



Good News GCHS Stands Tall

Student leaders urge

“transformation” of Grover Cleveland

Queens Ledger article by: Daniel Bush April 19, 2011

Grover Cleveland High School's top students won't let their school close without a fight.

Members of its student association are making a plea to send the struggling Himrod Street school through an official “transformation” makeover that would overhaul the institution and possibly bring in a new principal, but keep its doors open.

The transformation model is one of four options being considered by the city's Department of Education (DOE) under a federal program to improve failing schools. The others are redesigning the schools, rebuilding them from scratch, or closing them altogether.

Grover Cleveland faces one of those scenarios because it landed on a list of under-achieving schools. The city is expected to determine its future in the next several weeks.

Student leaders said given their options the transformation model is the least painful.

“Out of the choices it's the best one,” Karolina Zajac, the student association president, said at an appearance before Community Board Five.

The city has already implemented transformation models at 11 schools, including three in Queens: Long Island City, Queens Vocational, and Flushing high schools.

The overhaul strategy consists of hiring special “turnaround” teachers, using data to upgrade instruction, pouring more resources into helping students with their social and emotional needs, and soliciting input on improvements from community groups.

It also requires the principal to step down, something that would deal a blow to Grover Cleveland, where Principal Dominick Scarola is well-liked by students and parents.

But the plan also allows for popular principals with more than three years experience to serve as mentors for their replacements, said DOE spokesperson Jack Zarin-Rosenfeld, who would not comment specifically on Grover Cleveland.

Schools that have shown progress in recent years “are the schools that would benefit most from the transformational model,” he said. “We do try to [make] these decisions case by case.”

Supporters said the school's reputation for overcrowding and poor instruction has overshadowed its academic progress of late, especially in the areas of math and science.

“They have a strong math and science program,” said Councilwoman Elizabeth Crowley. The school “should focus on its strengths and expanding them.”

Some parents, like Kathy Carlson, a member of the school's parent association, believe Scarola is behind any gains Grover Cleveland has been able to make in recent years.

“He's done amazing things with the school,” Carlson said.

“We don't have the best reputation,” Zajac said of her school, where she'll graduate this summer, but “not a lot of people have noticed the changes that have occurred over the years.”

DOE's Zarin-Rosenfeld said the city has an April 30th deadline to make a decision.



Cleveland' Student Association