



Good News

Blind Students Are Encouraged By Gov

By Juliet Werner

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<http://www.queenstribune.com/news/1207239452.html>

David Paterson was born in Brooklyn, but the first legally blind governor received his early education outside of the City. His parents quickly became frustrated with New York City public schools once they realized their son would be confined to special education classes and relocated the family to Long Island where Paterson could attend class with the general student body.

Blind and visually impaired students are not isolated at Ridgewood's Grover Cleveland High School, one of only a few City schools equipped with a "Vision Room."

Freshman Kimberly Pulley, who has limited vision, has a full schedule of "regular" classes along with access to the Vision Room.

"I don't feel any different than anybody else," Pulley said.

"I just feel like I have extra help whenever I need it."

The Vision Room, staffed by Dolores Schmitt and Miriam Galarza, requires constant upkeep. The shelves are stacked with brail books, which must be replaced whenever a new edition of a text book is released. Brail books consume a lot of space; one text book can translate into 54 brail books. The classroom is also stocked with large print books and audio books, as well as a computer with a brail keyboard.

Principal Dominick Scarola, who has limited vision in one eye, said Paterson's coming to office provided educators with an opportunity.

"It's a teaching moment," Scarola said.

"Teachers won't dwell [on the scandal], but on the successor and how the politics work."

Galarza said her students followed Eliot Spitzer's resignation and Paterson's inauguration with interest.

"The kids were talking about it," she said.

Sophomore Quion St. Hill thought the new governor might look out for his needs.



The vision room at Grover Cleveland High School provides extra help. Photo by Michael Irizary

"Maybe there'd be changes for the visually impaired," he said.

St. Hill's classmate, Maritza Flores, had specific improvements in mind: including brail or large print on buses and at bus stops. At 15, Flores already has career goals.

"I'm basically stuck on two: working at a day care center and I might also be an artist," she said.

Raheem Houssein, a senior, works with senior citizens and disabled adults after school and has volunteered at a hospital. Schmitt and Galarza encourage their students to find role models.

"The teachers are very good," said Assistant Principal Donna Williams, who has been at the school for 21 years. "They work very hard. They work as hard as the kids."

Mary O'Sullivan serves as a guidance counselor to several of the visually impaired students.

"This is the best vision room in the entire system," O'Sullivan said. "To me this is a hidden treasure. It's not a crutch either. We're gonna call them to task if they don't [perform]. People think we don't do anything for these kids, but we do."