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NEW YORK POST, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2001

Shaken Rockaway kids get counseling at school

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Youngsters in Belle Harbor have learned all too well that tragedy can hit home — and school officials sought yesterday to comfort boys and girls fearful after Monday's plane crash.

"My daughter couldn't sleep at all," one woman said as she took her to school at PS 114, about six blocks from Monday's crash site.

"It's very hard," she said. "She's scared from September 11th and this made her fear worse. I also have a 15-year-old and his best friend's dad died in the World Trade Center."

Both Gov. Pataki and Schools Chancellor Harold Levy visited the school yesterday to offer practical help and healing words.

"Everybody in the school knows someone who saw it or knows the family in the homes where people died," Levy said.

He said Rockaway school kids are trying to cope with a lot — the Twin Towers disaster, the anthrax scare and now the plane crash. He said 24 counselors will be available at that school and three others in the area.

"Unfortunately, we're getting good at this, dealing with crises," the chancellor said.

Pataki told the 300 kids who greeted him with a standing ovation that the whole city is proud of them.

"People around the country and the world are saying 'the kids of Rockaway, aren't they brave!'"

The governor asked them, at one point, how many had a parent who is a firefighter or a police officer. Nearly two dozen kids' hands shot into the air.

Pataki fielded questions from the boys and girls who wanted to know, for instance, how the engine and wing fell off.

"I understand this is something you will never forget," he explained to them, saying the incident is being investigated and so far is considered an accident. "We'll never forget your courage."

Adults bravely looked ahead and vowed to help each other move forward after the terrible crash that turned a swathe of their neighborhood into a local ground zero.

"We're all friends and family, and we just kind of go into the mode to help those who need our help," said Liz Sulik, president of the Rockaway Chamber of Commerce.

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