

# SchoolBook

## At a ‘Restart’ School, It Starts with Long Lines

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By Anna M. Phillips



Kirsten Luce for The New York Times | Reesa Levy, center, the principal at Sheepshead Bay High School, helps direct students on the first day of school.

*SchoolBook reporters spent Thursday morning on campuses that were in the news last year. Here is the first of a series of dispatches on how things went on the first day back to school.*

“I got Ms. Torres,” shrieked Imonie Delvalle, 14, a sophomore at Sheepshead Bay High School in Brooklyn. It was 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, and Imonie was jumping up and down, clutching her schedule amid a circle of friends doing the same, hoping that their fates and classes aligned. News that a friend also had Ms. Torres elicited more shrieking, and then one girl’s whispered worry that she might not pass — Spanish is not her best subject.

The seemingly simple project of getting students inside the school on the first day is an organizational nightmare, but Reesa Levy, the principal, who came to Sheepshead Bay in 2005, had a plan. Students who already had school identification cards were to form one line; freshmen would form another, heading straight to the auditorium to have their pictures taken; and then

there was the third, ever-growing line for those who had lost or forgotten their IDs. By 8:30 a.m., these lines stretched around the block.

The hold-up was the metal detectors, which Sheepshead Bay has had for years, even before it was placed on the state's list of most dangerous schools. The school is no longer on that list, but the scanners remain, and security guards outside the building welcomed students Thursday with reminders to remove their belts.

Sheepshead Bay, with a history of violence problems and back-to-back C's on the city's progress reports, is one of 14 "restart" schools around the city, which were spared from being closed at the last minute this spring. The schools are each eligible for up to \$2 million a year for the next three years, as long as they bring in an education management company — in this case, Johns Hopkins University's nationally renowned Diplomas Now initiative — to help oversee operations and make recommendations for changes.

While Ms. Levy dashed around — asking students if they had IDs, smiling at familiar faces, guiding people to the right line and, for those who do not speak English, finding partners who speak their language — Maura Wynne, the assistant principal for social studies, was a one-woman welcoming committee. In an orange T-shirt with the school's mascot, a shark, and the words "Ask me," Ms. Wynne tried to counter the unfriendly feeling of being in airport security with pure cheer. Boxes of impatiens and hanging baskets of petunias outside the school also helped.

Neil Griffenberg, 42, the athletic director and another assistant principal, kept students in line with the help of a dozen City Year corps members, who are new to the school this year as part of the restart program. Being a restart school also protected Sheepshead Bay from much of the budget-cutting other places suffered: no teachers were let go, Mr. Griffenberg said. In fact, they're hiring.

"We have more help this year, and you can't say no to more help," he said, gesturing to the City Year members. "The school has been getting better every year, and this will probably take us over the edge. We've got a 63 percent graduation rate, and we're trying to get it to 68 percent this year and then raise it every year."

Ali Korio, 14, stood in line with three other freshmen he knew from middle school. "It's good, it's good," he said, grinning and tugging nervously on his T-shirt. "All you got to do is do your thing, don't bother nobody, walk in your lane. It'll be good."