2003  
Executive Summary

This year, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) created a new school-based position called "Parent Coordinator" to assist and welcome parents and children. These coordinators are required to be available some night and weekend hours. The Office of the Public Advocate conducted a survey during the month of October to determine the ability of Parent Coordinators to answer parents' questions and their availability outside of schools hours, when many working parents are likely to call.

### Findings

Two-thirds of Parent Coordinators surveyed were unreachable after-hours

Over half the Parent Coordinators surveyed did not return calls

Parent Coordinators in Queens were least reachable after hours

Parent Coordinators in the Bronx were least likely to return calls

Three of the parent coordinators did not have numbers where they could be reached after-hours

Reached parent coordinators were friendly and helpful

### Recommendations

DOE must enforce Parent Coordinator's after-school hours

Parent Coordinators must return calls from parents in a reasonable time frame

DOE must provide set after-school contact hours for Parent Coordinators

DOE must provide contact information for all Parent Coordinators

### Introduction

In preparation for the 2003-2004 school year, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) created a new school-based position called the "Parent Coordinator" to assist and welcome parents and children. According to the DOE, "Parent Coordinators will have a slightly different schedule than other school staff. They will be available during some school hours, as well as having night and weekend hours." Assigned one per school, Parent Coordinators were also issued cell phones "to provide parents with better access to information and resources."

Due to the down-sizing of the local district offices, where parents previously were able to go for information on their children's school, it is imperative that Parent Coordinators are able to provide answers to parents' questions and are accessible outside of school hours. The Office of the Public Advocate conducted a survey of over 100 parent coordinators to determine the ability of Parent Coordinators to answer questions and their accessibility outside of school hours, when many working parents there are likely to call.

### **Methodology**

This is a random telephone survey of 103 Parent Coordinators across the five boroughs of New York City, 20 in Manhattan and Staten-Island and 21 in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Parent Coordinator contact numbers listed on the New York City Department of Education's website were used for this survey. Each Parent Coordinator was called once and, if unreachable, a message was left that the caller's child was about to enroll in the Coordinator's school, and that the caller had questions and would like a call back in the evening. The survey was conducted between five and seven in the evening, from October 16<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>. Parent Coordinators were given one week to return surveyor calls.

### **Findings**

Two-thirds of Parent Coordinators surveyed were unreachable after-hours.

Of the 103 Parent Coordinators surveyed, two-thirds or 68 percent were unreachable after five pm. We were only able to reach 32 percent of the Parent Coordinators surveyed.

Elementary school Parent Coordinators were hardest to reach after hours. Of the 35 elementary school Parent Coordinators surveyed, only 20 percent, or seven, were reachable.

High school Parent Coordinators were easier to reach, with 36 percent, or 12 of 33, Coordinators reached after hours.

Middle school Parent Coordinators were easiest to reach, with 40 percent, or 14 of 35, Parent Coordinators reached after hours.

Over half the Parent Coordinators surveyed did not return calls.

Voice messages were left for 68 Parent Coordinators. They were given one week to return surveyor calls, and over half, 51 percent, of the Parent Coordinators did not return our messages. Only 49 percent or 33 Parent Coordinators called back within the prescribed timeframe.

High school Parent Coordinators were least likely to return calls. Messages were left for 21 high school Parent Coordinators and

only 43 percent, or nine, returned our calls.

Half the elementary school Parent Coordinators failed to get back to callers. Of the 26 elementary school Parent Coordinators for whom messages were left, only 50 percent, or 13, called back.

Middle school Coordinators were most likely to return calls. Messages were left for 21 middle school Parent Coordinators, and 52 percent, or eleven, called back.

Parent Coordinators in Queens were least reachable after hours.

Parent Coordinators in Queens were hardest to reach, with only 19 percent, or four of 21, Parent Coordinators surveyed reached.

Staten Island closely follows, with 20 percent, or four of 20, Parent Coordinators reached after hours.

Brooklyn fared better with 33 percent, or seven of 21, Parent Coordinators reached. Manhattan was similar, with 35 percent, or seven of the 20, Parent Coordinators reached after-hours.

Parent Coordinators in the Bronx were the most reachable after hours, with over half, or 57 percent of the 21, Parent Coordinators surveyed reached.

Parent Coordinators in the Bronx were the least likely to return calls.

Messages were left for 10 Parent Coordinators in the Bronx . Only 40 percent, or four, of the Parent Coordinators surveyed in the Bronx returned our calls.

Brooklyn follows with 43 percent, or six of 14, Parent Coordinators returning our messages.

Parent Coordinators in Queens were better at getting back to surveyors, with 47 percent, or seven of 15, returning our messages.

Manhattan Parent Coordinators were more likely to call parents back, with 58 percent, or seven of 12 Coordinators, returning our messages.

Parent Coordinators in Staten Island were the most likely to call parents back, with 63 percent, or 10 of 16 Coordinators, returning our calls.

Three of the Parent Coordinators did not have numbers where they could be reached after-hours.

Of the 103 Parent Coordinators surveyed, DOE did not list contact numbers for Parent Coordinators at three schools: PS 15 Institute for Environmental Learning and PS 161 Ponce De Leon in the Bronx , and Tottenville High School in Staten Island. Surveyors were able to leave messages for Coordinators at Tottenville High School and PS 161 at the school general number. The Parent Coordinator for Tottenville High School returned our call but only ten days after we left the message. The Parent Coordinator from PS 161 did not return the call.

Reached Parent Coordinators were friendly and helpful.

Of the total 103 Parent Coordinators surveyed, we were only able to speak to 32 percent, or 33, of the Coordinators. However, we found the reached Parent Coordinators to be friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable about many of the issues on which they were questioned. They gave consistent answers on the types of documentation required to register for school, the process of registering for school, and programs available at the school.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Parent Coordinators we were able to reach were all very helpful and knowledgeable. However, the findings from our survey indicate that nearly two-thirds of the Parent Coordinators surveyed could not be reached after-hours. While our inability to reach Parent Coordinators after placing only one call after five pm may be understandable, the fact that over half did not return our messages is alarming. This tells us that parent coordinators are not as easily accessible to parents nor as responsive as they should be.

The Public Advocate recommends the following to improve Parent Coordinator accessibility and responsiveness:

DOE must enforce Parent Coordinator's after-school hours. Despite DOE's claim that Parent Coordinators will have night hours, it is clear from our survey that this is not happening as often it should. DOE must enforce this rule, determine any barriers to Parent Coordinators providing this critical service, and, when warranted, take action against Parent Coordinators who fail to do so.

Parent Coordinators must return calls from parents in a reasonable timeframe. Parent coordinators are provided with cellular phones by the Department of Education. Parent coordinators must use this tool provided to them to respond to messages in a timely manner. If parent coordinators do not return calls, the Department of Education must determine why the calls are not being returned and take action against Parent Coordinators when warranted.

DOE must set after-school contact hours for Parent Coordinators, and notify parents through website, letters, and postings at school. Currently, the DOE posts the contact info for Parent Coordinators on each school's webpage. The DOE must also post what days and hours the Parent Coordinators will be available after school to better assist working parents who may be unable to call during school hours. This information should also be posted at schools and sent to parents through the mail.

DOE must provide contact information for all parent coordinators. Our survey found that the DOE did not provide contact numbers for three of the Parent Coordinators randomly selected for the survey. DOE must make sure that all Parent Coordinators have cell phones and that parents are provided with this information so that parents have after-hour access to Parent Coordinators.

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