

children and parents depend on them to sound the alarm when special education students are not getting appropriate services, when dangerous school conditions threaten children's safety or health, when a school budget and programs are mismanaged to the detriment of services for children.

Many people have complained about the lack of information and transparency at the Department of Education. The City Council's CFE Commission suggested an independent institute for research and accountability. It would evaluate educational initiatives and track the use of CFE funding to make sure it is well used. Others, including Diane Ravitch and me, have suggested other changes to improve DOE accountability.

With such a lack of open communication to parents, to the press, and to education watchdogs, it's often left to classroom educators to tell people what is going on in the schools. Yet more and more these days, my members are reluctant to speak out. They are afraid of reprisals, and given that many of them are new, that's not surprising.

In this hearing, you will hear from a number of courageous educators who became targets of retaliation and retribution because they refused to be silent about practices that harmed their students and schools.

They are representative of the dozens

School-based educators are the system's canaries in the coal mine.

distressing personal stories that my members have told me.

In January 2004, **Phillip Nobile**, a former journalist who taught political law at the Cobble Hill School of American Studies, sent a memo to his principal alerting him to a pattern of grade tampering. Specifically, he said there was evidence of a pattern of raising failing grades to a passing level in Regents exams in global and American history, subjects that fell under the purview of the school's assistant principal for humanities.

Two weeks later, the AP dropped into one of Nobile's classes and then gave him an "unsatisfactory" rating for the lesson. Over the next few months, Nobile sent the principal a series of memos contending that the AP "systemically directed the changing of Regents grades." In return, he says, he was bombarded with U ratings. Nobile complained to

grades — meaning they moved up grades that were just below the passing mark of 65. Others said they raised some grades from the low 50s to passing. The AP resigned during the probe and the principal was removed last July.

Robyn Harland, a veteran special education teacher in Queens, discovered that teachers and children were being put in harm's way by the failure of the Department of Education to provide protective equipment, training and vaccinations to educators at risk of exposure to life-threatening pathogens in blood and other bodily fluids.

So when a special ed paraprofessional in her school contracted Hepatitis C, she filed a complaint with the state's health and safety bureau about the lack of protection, not just for staffers but also for children. And what did the DOE do when confronted with such a whistle-blower? They removed

rules, the principal exceeded two more counselors with less experience. A total of 1,200 students were deprived of counseling services, including 135 special education students. Two students were hospitalized for threatening suicide during that time. All this to punish two educators who were simply trying to uphold the academic standards of the school and report suspected wrongdoing.

School-based educators should not have to choose between saving their careers and acting in the best interests of their kids and schools.

We rely on school-based educators to be the eyes and ears of parents and the public who don't have full access to schools. These educators need to know that they can advocate on behalf of children and families without putting their careers at risk. Parents need to know that they can count on teachers to protect their children and fight for what their children need and deserve. And most of all, children need to know that they can trust their teachers not to let anything bad happen to them.

This committee cannot undo the damage done to the brave teachers testifying before you today. But by passing this legislation, you can help the next Philip Nobile or Frances Strutt when they step forward to blow the whistle on behalf of their students.