

New public school in Graniteville to stress leadership

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- To the average person, it might look as though the students at PS/IS 861 are just planting flowers at Sea View Hospital Rehabilitation Center and Home.

But parents and teachers will know the children are actually learning about math, about interacting with the community and about what it means to help others.

Also called the Staten Island School of Civic Leadership, the new school is slated to open in Graniteville in September and will be one of 26 new schools across the city, creating a total of 14,000 classroom seats, officials said. Some of those schools will be brand-new while others are opening with annexes or in new buildings.

PS/IS 861 -- the only new school slated for the borough -- will house students from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade, the first of its kind on the Island. The school will open with pre-K, kindergarten, first-grade and sixth-grade classes. The capacity will be 822 students, including 72 seats for special-ed students. The school will prepare students to be disciplined, respectful and self-motivated, said Principal Rose Kerr, who is now an assistant principal at PS 22.

"What we're really trying to do is show the kids from day one that they are the leaders of tomorrow," she said. "They will be expected to take responsibility for their lives, to work with others and to do the right thing, even when no one is watching."

The staff will teach kids to take an active role in the world around them, incorporating that message into every aspect of their day-to-day curriculum, Ms. Kerr said. An act of community service, like planting flowers, will be reflected on and deconstructed in class lessons. Students will learn to become public speakers and will be comfortable interacting with adults by the time they go to high school, she said. For every two classes there will be three teachers, reducing the student-to-teacher ratio, Ms. Kerr said. Students will be closely evaluated for their learning habits and encouraged to create goals for themselves.

The school will have partnerships with the Jewish Community Center, Wagner College, Staten Island Mental Health Society, Seaview Hospital Rehabilitation Center and Home, Richmond County Bar Association, Rep. Michael McMahon's office, American Legion, [the Alliance of Guardian Angels](#) and local businesses, she said.

Though the school will have open enrollment, first priority will be given to students in surrounding schools, including PS 20, PS 21, PS 22, and Laurie and Markham intermediate schools -- all of which are overcrowded. Department of Education officials said there is a chance the school will be zoned next year, pending CEC approval and public input. Spokesman Will Havemann said the DOE is planning to redraw zoning lines, a complicated process that couldn't be completed by the start of the school year.

"We wanted to be sure that we gave it the time and attention that it required and so we decided to aim for rezoning next year," he said.

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