

### **Public Comment Analysis**

Date: May 28, 2014

Topic: The Proposed Grade Truncation of I.S. 125 Thom J. McCann Woodside (24Q125) from a 5-8 School to a 6-8 School Beginning in the 2014-2015 School Year

Date of Panel Vote: May 29, 2014

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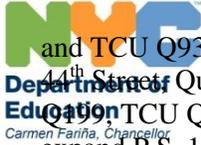
### **Summary of Proposal**

On February 28, 2014, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) proposed to implement a grade truncation of the fifth grade of I.S. 125 Thom J. McCann Woodside (24Q125, “I.S. 125”). I.S. 125 is a zoned middle school, which currently serves students in fifth through eighth grades in main building Q125, mini-building Q825, and Transportable Classroom Unit (“TCU”) Q947 located at 46-02 47<sup>th</sup> Street, Queens, NY 11377, in Community School District 24 (“District 24”). In Fall of 2013, the School Construction Authority (“SCA”) approved the removal of I.S. 125’s mini-building, Q825, following the 2013-2014 school year, to be replaced by the construction of a permanent addition for Q125 with a designed capacity of 655 seats. The permanent addition is projected to be completed for the 2017-2018 school year.

On April 10, 2014, the Notice of Joint Public Hearing for this proposal was amended to reflect a new date on which the Panel for Educational Policy will vote on this proposal.

If this proposal is approved, I.S. 125 will no longer enroll fifth-grade students after the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year. In 2014-2015 and beyond, I.S. 125 will continue serving students in grades sixth through eighth grade. Current students in grade five will continue to be served at I.S. 125 as sixth-grade students in the 2014-2015 school year. There may be cases where current fifth-grade students do not meet promotional requirements and must repeat the fifth grade, which will no longer be offered by I.S. 125 in the 2014-2015 school year. If an I.S. 125 fifth-grade student does not meet the promotional standards at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year and is required to repeat the grade in the 2014-2015 school year, then the student will be served at their zoned school.

The implementation of this proposal is contingent upon the approval of the grade expansion of P.S. 199 Maurice A. Fitzgerald (24Q199, “P.S. 199”), which the DOE is proposing concurrent to this proposal. If the proposal to expand P.S. 199 is not approved, the DOE will reassess its plans for I.S. 125 and building Q125, including its plans for accommodating all of I.S. 125’s students during the construction of the permanent addition for Q125. P.S. 199 is a zoned elementary school that currently serves students in kindergarten through fourth grades in main building Q199



and TCU Q938 located at 39-20 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Queens, NY 11104; Annex Q777 located at 50-15 44<sup>th</sup> Street, Queens, NY 11377; and Annex Q841 located at 48-25 37<sup>th</sup> Street, Queens, NY 11101. TCU Q938, Annex Q77, and Annex Q841 are all located in District 24. If the proposal to expand P.S. 199 is approved, beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, P.S. 199 will expand to serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

I.S. 125 is a zoned middle school that currently admits fifth- through eighth-grade students who reside in its zone. A student's zoned school is determined by his or her home address. If this proposal is approved and I.S. 125 no longer serves fifth grade, I.S. 125 will continue to admit sixth through eighth-grade students who reside in its zone. Additional information about the Middle School Admissions Process and I.S. 125 admissions is provided in Section III.A of this proposal.

The proposed grade truncation, which was developed in collaboration with the school leadership, would align I.S. 125's grade span with that of other middle schools throughout the district and city.

Finally, changing I.S. 125's grade span from 5-8 to 6-8 would reduce the school's enrollment by approximately 195-215 seats. After the completion of the new building addition for Q125 for the 2017-2018 school year, there may be additional space that I.S. 125 could use to meet anticipated growth within the school's zone.

The details of this proposal have been released in an Educational Impact Statement ("EIS"), which can be accessed here: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2013-2014/May62014PEP>

Copies of the EIS are also available in the main office of I.S. 125.

### **Summary of Comments Received**

A joint public hearing regarding the proposal was held at I.S. 125 on April 9, 2014. At the hearing, interested parties had the opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 27 members of the public attended the hearing and 3 people spoke. Present at the meeting were District 24 Superintendent Madelene Chan; Judy Mittler, Principal of I.S. 125; I.S. 125 School Leadership Team ("SLT") representatives Assistant Principal Kathy Dalton, Sabel Vega and Judith Glazer; Community Education Council ("CEC 24") Member Bill Kregler; and Emily Ades from the Office of District Planning. An additional community meeting was held at the Q125 building on March 31, 2014. At that meeting, interested parties had another opportunity to provide input on and ask questions about the proposal. Approximately 20-30 members of the public attended the meeting and 11 people spoke. Present at that meeting were: Judy Mittler, Principal of I.S. 125; Deputy Chancellor Dorita Gibson, Superintendent Madelene Chan; I.S. 125 School Leadership Team ("SLT") representatives Assistant Principal Kathy Dalton, Sabel Vega and Judith Glazer; and Emily Ades from the Office of District Planning. Additionally, a walkthrough of the Q125 building was conducted by Deputy Chancellor Dorita Gibson from the DOE on March 31, 2014, just prior to the community meeting.

The following comments and remarks were made at the joint public hearing and community meeting on this proposal:

1. SLT Representative Judith Glazer spoke in favor of the proposal to truncate I.S. 125.



- a. She presented research that it is more age-appropriate for fifth graders to be served in an elementary school environment.
  - b. She commented that last year I.S. 125 was denied a \$20,000 grant because the grant stipulated that the school must serve middle school grades only and since I.S. 125 serves fifth graders, they were not considered for the funding.
  - c. She spoke about the challenges that I.S. 125 has because students enter in fifth, sixth and seventh grades due to the feeder pattern that has students entering from elementary schools serving various grade levels. She requested that 30Q011, 30Q150 and 30Q152 be truncated to serve elementary grades only so that I.S. 125 can serve students beginning in sixth grade.
2. One commenter stated that the chaotic feeder pattern causes a lack of continuity and results in adjustment challenges for incoming seventh grade students who struggle both academically and socially.
  3. One commenter spoke in favor of the proposal but stated that the feeder elementary schools should be truncated to serve grades kindergarten through fifth as opposed to serving kindergarten through sixth grades.
    - a. She noted that when students enter in seventh grade they often struggle with being overwhelmed with the differences between middle school and elementary school.
    - b. She commented that students entering in seventh grade from elementary schools serving sixth grade students often struggle with Science and Social Studies since elementary schools tend to focus more on English Language Arts and Math.
  4. Sabel Vega representing the SLT expressed concerns about overcrowding at P.S. 199.
    - a. She commented that she is hopeful that the DOE will work with the administration of P.S. 199 to provide fifth graders with all the benefits that they have been provided with at I.S. 125.
  5. One commenter spoke in favor of the proposal.
    - a. He praised the principal, teachers and staff of I.S. 125 and said that they can manage any transition well.
    - b. He noted that the new building addition will be better for the students than the temporary structures and have all the amenities a middle school student needs.
  6. Several commenters requested that the fifth graders at P.S. 199 have similar opportunities that fifth graders at I.S. 125 had.
  7. One commenter spoke in favor of the proposal and mentioned that P.S. 199 has smaller class sizes than I.S. 125.
  8. One commenter expressed opposition to the proposal mentioning that having the fifth grade in the building provides an extra year for students to prepare for the transition to middle school.
  9. One commenter asked if the DOE could offer choice to parents if some families choose to remain at I.S. 125 while some choose to remain at P.S. 199.
  10. Several commenters praised the staff at I.S. 125 and asked what will happen to the fifth grade teachers if there is no longer a fifth grade.
  11. One commenter asked why I.S. 125 cannot have the annex at Q313 instead of P.S. 199.
  12. One commenter requested that more funding be spent on transportation in the city.

#### Summary of Issues Raised in Written and/or Oral Comments Submitted to the DOE

The DOE received no written and/or oral comments through its dedicated phone line and e-mail for the proposal.



Department of  
Education  
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

## Analysis of Issues Raised, Significant Alternatives Proposed and Changes Made to the Proposal

Comment 4 is related to overcrowding at P.S. 199.

On February 28, 2014, the DOE proposed to expand P.S. 199 to serve kindergarten through fifth grade. The EIS for the grade expansion and temporary re-siting of P.S. 199 is available here: [www.schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2013-2014/SchoolProposalsMay62014PEP](http://www.schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2013-2014/SchoolProposalsMay62014PEP). As noted in that EIS, if the proposal for the grade expansion and temporary re-siting of P.S. 199 due to construction is approved, there will be sufficient space across P.S. 199's buildings to accommodate students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

There have been several efforts to reduce overcrowding at P.S. 199. One of these efforts includes providing additional capacity in new building Q313 which will open in the 2014-2015 school year with a new zone that reduces P.S. 199's zone size. Another includes the renovation of building Q777, the St. Theresa's annex, which will also provide additional elementary school capacity in the area.

Additionally, although a utilization rate in excess of 100% may suggest that a building will be over-utilized or over-crowded in a given year, this rate does not account for the fact that rooms may be programmed for more efficient or different uses than the standard assumptions in the utilization calculation, as described in the EIS.

Comments 6 and 4a request that the fifth grade have the same opportunities at P.S. 199 as they had at I.S. 125.

As discussed in the EIS associated with P.S. 199, an expansion of P.S. 199's grade levels would provide current students with continued access to this high performing school option, as well as the opportunity to transition into middle school in the sixth grade along with their District 24 peers. P.S. 199 has received an "A" on each of its last three progress reports, similar to I.S. 125.

The leadership of P.S. 199 and I.S. 125, along with the Superintendent have committed to working collaboratively to support the students and to continue to set high expectations, as both schools have done with students across all grade levels.

Comment 8 expressed opposition to the proposal mentioning that having the fifth grade in the building provides an extra year for students to prepare for the transition to middle school.

As mentioned above, this proposal, which was collaboratively planned by stakeholders, will allow I.S. 125 to align its grade span with other middle schools across District 24 and citywide. It will also reduce the number of entry points to the school, eventually resulting in a more predictable enrollment pattern and a focus on instructional needs of incoming middle school students.



During the community meeting held at I.S. 125 on March 31st, Superintendent Chan mentioned that she will continue to support the schools and provide best practices for school transitions as well as continue to work closely with impacted families .

Comment 9 offered an alternative to the proposal suggesting that families be given a choice as to which school they wanted their fifth graders to attend.

As mentioned below, the Superintendent, school leaders and parent representatives collaborated and took all options into consideration. They ultimately determined that aligning the grade spans of both I.S. 125 and P.S. 199 with other elementary and middle schools across the district and city would be most beneficial to the students. Educators in both schools are committed to responding to the developmental needs of the evolving adolescent minds through caring relationships, high expectations and socially relevant learning opportunities.

Comment 10 expressed praise for the teachers and inquired as to what will happen to their jobs if I.S. 125 truncates.

The DOE certainly acknowledges and commends the staff of I.S. 125 for their hard work, dedication, and passion for the school. While it is difficult to precisely predict the number of affected staff positions that may be excessed due to declining enrollment associated with the elimination of the fifth-grade classes at I.S. 125, it is important to recognize that the fifth-grade students who would otherwise have enrolled in I.S. 125 will now be enrolled in P.S. 199, pending PEP approval of the proposal for that school to expand to serve fifth grade. P.S. 199 may need to hire new teachers to serve their larger student populations. Consequently, this proposal would not necessarily result in a net loss of teaching positions within the Citywide system.

Furthermore, any excessing that might be necessary would be conducted in accordance with existing labor contracts. For example, the current United Federation of Teachers (“UFT”) contract would require excessing to take place in reverse seniority order within each given teaching license area. Most teachers working in grades one through six hold a “common branches” license, regardless of their students’ age.

Barring system-wide layoffs, excessed teachers would be eligible to apply for other City positions, and any teacher who did not find a permanent position would be placed in the Absent Teacher Reserve pool, meaning that they would continue to earn their salary while serving as substitute teachers in other City schools. Should there be a vacancy in the school in a teacher’s license area within one year of the teacher being excessed, the teacher would have a right of return to the school, consistent with applicable contractual provisions and law regarding teachers’ seniority.

Comment 11 offered an alternative to the proposal suggesting that I.S. 125 use the annex at Q313 as opposed to P.S. 199.

Careful concern and consideration was given to all available options during the removal of I.S. 125’s mini-building and construction of the addition. The addition will ultimately allow for permanent instructional space for I.S. 125 to serve middle school students. The Superintendent, school leaders and the School Leadership Team determined that aligning the grade spans of both I.S. 125 and P.S. 199 with other elementary and middle schools across the district and city would be most beneficial to the students.



If this proposal is approved, there is sufficient space to serve all sixth through eighth grade students in building Q125 pursuant to the Citywide Instructional Footprint (the “Footprint”). Please visit the New York City Department of Education website to access the Instructional Footprint, which guides space allocation and use in City schools:

[http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/78D715EA-EC50-4AD1-82D1-1CAC544F5D30/0/DOEFOOTPRINTSConsolidatedVersion2011\\_FINAL.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/78D715EA-EC50-4AD1-82D1-1CAC544F5D30/0/DOEFOOTPRINTSConsolidatedVersion2011_FINAL.pdf).

As noted in the EIS, since I.S. 125 is the only school in Q125 it will be able to use all building resources to meet the needs of students throughout the construction period. The school may opt to operate in different ways than the standard assumptions in order to utilize the space in the most efficient manner. After the completion of Q125’s addition for the 2017-2018 school year, there will be additional space to accommodate I.S. 125’s students.

Comments 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, 2, 3, 5, 5a, 5b and 7 express support for the proposal and do not require response.

Comments 3a, 3b and 12 were not relevant to this proposal and do not require a response.

#### **Changes Made to the Proposal**

No changes have been made to this proposal.