



Assemblywoman
**Barbara
CLARK**
Reports to the People

DECEMBER 2011

**Invest 2 hours a month in your local Parents Association.
The return on your investment is a better education for our children.**

Dear Friends:

Education policy is being radically reformed all across the country. Due to the revolutionary changes that have occurred in the New York City school system over the last ten years New York is in the forefront of this movement. A sense of how high the stakes are can be garnered from the fact that, for the 2011-12 fiscal year, \$30.3 billion in capital and operating funds were budgeted for the education of New York City's 1.1 million students. And though that's billion with a B, even that is inadequate.

Given these numbers it is little wonder that legions of non-traditional interests are jockeying to involve themselves. Running the gamut from Wall Street financiers to international business magnates, this onrushing army of nontraditional reformers are paradoxically claiming the field of reform just as those with the most precious interests, parents, are in apparent retreat. According to the New York Times, in this year's parent council elections only "5,000 parents submitted advisory votes, down from 25,000 in 2009."

If this trend continues, the 2013 elections for New York City parent councils will have the unacceptable effect of removing parents from the vehicle created to give them input into the most fundamental restructuring of education to occur in this country in the last half century. This cannot be allowed to happen. As one who has long supported and actively pursued radical change in the way we operate our schools, I know that parental engagement in the process can have the effect of slowing the pace of change. Still, without massive parental engagement no radical change has any chance whatsoever of succeeding.

I am therefore taking this opportunity to encourage those of my constituents who have children in the public schools to participate in the Community Education Council elections en masse. Please do not fall prey to the trap of non-participation arising from the broadly held belief that these councils have no teeth. Even if true, mass participation is the way to give them teeth.

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

Assemblywoman Clark invites State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli to the 33rd Assembly District

“Found money is a wonderful thing even in the best of times.”

— Assemblywoman Clark

On Tuesday October 18th, at the invitation of Assemblywoman Clark, State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli visited Kermit Dowry Memorial Hall, 204-03 Linden Blvd., and gave a presentation to an assembled group of constituents. Comptroller DiNapoli gave a well received talk in which he outlined the full scope of services his office has available to the citizens of the state.

At the end of the night participants had a much better understanding of the role the comptroller plays in state government. Some were surprised to learn that the comptroller has a hand in everything from managing the state retirees’ pension fund to developing affordable housing. For some odd reason, however, the most interest arose when the comptrol-

ler announced the news that not only is he the custodian of \$11 billion in unclaimed funds but that some of those funds might belong to some in the room.

After having witnessed this response Assemblywoman Clark requested that the comptroller arrange for his Office of Unclaimed Funds to visit the district with their portable terminals so that people could check for lost money. “Found money is a wonderful thing even in the best of times,” offered Clark, “you can imagine what a boon it would be at a time when all our budgets are being stretched thin. So I’m thrilled to be able to at least provide a venue where someone might find some.”

Office of Unclaimed Funds Highlights Assemblywoman Clark's Financial Workshop

As a follow up to Comptroller DiNapoli's October visit on November 17th Assemblywoman Clark held a Financial Planning Workshop at the Grace Luthern Day School. During the workshop those in attendance with housing issues were able to obtain expert guidance from the Neighborhood Housing Services of Jamaica's Foreclosure Service Manager, Cerinelly Disla, and Housing Service's attorney, Simone Whiteman.

As promised, New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli sent a contingent from his Office of Unclaimed Funds. Vanessa Lockel, from the Comptroller's press office, spearheaded this contingent. In the end, however, it was the two representatives operating the terminals where people checked for unclaimed funds that proved to be the most popular.



Assemblywoman Clark and Comptroller DiNapoli enjoy a light moment.

When she was told that the first to discover the possible existence of unclaimed funds was Grace Luthern Church Assemblywoman Clark said things could not have turned out better. “After being so gracious in providing us the space to have this workshop,” said Clark, “what could have been more fitting.”



Workshop attendees listen to presentation of the panel. Panel members seated at front table left to right: Cerinelly Disla, Simone Whiteman and Vanessa Lockel.



Grace Luthern Staff, left to right: Elder Leonard Burrel, Deacon Lillian Biddle, Pastor Marvin A. Griffin Sr., Principal Shirley Griffin and Congregational President Maureen E. Hoyte

Assemblywoman Clark speaks out against school layoffs

On September 23, Assemblywoman Clark joined Assemblymember William Scarborough to protest the layoffs of 800 New York City school aides. With a contingent of teachers, labor leaders and community residents, they gathered in front of Public School 15 in Springfield Gardens during a steady rain.

“These layoffs are especially disheartening,” said Clark. “Not only do they place at risk all the changes we have made in the school system but they lay our budget problems on the

backs of the people who can least afford it.”

Clark went on to stress the fact that the victory won in the long court battle to increase state funding in education was increasingly being made an empty one by layoffs such as those proposed. “It’s just heartbreaking,” lamented Clark. “You fight and fight and fight only to find yourself out here in the rain trying to save the jobs of not only the people who need their jobs the most but also the people whose jobs are critical to the success of what you were fighting for.”



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Assembly woman Clark being interviewed by New York 1.
Photo courtesy of Juliet Kaye

The Auxiliary of Queens Hospital Center’s 75th Anniversary Gala

On Thursday, October 13th, I was honored to attend the Queens Center 75th Anniversary Gala. Over the years, the auxiliary has raised countless dollars to augment the services offered by Queens Hospital. Over the course of this time the Auxiliary has again and again shown itself to be a shining example of the best volunteerism can be. Attesting to its work was the fact that among the attendees was a long list of dignitaries and officials.

The night was especially rewarding for me in that my mother, Ada DeBerry, the auxiliary’s president, was one of the honorees. More than anything it is her fortitude that fortifies me. This she reminds me each time the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune start to break me down by pointing out the fact they she is still suffering them as a volunteer while at least I’m getting paid for it.

Thank you mom for the gentle reminder.



Assemblywoman Clark honors Gregory Floyd, president of Teamsters Local 237. **Photo courtesy of the Queens Courier.**



Former Queens Borough President Claire Shulman, left, and Master of Ceremonies Bill McCreary honor Auxiliary president Ada DeBerry, center.

The safety of our children: A PERSONAL NOTE

We in New York are accustomed to the periodic horror stories that arise from our institutional failure to protect our most vulnerable children. We collectively wince at the most horrific of these stories not because they reveal our failure to attend to the material well-being of these children but because they bring to light our failure to put in place those institutional safeguards that would assure them a reasonable chance of at least living their lives free from the specter of physical abuse.

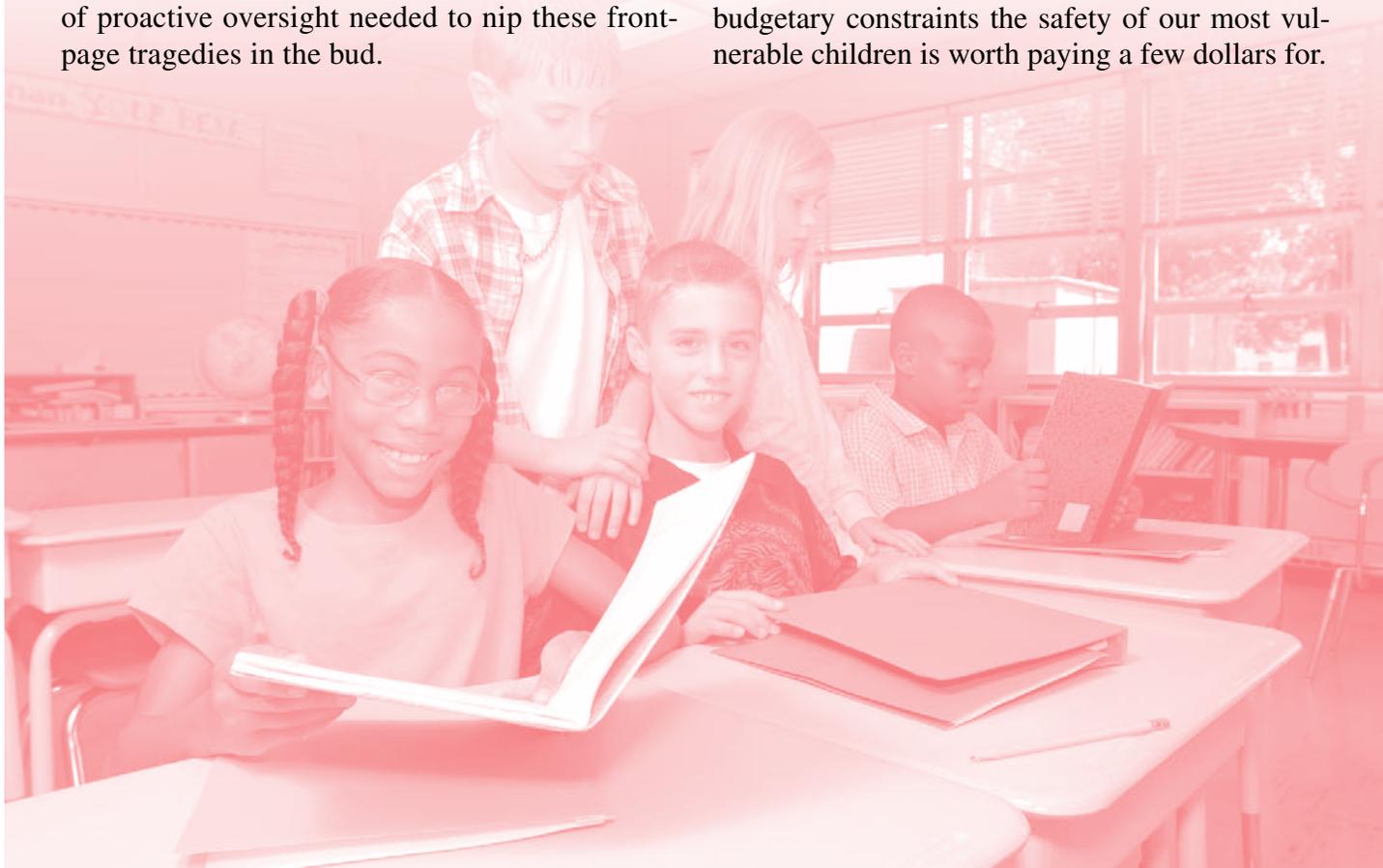
In the wake of these revealed tragedies we usually go through an intense moment of soul searching and recrimination before returning to business as usual. As I write, the country is in the preliminary stages of several of these incidents. What most frustrates me about this is that ever since 2005 I have unsuccessfully attempted to have legislation passed in this state specifically designed to correct the institutional dynamic that apparently allowed the abuse of children in Pennsylvania to go on year after year after year.

Essentially titled “AN ACT . . . [to establish] the independent office of the child advocate,” my legislation was originally crafted to create an independent office with subpoena power whose sole purpose was to proactively oversee both the child welfare and the juvenile justice systems in this state. It would not only have removed the oversight function from under the organizational umbrella of the entities it is supposed to oversee but it would also have encouraged the type of proactive oversight needed to nip these front-page tragedies in the bud.

Not surprisingly, opposition to this legislation came from both public and private child care agencies. The legislation was consequently bottlenecked. To overcome the bottleneck, in January of 2010, I reluctantly amended the bill such that it would only apply to juvenile justice facilities. I did this to take advantage of a window of opportunity opened when the United State Department of Justice issued a report citing widespread abuse in several of the state’s juvenile justice facilities and giving the state a short period of time to address them. As a consequence, my bill overwhelmingly passed both houses of the legislature and was sent to then Governor Paterson. Unfortunately, essentially citing budgetary reasons, Governor Paterson vetoed the legislation.

He most pointedly cited what he said would be estimated costs of \$6.2 million dollars in the office’s first year of operation and then \$3.2 million dollar annual costs thereafter. Even if these figures are correct, which I dispute, from a budgetary standpoint, I believe them to be an example of being penny wise and pound foolish. My position has always been that not only will this office economically save us far more than it costs but that it will also provide us the best means of avoiding the epidemic of after-the-fact moral finger pointing we are witnessing in the state of Pennsylvania today.

I will be reintroducing this legislation in the coming session. I urge my constituents to lend your support by making it known that even in times of budgetary constraints the safety of our most vulnerable children is worth paying a few dollars for.



Assemblywoman Barbara M. Clark

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