

Dads come together on Take Your Child to School Day



On September 20th, it was a cloudy and cool Tuesday morning, when across the city you could see hundreds of men walking to school among the backpack-clad children on Dads Take Your Child to School day. At MS 35, the Stephen Decatur School, in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, more than twenty dads packed themselves into a room to talk about something they all agreed on: the importance of men in their children’s lives.

“Your actions count, even if you might get overwhelmed. Because if you’re a king, you want your children to be better kings,” said Gamie Ollivierre, a father of three, who also happens to be the first male PTA president in the school’s history. “I’m so proud of what’s happening here. I’m getting choked up.”

Indeed, there were powerful emotions in the room, as tears were shed in recognition of the enormity of being a father—from the highs to the lows. One of the strongest looking men in the group, a formerly incarcerated father, was visibly moved. “Everything we take into this room, we need to take out of this room as well,” he said, acknowledging that he had lost his own dad to gang violence. He now has custody of his son and daughter, whom he says he cherishes every day, despite the stresses of being a parent.

He, and other fathers present, were impressed by the positivity being expressed in the room, coming from speaker after speaker. MS 35 Assistant Principal Kevin Bond, who rallied the fathers to “to join our strength together,” made his point by first hitting the wall with his pinky, and then making a resounding boom by hitting it with his fist. HRA Special Advisor Kenneth Charles, who also happens to be the brother of MS 35’s principal Jackie Charles-Marcus, reminded the fathers to keep a close eye on

their children because, “A leads to B leads to C. . . which leads to D,” encouraging them to steer their children away from the first steps of self-destructive behavior.

Similar words of guidance and support could be heard throughout the city, which had close to a hundred schools participating in the event organized by the federal government’s Administration for Children and Families, The New York State Office of Children and Family Services and the state’s Fatherhood Initiative out of the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance. Also partnering in the effort were the NYC Department of Education’s Office of Family and Community Engagement, Department of Youth and Community Development, Administration for Children Services and the Human Resources Administration. In the Bronx’s Sharon Baptist Head Start, for example, 30 dads were joined by the City’s Fatherhood Coordinator Alan S. Farrell and Office of Child Support Enforcement Deputy Commissioner Fran Pardus-Abadessa, who both spoke. Athletic metaphors were popular on this day, when the greatest champs were the dads who choose to help guide their children to better futures.

Back in Brooklyn, Ollivierre spoke honestly about the difficulty of mustering up the energy of parents-dads and moms alike-throughout their children’s school -year. In fact, Ollivierre says he didn’t know most of the dads present in the room. It’s not easy, Ollivierre conceded, being an involved father.

But on this day, the takeaway message was powerful and positive: Your presence matters in the educational lives of your children—and you are not alone.