Why was nothing done at PS 106? Because the city and union wouldn't listen

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Last week, after an investigation into her alleged habit of skipping school, the Department of Education finally moved to remove Principal Marcella Sills from PS 106 in the Rockaways.

But why was this "School of No" allowed to perpetuate atrocities for nine years?

Why did it take an exposé in The New York Post to not only unseat a bad principal, but get students much-needed books — and stop them from watching movies instead of getting gym or art classes?
As a teacher who worked there for many years, I can tell you that it wasn't because the city wasn't warned. The children of PS 106 were failed by administrators, government lawmakers and union officials — a host of top people who couldn't be bothered to care.

When I started there in 2003, PS 106 was truly a secret treasure. It was a small school with a solid core, tucked away on the beach.
I was the special-education teacher; the work load was tremendous, but I loved it and took pride for moving children to higher levels simply by teaching.

Principal Arthur Strauss would meet and discuss programs and entrusted teachers with educational decisions made in the best interest of children.

In 2004, PS 106 was a school of recognition, achieving English language arts and math scores of 3 and 4 (exceeds standards) in all the testing grades 3-5.

We were recognized as a School of Excellence in 2004. It was truly a marvelous accomplishment — the students loved to read and write! Those were the days.

After Strauss left, Marcella Sills became principal in 2005 — a product of the city's "leadership academy."

Deterioration was rapid. You were either a friend of Sills or an enemy, and if she didn't like you, she'd rip you apart in reviews.
Sills opened state exam booklets earlier than allowed and asked teachers to discuss how to read a passage to help students better understand it, which was cheating. When told it was illegal, she had a fit.

Then, of course, there was what the investigation found last week — frequently showing up late for work, sometimes not showing up at all. Retaliation was common. When a teacher signed her name to a letter sent to officials expressing her concerns about educational practices that are adversely affecting children in our school, she was reprimanded for more than one hour by two supervisors from the Department of Education. Teachers learned to remain anonymous.

Letters began to flood the district office, superintendent's office, mayor's office, chancellor's office, UFT and the special commissioner of investigation just three months after Sills took the leadership position. But rather than addressing our concerns and dealing with the cause, the staff was reprimanded and scolded for not signing individual names. Now see why! Sills strategically targeted and harassed staff. Meetings, letters, e-mails, reports to the teachers union . . . all proved to be futile. Every letter, every complaint reiterated her absence, lateness,

inappropriate interaction with children, parents, staff, even falsification of reviews.

Sills was never held accountable.

What happened of course is that anyone who could left PS 106.

The transfer rate of staff members soared to 60%.

Then the students left. Parents transferred their children to other public schools and charter schools to escape what they saw as an institution that the city had given up on.

Enrollment declined from more than 600 students to just 250.
A year after Hurricane Sandy, Sills blamed the school's troubles on the storm. But its problems started long before Sandy and stayed around long after.

To show just how clueless and uncaring the administration was — in December 2013, PS 106 received a glowing report. At the time, there was no mandated gym, no special-education teacher (I had left and wasn't replaced), no books, no art and no extended-day services!
PS 106 received millions in extra school funding to help low-income kids. Where did the money go? It didn't go to pay for teachers who left and weren't replaced. It didn't go to the payroll secretary Sills didn't have so no one kept track of her absences.

It certainly didn't go to help the children of Far Rockaway.

Thanks to The Post for finally getting results and Chancellor Carmen Fariña and the mayor's office for ending this reign of abusive leadership. But the question remains how the people who were supposed to care remained deaf for so long. Why do families and teachers flee public

schools? They flee when they feel powerless. They flee because of what happened at PS 106.

Patricia Walsh, a graduate of Teachers College at Columbia University, taught for 27 years, and was a special education teacher at PS 106 from 2003 to 2009.