Students learn to go beyond please and thank you

By Eve Marx

There's not a parent alive who hasn't agonized over their children's company manners. While it's one thing to teach your kids to sit at the family dinner table and not speak with their mouths full, it's quite another to get them to hold a stranger's hand and stick out their right hand.

That's where Melissa Leonard, certified business etiquette and international protocol consultant, comes in. For three days in December at West Patent Elementary School, the expert motivated a large group of young people to brush up on their manners.

Ms. Leonard, who has worked with many Fortune 500 companies and has been featured on Martha Stewart, Sirius Radio, and in both The New York Times and Redbook, said, "Manners make all the difference and the importance of early training cannot be overemphasized." Pointing out that our children are future politicians, business leaders, and important contributors to our society, she explained that "their success in life will directly relate to what we instill in them now. It may be something as simple as knowing how to hold hands, introduce themselves to adults, or show gratitude and respect for others.

This is not only important to the students, but also to the professionals teaching them, as they are the ones to apply the advice to their daily lives.

For example, the first key point of the program was to show students how to shake hands. "It's important to make eye contact," Ms. Leonard said. "You want to ensure that the person you are shaking hands with is paying attention to you."

The second point of the program was to teach students how to address others. "It's important to be polite and use your manners," Ms. Leonard said. "You can't just walk into a room and say, "Hi." You have to introduce yourself."