

Public should 'annoy' to get ed projects in motion

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No matter the district, our city schools tend to lack many basics found in districts just to the east of our borough. Some discrepancies include funding for arts and music programs and after-school educational, counseling and recreation programs and sports.

In some schools, parent fund-raising enables schools to fill in these gaps. Legislative aid also helps. The gap in technology — computers — gets addressed primarily through discretionary capital budget enhancements, often advocated by school, parent and civic leaders. With the city budget adopted last month, the time to play “annoy” arrives and community members should get their requests in now.



Corey Bearak

Last fall The Public Ought to Know reviewed this “game” devised with late Newsday political columnist Joe Queens to encourage the public to request a slice or slices of the budget pie for their neighborhood. See “Public should request a piece of city budget pie” (http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=10322782&BRD=1079&PAG=461&dept_id=170341&rft=6).

As a parent and school board member in Community School District 26, I found the resource differential between the schools in Nassau and northeast Queens glaring. I recognized the need to bridge the gap in the music and arts offerings, even though the student I once was preferred science, math and, especially, social studies. Computers were not a consideration when I attended PS 191, Hillside Junior High School (now Altman Middle School) or Martin Van Buren High School.

I vaguely recall a computer in the back of my high school math classroom. A Hofstra University, political science class gave me an opportunity to program a model that measured an American president’s success based on administration policies. During 1984’s presidential primary, I received a firsthand understanding of what computers could do.

I finally acquired my first home computer, a Tandy, in 1989 when I accepted an offer to submit an article for the Hofstra Environmental Law Digest.

I needed to type the article, but the portable typewriter I sometimes used was lent to someone a few years previous and the now troubled public official never returned it. I needed to type the manuscript and found a computer’s cost compared favorably with the electronic IBM typewriters I used in my office. The New York City Recycling Law: Reality Meets Idealism appeared in the fall 1990 (see <http://coreybearak.com/projects.shtml>).

Experiencing firsthand the benefits of a very rudimentary home personal computer, I wanted to see modern technology regularly available to students in our schools. My work then as chief of staff/counsel for a city councilman gave me opportunities to pass on suggested initiatives.

At the time, the Council secured the practice, which continues today, of negotiating the inclusion of capital projects in the city budget. An early initiative involved the installation of a modern, state-of-the-art computer lab in a school in each council district. My political beef was the failure to choose a school in the district of the council member for whom I worked. After all, he was a major proponent of the initiative, and 16 of 25 District 26 schools were in his district.

The following year, the Council switched gears. In place of a broader program that left sites to the discretion of 110 Livingston St., council members who sought to include funding for computer projects worked out sites with the school districts. Council members selected the sites based on outreach from individual schools and parent associations.

After I advised all District 26 parent leaders on this program, only the PTA from my child's school bothered to play Annoy and request the project. PS 115 got the first of the labs.

I suggested the new school board play "annoy" by submitting its preferred priority for funding new computer centers. This removed from my boss and placed on the school board any heat from parents over which school would get a computer lab.

More importantly, the school board played "annoy" with all three council members who had District 26 schools. Within five years every school in the Council and school district got new labs; some even got second projects. "Annoy" works.

A suggestion for next year would be to request portable science labs. Before I left government, I worked on a project that provided these labs to several Bronx high schools. Last year Councilman Jim Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows) brought that concept to a few Queens schools.

State and city legislators deserve kudos for the results when members of the public play "annoy," but special thank yous must also go to school, parent and civic leaders and community members who play "annoy" and request these projects.

You may want a park repair, repairs to a school, a resurfaced road or flood relief. Play "annoy" and see results. Get in the game.