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**NEW YORK CITY  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION -  
DIVISION OF PORTFOLIO  
PLANNING  
Expansion of 06M366 - 12/12/12**

1 [BEGIN RECORDING]

2 SUPERINTENDENT ELSA NUNEZ: Good evening,  
3 buenos noches. This is a joint public hearing  
4 of the Department of Education, Community  
5 Education Council, and School Leadership Team  
6 for the proposed grade expansion of Washington  
7 Heights Academy from K through 5 to K through 8  
8 beginning 2014-2015. I am Community School  
9 District 6 Superintendent Elsa Nunez. We have  
10 asked the District 6 Community Education Council  
11 and the School Leadership Team in M366 to  
12 participate in this joint public hearing. The  
13 CEC was invited. They have not arrived. If  
14 they do, I will stop to introduce them. I am  
15 joined tonight by P.S. 366 Principal Renzo  
16 Martinez and members of the SLT, who will be  
17 introduced.

18 This hearing is being recorded. The purpose  
19 of this hearing is for you to provide comments  
20 about the proposal. Before I describe the  
21 proposal, I want to make sure you are all aware  
22 of the opportunity to provide your input. All  
23 those who wish to speak must sign up in the  
24 speaker sign-up area located just outside the  
25 auditorium. The sign-up list will close in 15

1 minutes. Speakers will be given the floor in  
2 the order that they signed up. All comments are  
3 limited to two minutes.

4 There may be elected officials who arrive at  
5 different times throughout the evening. If they  
6 wish to speak, we will do our best to  
7 accommodate them at the first opportune moment.  
8 All those who are here at the start of the  
9 public comment segment will be asked to speak  
10 first. All comments will be mentioned in the  
11 Analysis of Public Comment to be published and  
12 provided to the Panel for Educational Policy the  
13 evening before the panel votes. The vote is  
14 scheduled for December 20<sup>TH</sup>.

15 In addition, we welcome any comments and  
16 feedback you may have at any time before the  
17 panel votes on this proposal. The e-mail  
18 address and phone number where comments may be  
19 made are [do6proposals@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:do6proposals@schools.nyc.gov) and (212)  
20 374-3466.

21 Proposal Summary: The New York City  
22 Department of Education is proposing to expand  
23 Washington Heights Academy to serve kindergarten  
24 through eighth grades. Washington Heights  
25 Academy is an existing district elementary

1 school serving students in kindergarten through  
2 fifth grades in Building M263 at 202 Sherman  
3 Ave., New York, New York 10034, and Community  
4 School District 6 Washington Heights Academy  
5 offers a pre-kindergarten program. Washington  
6 Heights Academy currently serves 353 students in  
7 kindergarten through fifth grade and pre-  
8 kindergarten. If this proposal is approved,  
9 students enrolled in Washington Heights Academy  
10 will be able to stay at the school through  
11 eighth grade. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school  
12 year, Washington Heights Academy would add one  
13 grade each year until 2016-2017, when it would  
14 reach full scale and serve students in  
15 kindergarten through eighth grades and pre-  
16 kindergarten. The DOE does not anticipate that  
17 the proposed grade expansion of Washington  
18 Heights Academy will affect the pre-kindergarten  
19 program at the school. The M263 building has a  
20 capacity of 488 students and currently serves  
21 353 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth  
22 grade, yielding a utilization rate of 72%. If  
23 this proposal is approved, the building would  
24 serve approximately 455 to 555 students and have  
25 a utilization rate of 93 to 114% in 2016-2017

1 when Washington Heights Academy reaches full  
2 scale. Although a utilization rate in excess of  
3 100% may suggest that the building will be over-  
4 utilized or overcrowded in a given year, it is  
5 important to note that this rate does not  
6 account for the fact that rooms may be  
7 programmed for more efficient or different use  
8 than the standard assumptions in the utilization  
9 calculation. Furthermore, the M263 building has  
10 sufficient space to provide Washington Heights  
11 Academy with at least its baseline room  
12 allocations pursuant to the DOE Blue Book.  
13 Therefore, the M263 building has the capacity to  
14 accommodate the proposed grade expansion of  
15 Washington Heights Academy.

16 The proposal to expand Washington Heights  
17 Academy initially came from the school  
18 community. In May 2012, a Grade Expansion Team  
19 composed of Washington Heights Academy teachers,  
20 parents, staff, and administrators submitted a  
21 formal application to expand the grades served  
22 by the school. This application was supported  
23 by parents in the broader school community.  
24 This suggests a high level of satisfaction with  
25 the school in its parent body and implies -- and

1 strongly implies that an expanded Washington  
2 Heights Academy would suit the needs of the  
3 children in District 6. The grade expansion  
4 will allow Washington Heights Academy to serve  
5 elementary and middle school grades and pre-  
6 kindergarten at full scale. If this proposal is  
7 approved, the current fourth grade students will  
8 be able to apply to attend middle school at  
9 Washington Heights Academy when they are in  
10 fifth grade through the Middle School -- through  
11 the District 6 Middle School Choice Process for  
12 the 2014-2015 school year. Students enrolled at  
13 Washington Heights Academy will have admission  
14 priority if they wish to remain for sixth grade.  
15 Other eligible fifth graders in District 6 will  
16 have the opportunity to apply to attend middle  
17 school at Washington Heights Academy should  
18 additional seats become available.

19 We will now have presentations from SLT if  
20 they wish to speak. So, once again, I want to  
21 remind all that a member of the CEC also  
22 confirmed participation for tonight, but she has  
23 not arrived yet. We will welcome the CEC's  
24 participation and will accommodate the member's  
25 comments and presentation at the first opportune

1 moment. So, now we will introduce those  
2 sitting up front and if they would like to make  
3 a comment, they are welcome to do so.

4 PRINCIPAL RENZO MARTINEZ: Good evening,  
5 everyone. Thank you for coming. I'm the  
6 principal of the school, and I am very excited  
7 that we have gotten to this level in the  
8 expansion. There has been a collaboration. It  
9 has been a process, but we finally are at the  
10 stage where we really wanted to be to make this  
11 happen, and I want to thank everyone for all  
12 your input throughout this process. Thank you.

13 DR. AKBAR HERNDON: Good evening. I'm Akbar  
14 Herndon. I was one of the two founders of the  
15 school; and, from the beginning, our plan was to  
16 be a K through 8 or junior pre-K through 8 and,  
17 finally, we are at the point of being  
18 considered. We were given various conditions to  
19 meet, like find a building, which happened; get  
20 better grades, which has happened; and I feel  
21 that the DOE is at this point very supportive  
22 and we are happy to be with them in being ready,  
23 we feel, to bring the middle school into  
24 actualization. I'll only add to that, I think  
25 our school gives a type of continuity for a type

1 of school. We're a small school. We have very  
2 specific sort of hands-on, student-centered  
3 social-emotional orientation that allows not  
4 only our students to find a fit right away, but  
5 students coming from other schools of similar  
6 pedagogy to find a place that's a continuum for  
7 them, too.

8 MS. NICOLE BONHEUR: Hello. My name is  
9 Nicole Bonheur. I've been teaching at  
10 Washington Heights Academy for the past six  
11 years, and I know what an amazing school we have  
12 and incredible parents, student population, and  
13 faculty, and I'm really excited for us to  
14 continue into middle school.

15 MS. LOURDES HERNANDEZ: I'm going to start  
16 by apologizing if I get emotional, because today  
17 is a very joyful today. Today is a joyful day  
18 because this is the opportunity to have our  
19 voices heard about our wishes to have a school  
20 that is not only serving our lovely students  
21 until fifth grade but until eighth grade. That  
22 is something that is going to put them in a path  
23 of success in a way that would be threatened if  
24 they had to do the transition from fifth grade  
25 to a different school on their way to high

1 school. We are saddened for the families that  
2 were founding families that are not with us  
3 anymore because their kids aged out of the  
4 school, but we are really hopeful that we're  
5 going to be able to provide a school that  
6 prepares our students in a way that they are not  
7 only going to be successful academically but  
8 successful socially, because this school is  
9 really a community of parents and teachers and  
10 staff and neighbors who are committed to the  
11 growth of our students in not only their  
12 academic achievement but also in their  
13 social/emotional achievement. So, it is a  
14 beautiful, joyful day today.

15 DR. HERNDON: Should we invite the one SLT  
16 member in the audience to speak if she wishes?  
17 We have one SLT member in the audience. Grecia,  
18 I don't know if you wish to speak, but this  
19 would be your opportunity if you wanted to speak  
20 as part of the SLT.

21 [Crosstalk]

22 MS. GRECIA TESALONA: Good evening,  
23 everyone. My name is Grecia Tesalona, and I  
24 have a fourth grader in the school. I had a  
25 daughter who graduated from fifth grade two

1 years ago. And, basically, when we were  
2 looking for a kindergarten for our oldest  
3 daughter, she got accepted into other schools  
4 that were already well-established, but we chose  
5 Washington Heights Academy because it was a  
6 choice between a school that already is or a  
7 school that could be. Even though we've had  
8 challenges in the past few years, I think we're  
9 back on the right path, and it would be great to  
10 see the school expanded to eighth grade, and it  
11 would be great for the entire community. So,  
12 thank you.

13 DR. NUNEZ: We have now concluded the formal  
14 presentations. We will now open the floor for  
15 public comments. Speakers will be given the  
16 floor in the order that they signed up. All  
17 comments are limited to two minutes. The first  
18 speaker is Susana Ramos.

19 [OFF THE RECORD]

20 [ON THE RECORD]

21 MS. SUSANA RAMOS [through interpreter]: My  
22 name is Susana, and I have two children in  
23 school.

24 [Crosstalk]

25 MS. RAMOS: [Interpreter] Okay, my name is

1 Susana Rannis, and I have two kids in the  
2 school. - - graduated this year from fifth grade  
3 - - very, very sad to leave her school, because  
4 my kids went to another school and when she came  
5 here, she started reading and everything and she  
6 feels very comfortable with the school, so that  
7 I think that if she continues in this school  
8 with this wonderful staff that we have - - I  
9 think she should continue to be better and  
10 better than she is now and that she is going to  
11 have a better and better education that many  
12 schools are not having and that she's  
13 comfortable here. I think many kids and their  
14 parents in the - - think that we should - - for  
15 our kids to have - - .

16 [Applause]

17 DR. NUNEZ: Last name, Fernandez. Yud-- I  
18 don't want to mispronounce the first name.  
19 Yudelka [phonetic] Fernandez. Thank you.

20 MS. YUDELKA FERNANDEZ [through interpreter]:  
21 Good evening. My name is Yudelka Fernandez. I  
22 have two children here, one in first grade, my  
23 daughter in third grade. For me, I support  
24 expansion of the school because I consider this  
25 school that it's good and it's safe. I don't

1 have to be worried about looking for another  
2 school. My children are in lower grades and  
3 before knowing that the school would be  
4 expanded, I was looking for other schools. For  
5 me, it is very important that the school is  
6 expanded. Thank you.

7 DR. NUNEZ: Kathy Rosario?

8 MS. KATHY ROSARIO: Good evening. My name  
9 is Kathy Rosario, and I have two children in  
10 kindergarten and first grade. I - - to be here  
11 and it would be great to have them up to eighth  
12 grade. - - and when they told me - - opportunity  
13 for my kids to be here, that is the greatest  
14 gift. - - they are safe. These teachers are--  
15 they give everything for these kids. You see  
16 how other kids learn every day. They don't want  
17 to do their homework; they don't want to go to  
18 school. My kids love to come to school. They  
19 are doing great. The teachers and parents, we  
20 feel like we are home--at home here and I come  
21 here and I want to see my child, I have the  
22 opportunity I can go see them. My kids are  
23 safe. - - you know how everything is now - -  
24 they are afraid - and they don't feel  
25 comfortable, and here my kids, I feel so

1 comfortable that, you know--it's good, you  
2 know, I feel good about it. So, it would be  
3 great to have it up to eighth grade, because I  
4 know that - - socially and mentally and they  
5 have the great teachers that they have here, and  
6 the principal also is doing his best to keep  
7 this education up to date and everything secure  
8 and--. Thank you. [Applause]

9 DR. NUNEZ: Dayanita Martinez [phonetic]?

10 MS. DAYANITA MARTINEZ: Good evening. My  
11 name is Dayanita Martinez, and my - - Martinez  
12 is in fourth grade. He started here in second  
13 grade - - really, really low, and coming here,  
14 it was just amazing. It has been a very, very  
15 positive experience for me and my husband's  
16 peace of mind that he is in very, very good  
17 hands. There are professional people that are  
18 helping him, not only academically but  
19 emotionally and he's making lasting friendships.  
20 That was one of the main reasons why - - and I  
21 asked him, why would you think the expansion  
22 would be a positive thing? And he said, well, I  
23 could get to stay with all my friends, and I  
24 agree with him 100%. I'm very happy with the  
25 staff and the sense of community that we get

1 from everybody here. Thank you.

2 [Applause]

3 DR. NUNEZ: Aida Disla?

4 MS. AIDA DISLA: I hate my voice on  
5 microphone. My name is Aida, and I have a boy  
6 in the fourth grade, and I do want the expansion  
7 to go on. I think it is needed. It's very hard  
8 to - - whether it be art, the chorus, sports - -  
9 . - - that she needs. - -

10 [Applause]

11 DR. NUNEZ: Felix Matos?

12 MR. FELIX MATOS: Good evening, everyone.  
13 My name is Felix Matos. I'm the Director of the  
14 After-School Program - - community service here  
15 at the school. As director, I'd like to say I  
16 am very, very proud to be a part of this  
17 community. It is very, very important that we  
18 keep the kids we have here because in my 21  
19 years of experience, I've worked in many local  
20 schools. I've worked in middle schools. I've  
21 worked in elementary schools. What happens here  
22 is so different, and it's different because  
23 every single teacher, every single person that  
24 is inside the school is committed to the  
25 children, and I think that the kids need small

1 schools. If they went to bigger schools,  
2 there's a big loss because now they're in this  
3 great giant world of different people and kids  
4 and, yes, we need - - but, at the same time, we  
5 also need to remember that all these changes  
6 affect the education of the children. I want to  
7 mention that we, as an After-School Program,  
8 have shared with the principal and teachers here  
9 to get the kids to - - level. We try to do as  
10 much as we can just to get these kids to have a  
11 better education. It's nice that the program is  
12 big on - - for the future. These things are  
13 needed. We want to be sure that children will  
14 be adults. Children continue - - education with  
15 the purpose of - - smaller setting. And I think  
16 that's why it's not just important to say - -.  
17 Thank you very, very much.

18 DR. NUNEZ: Lourdes Hernandez?

19 MS. HERNANDEZ: I spoke.

20 DR. NUNEZ: Oh, okay. Oh my, maybe - -

21 MALE VOICE 1: Carmen? Carmen Prediado  
22 [phonetic]? Carmen?

23 DR. NUNEZ: Carmen?

24 MALE VOICE 1: Cary? Maybe Cary? Carmen --

25 MALE VOICE 2: Pelados [phonetic].

1 MALE VOICE 1: Pelados, Palado?

2 FEMALE VOICE: Carmen?

3 DR. NUNEZ: Carmen.

4 MALE VOICE 1: Or Cary.

5 DR. NUNEZ: It's Number Ten, but I  
6 understand there weren't numbers.

7 MALE VOICE 1: The phone number ends in  
8 4910.

9 DR. NUNEZ: Does anyone's first name begin  
10 with a "C?" [Laughter] No?

11 [Crosstalk]

12 DR. NUNEZ: Oh, okay, all right. So, the  
13 next one is Lanie...?

14 MALE VOICE 1: Lynn Herndon.

15 DR. NUNEZ: Lynn Herndon.

16 MALE VOICE: Lynn?

17 MS. LYNN HERNDON: Hello, my name is Lynn  
18 Herndon. I am a teacher and a parent at  
19 Washington Heights Academy, and I'm also one of  
20 the founding members of the school. I wanted to  
21 thank the Department of Education for being with  
22 us tonight as well as our District  
23 Superintendent, Dr. Nunez. -- our team members  
24 and parents have all shown such tremendous  
25 support of our school. Some of you may know,

1 some of you may not know, that the school did  
2 originate ten years ago as a vision and in those  
3 ten years, we've moved from being a vision, to  
4 being a program, to being a school. We've  
5 worked with four different District  
6 Superintendents. We have lived in three  
7 different buildings - - . We have had a lot of  
8 ups and downs and twists and turns in our first  
9 ten years. But I can say that right now with the  
10 leadership of our principal, Renzo Martinez, had  
11 he been part of the original conversation that  
12 took place in - -, I can say with all my heart  
13 that we are more strongly poised now than we  
14 have ever been to open a very successful - - and  
15 I just want to thank those of you who have shown  
16 such support to us and at this time look forward  
17 to the next ten years. Thank you. [Applause]

18 DR. NUNEZ: Okay. So, the speaker list is  
19 now exhausted. Again, we welcome any comments  
20 and feedback you may have at anytime before the  
21 Panel for Educational Policy votes on this  
22 proposal at its December 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. The e-mail  
23 address and phone numbers where comments may be  
24 made are [do6proposals@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:do6proposals@schools.nyc.gov) and (212)  
25 374-3466. Thank you for your participation.

1 This joint public hearing is now closed.

2 [END RECORDING]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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2           The prior proceedings were transcribed from  
3 audio files and have been transcribed to the  
4 best of my ability.

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6           Signature

*Sandra J. Bennett*

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