



## **Public Comment Analysis**

Date: December 13, 2010

Topic: The Proposed Grade Expansion of P.S. 206 Jose Celso Barbosa (04M206) to a 3-8 School

Date of Panel Vote: December 14, 2010

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### **Summary of Proposal**

P.S. 206 Jose Celso Barbosa (04M206, or “P.S. 206”) is an existing elementary school located at 508 East 120 Street, New York, NY, 10035, in Community School District 4. It currently serves students in third through fifth grade. P.S. 206 is co-located with P.S. 112 Jose Celso Barbosa (04M112, or “P.S. 112”) and River East Elementary School (04M037, or “River East”) in buildings M206 and M112 (the “tandem buildings”). Co-location refers to situations where multiple schools are located within a single school facility, often sharing certain common rooms and outdoor recreation areas. In this case all three co-located schools share the cafeteria, auditorium, gymnasium, and outdoor space at the tandem buildings.

P.S. 206 is a zoned elementary school that offers a specialized program for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) that is not widely available in other New York City schools. In this program, known as ASD Nest, students with ASD are taught in a classroom alongside general education students. Classes are small, limited to 16 students in grades three through five. Currently, there are no middle schools in Manhattan that offer comparable programs for students with ASD.

P.S. 112 is a zoned elementary school that serves students in Kindergarten through second grade and also offers a pre-Kindergarten program. The school serves the same zone as P.S. 206 and offers an ASD Nest program for students in Kindergarten through second grade. Students attending P.S. 112 are automatically eligible to enroll at P.S. 206.

River East is a District 4 “choice” elementary school, which means that it admits students from any District 4 school zone regardless of where they reside in the district. If seats are available, River East sometimes also admits students from other districts, particularly from Districts 3 and 5 which are adjacent to District 4. River East serves students in Kindergarten through fifth grade.

On October 29, 2010, the Department of Education (“DOE”) published a proposal to implement a “grade expansion,” which means that P.S. 206 would begin enrolling three sections of sixth graders beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. Each section would serve a maximum of 25 students, including five ASD students. P.S. 206 would then grow to serve seventh graders in the 2012-2013 school year and eighth graders in the 2013-2014 school year. Beginning in September 2013, P.S. 206 would complete its expansion, at which point it would enroll students in third through eighth grade. General education students and students with ASD would continue to learn together in an inclusive classroom setting, with some differentiated classes and pull-out services offered to students with ASD students.

On November 15, 2010, the DOE published an amended EIS, which included additional background information, but did not revise or modify the proposal itself.

Because there are currently no middle schools in Manhattan that offer comparable programs for students with ASD, P.S. 206’s expansion would provide a unique, continuous educational experience and supportive environment for students with ASD, while also providing an additional middle school option for general education students in District 4. The proposed grade expansion is not expected to affect the enrollment or programs offered at P.S. 112 or River East.

Currently, P.S. 206 students apply to middle school through the District 4 middle school choice process. If this proposal is approved, current fifth-grade students at P.S. 206 would have the opportunity to apply to P.S. 206’s sixth grade during the upcoming 2011-2012 new schools application round. Going forward, P.S. 206 would be an additional option offered in the District 4 middle school choice process for students seeking to enroll in sixth grade during the 2012-2013 school year. While P.S. 206 fifth graders would receive priority admission to the school’s middle-school grades, any remaining seats would be open to other rising sixth-graders who attend an information session, thereby increasing the options for middle-school students throughout District 4.

The proposal to expand P.S. 206’s grade span was initiated by a grade expansion team composed of the P.S. 206 principal, other administrators, and teachers, with the support of the school’s parents and the broader community. This suggests a high level of satisfaction with the school as well as parent confidence that an expanded P.S. 206 would better suit the needs of their children than existing middle school options within the District. The application was approved by the DOE in September 2010, prompting this formal proposal.

### **Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing**

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at P.S. 206 Jose Celso Barbosa (04M206) on December 1, 2010. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 95 members of the public attended the hearing, and 26 people spoke. Present at the meeting were District 4 Superintendent Luz Cortazzo; District 4 Community Education Council President Hector Nozario; Citywide Council of Special Education representative Ellen McHugh; P.S. 206 Principal Myrna Rodriguez; P.S. 112 School Leadership Team representative Dana Wattenberg; P.S. 37 School Leadership Team representative James Sinclair; P.S. 206 School Leadership Team representative Lionel Campbell;

Benjamin Taylor from the Division of Portfolio Planning; and Barbara Morgan from the Office of Public Affairs.

The following comments and remarks were made at the joint public hearing:

1. School Leadership Team representative from River East James Sinclair stated that the committee at River East would be committed to working collaboratively with P.S. 206 and P.S. 112 on this grade expansion with the understanding that the outcome of this expansion would be equitable for all parties involved. He suggested that an objective mediator be assigned to facilitate negotiations and redistribution of space among the three schools, as well as to schedule space for all of the schools.
2. School Leadership Team representative from P.S. 206 Lionel Campbell indicated that when the announcement of the expansion was initially made, there were concerns about the space, but it was mentioned that there would be mediators involved in the process of distributing space between the three schools. He also mentioned that this proposal is very inviting and that it offered an alternative for students in terms of middle school, as well as provided an opportunity for students to progress through middle school without transferring and readjusting to a new school community. The proposal further allowed the three current schools to continue the work that was already in progress and grow. Lastly, he also mentioned that this proposal was attractive because it would allow for an ASD program in District 4 and smaller class sizes.
3. School Leadership Team representative from P.S. 112 Dana Wattenberg, an ASD NEST teacher, believes that this proposal to expand P.S. 206 is a great opportunity. As stated, it is important to offer the students the stability and continuity of remaining in the same building with the same group of peers.
4. CCSE representative Ellen McHugh applauded the three schools involved for their efforts in creating a nurturing school environment for all students.
5. P.S. 206 Principal Myrna Rodriguez emphasized the importance of the public joint hearing. She also stated that this proposal to expand would allow the schools to serve all students within the community.
6. Commenters expressed excitement regarding the expansion and the opportunities offered through the ASD NEST program.
7. Commenters expressed their support for the expansion of P.S. 206.
8. A commenter stated that he perceives the school to be very supportive, and it is one of the best schools in District 14.
9. A commenter indicated that the expansion allows for additional options for students in District 4.

**The DOE received a comment at the Joint Public Hearing which did not directly relate to the proposal.**

10. A commenter who expressed support for the proposal also expressed general concern with school busing.

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

11. Commenters expressed support for the proposal and noted that the expansion will be beneficial for all schools involved, specifically the ASD program.

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

Comments 3 through 9, as well as 11, expressed support for the proposal, and therefore do not require a response.

With regard to comment 1 and 2, the EIS states that “[s]pecific decisions regarding the allocation of the available space across the tandem buildings will be made by the Building Council, consisting of the principals from all three schools, in conjunction with the DOE Office of Space Planning.” The EIS also states “there would continue to be sufficient space for all three co-located schools at the tandem buildings to operate at full organizational capacity pursuant to the Citywide Instructional Footprint (the “Footprint”) after the grade expansion is completed.” To the extent that the Building Council cannot reach a resolution on an issue, the parties shall avail themselves of the dispute resolution procedures set forth in the Campus Policy Memo 2010, available at <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/campusgov/default.htm>.

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

No changes in the proposal were made in response to public feedback.