

# Project Challenge Newsletter

## Volume VI

Members of the PCPA executive board had a year-end meeting with Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Dr. Linda Bruno on June 19. At the meeting, Dr. Bruno reported that the district has received a preliminary report from Dr. Selena Smith. Dr. Smith is a professor at St. John's, specializing in gifted education, and has been reviewing the criteria, matrix and selection process for Project Challenge.

During the course of her review, Dr. Smith met with teachers, administrators and parents to get their input and feelings about the program. She addressed the PCPA's May 16 meeting, where she read us the District's definition of giftedness, of which none of us was aware. It reads:

*The Plainview-Old Bethpage Central School District believes that there are gifted students whose intellectual capacity, rate of learning, and potential for creative contributions demands an experience apart from the regular classroom. These students have consistently exhibited a level of motivation and performance which sets them apart from others*

When asked what we thought was the criteria is for entering Project Challenge, most parents said it was scoring 130 on the OLSAT. The District definition clearly states that there is more to the selection criteria than a test. Dr. Smith said while there is "a lot of reliability" to the OLSAT, it's just a screening. She said it does nothing, for example, to test creativity. "Where are you testing creativity on a test?"

Dr. Bruno is working on expanding the matrix used to evaluate candidates for the program. She has met with the PC teachers and asked them to draft ideas for a matrix. She said she hopes to have a new matrix in place for the 2008-2009 school year. The District is in the process of reviewing other Districts' criteria for entrance into their gifted programs.

Dr. Bruno also said all 3rd-graders would be tested for Project Challenge next year.

Next year's PC classes will contain 120 students. There are 17 3rd-graders (3 Parkway, 3 Pasadena, 9 Old Bethpage, 2 Stratford); 25 4th-graders (4 Parkway, 8 Pasadena, 4 Old Bethpage, 9 Stratford); 46 5th-graders (15 POB, 31 Mattlin); and 32 6th-graders (15 POB, 17 Mattlin).

Dr. Bruno said the District is moving ahead with its feasibility study of the International Baccalaureate program for middle schools. Last month, District representatives visited Commack schools, which use IB. This week, District teachers were to be meeting with Dr. Cathy Battaglia, an IB representative.

While it will take several years for an IB program to be fully implemented, Dr. Bruno has taken steps to introduce more rigor into our curriculum. The PC teachers have received training in the Junior Great Books program which uses the Socratic Seminar method to promote critical

thinking and enhance comprehension. Students read texts and must answer questions based on the passages. There are no right or wrong answers per se, but students must be able to defend their answers using only what is available in the texts, and not prior knowledge. This will promote debate and enable students to develop a higher level of thinking.

PC teachers having been using this method in their classes and, next year, Dr. Bruno hopes to have all middle school teachers trained in this method for ELA, science and social studies.

### **New PCPA board**

On May 16, the PCPA elected its new board:

Holly Ash, President

Joe Illuzzi, First VP Communications

Betty Heiman, VP Membership

Sophia Brogna, VP Programming

Emily Schulman, Recording Secretary

Cheryl Kuster, Treasurer

The PCPA would like to thank outgoing President Steve Dershowitz, VP Membership Eileen Dershowitz, Treasurer Ivy Chasan and Recording Secretary Jasmine Norris for their dedicated service. We owe a great debt to Steve, Eileen and Ivy for getting this organization off the ground and going to bat for our children.