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Chancellor

Public Comment Analysis

Date: February 8, 2012

Topic: The Proposed Opening and Co-Location of a New Middle School (11X556) with Existing Schools Aspire Preparatory Middle School (11X322), Bronx Green Middle School (11X326), and Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement (11X468) in Building X135 Beginning in 2012-2013

Date of Panel Vote: February 9, 2012

Summary of Proposal

On December 19, 2011, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) issued an Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) describing a proposal to open and co-locate a new zoned middle school, 11X556 (11X556 or “I.S. 556”), in building X135 (“X135” or “Whalen Campus”), located at 2441 Wallace Avenue, Bronx, NY 10467, in Community School District 11 (“District 11”). I.S. 556 would be a new District 11 middle school that would serve sixth through eighth grades and would admit students through the District 11 Middle School Choice application process through a campus choice model described in more detail below. If this proposal is approved, in 2012-2013, I.S. 556 will begin enrolling 115-125 students in sixth grade; it will add one grade per year until it has reached full-scale and serves sixth through eighth grades in 2014-2015.

On January 13, 2012, the DOE issued an amended EIS, which corrects several typographical errors and corrects the number of sixth grade seats that will remain in District 11 after the implementation of this and several concurrently posted proposals.

I.S. 556 would be co-located in the X135 building with the following schools: Aspire Preparatory Middle School (11X322, “Aspire”), Bronx Green Middle School (11X326, “Bronx Green”), and Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement (11X468, “Pelham Academy”).

Aspire, Bronx Green, and Pelham Academy are existing zoned middle schools that currently serve sixth through eighth grades. The schools all admit students through the District 11 Middle

School Choice process and offer priority to students residing in the Whalen Campus zone through campus choice, in which all students zoned to the Whalen campus have priority for a seat on the campus and rank each school in the order of preference. Students are then matched to one of the schools through a zoned campus choice matching process operated by the Office of Student Enrollment (“OSE”).

In a separate EIS also published on December 19, 2011 and amended on January 13, 2012, the DOE has proposed to gradually phase out and eventually close Aspire because of its low performance and inability to turn around quickly to better support student needs. If the phase-out proposal is approved, Aspire will no longer admit sixth-grade students after the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year. One grade would then be phased out in each subsequent year. During the 2012-2013 school year, Aspire would serve students in seventh and eighth grades. In 2013-2014, Aspire would serve students in eighth grade only. Aspire would close in June 2014. This proposal can be found on the DOE Web site at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2011-2012/Feb2012Proposals>.

In 2010-2011, the Whalen Campus had a target capacity of 1,118 students, and the building enrolled a total of 1,136 students, yielding a target building utilization rate of 102%. In 2011-2012, the building served a total of 1,078 students, yielding a target utilization rate of 96%.

If this co-location proposal and the proposal to phase out Aspire are approved, in 2014-2015, once Aspire has completed its phase-out and I.S. 556 has reached full scale, there will be approximately 955-1,045 students served in the building, which would yield a target utilization rate of approximately 85-93%. The DOE anticipates that I.S. 556 will replace the middle school seats that would be lost as a result of the phase-out and closure of Aspire and will provide a new educational option for families in District 11.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at the X135 school building on January 23, 2012. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 120 members of the public attended the hearing, and 22 people spoke.

Present at the meeting were: Deputy Chancellor Kathleen Grimm; Executive Director of the Division of Academics, Performance and Support Gregg Bethel; District 11 Community Superintendent Elizabeth White; Community Education Council 11 (“CEC 11”) President Petra Poleon; CEC 11 representatives Grace Loraglio and Elizabeth Bemelek Goka; Bronx Borough President Panel for Educational Policy (“PEP”) appointee Wilfredo Pagan; Aspire Principal Steven Cobb; Aspire School Leadership Team (“SLT”) members Irene Strag Boucage and Nixa Rivera; Co-PTA president Mr. Webbington; Pelham Academy SLT members Ms. Oldon and Ms. Rodriguez; Bronx Green principal Charles Johnson; Bronx Green SLT member Carmen Laponte; and Amanda Cahn and Stephanie Crane from the Division of Portfolio Planning

The following comments and remarks were made at the joint public hearing regarding the co-location proposal:

1. Steve Bennett, a CSA field representative, stated that New York City is not a place for experimentation with schools and students should not be subjected to repeated school closings. Students have not benefited from this supposed new school safety net but rather have been turned away for reasons of poor academic achievement and are “warehoused” in other low performing schools that may someday be closed.
2. A commenter asked why the DOE would bring in another school to replace Aspire.
3. A commenter asked why the DOE can’t give the resources that would be given to the new school to Aspire.

During the Question and Answer period, the following questions were submitted regarding the co-location proposal:

4. Is the internet the only way to learn about the proposal and provide feedback?
5. Can you explain what is meant by “underutilized space”?

In addition to collecting feedback at the Joint Public Hearing referenced above, the DOE solicited feedback on this proposal via email, telephone and an internet feedback form.

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

There were no written or oral comments submitted to the DOE outside of the joint public hearing.

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

Comment 1 concerns the DOE’s overall strategy of phasing-out and replacing low performing schools across New York City.

In a June 2010 MDRC, an independent research group, issued a report on NYC’s new small schools strategy. MDRC concluded: “it is possible, in a relatively short span of time, to replace a large number of underperforming public high schools in a poor urban community and, in the process, achieve significant gains in students’ academic achievement and attainment. And those gains are seen among a large and diverse group of students — including students who entered the ninth grade far below grade level and male students of color, for whom such gains have been stubbornly elusive.” (MDRC, “Transforming the High School Experience,” June 2010.)

New York City was ahead of the curve in complying with President Obama’s call to close or turnaround the lowest 5% of schools nationwide and provide better options to families. We simply can’t stand by and allow schools to keep failing our kids when we know we can—and we must—do better. New York City’s new schools strategy has helped us to deliver on the core promise we make to NYC families to provide *all* students with an excellent education.

The DOE is committed to providing a portfolio of high quality school options to students and families. A part of that strategy involves identifying the City's lowest performing schools and determining whether they can turn around quickly to better serve their student population. For the schools that the DOE determines lack the capacity to turn around quickly to better serve their student populations, the DOE recommends the most serious intervention: gradually phasing out the school over time by no longer enrolling new students.

This year, the DOE is proposing to phase out seven schools and truncate three schools that were opened under this Administration (since 2002). These ten schools represent less than 3% of the schools opened since 2002.

We count on each of our schools to provide a high-quality education to its students—and we hold all schools to the same high standard. If a school isn't getting the job done for students – whether it was opened recently or not – we are compelled to take serious action to ensure its students don't fall even further behind.

Our new schools are overwhelmingly getting the job done for students, and when they aren't, and a school is struggling, we follow the same process to phase out and replace that school.

Comments 2 and 3 query why the DOE decided to bring in another school to replace Aspire and why resources will be allocated to the proposed new school and not Aspire.

The DOE strives to ensure that all students in New York City have access to a high-quality school at every stage of their education. Continuing to allocate space and resources to schools that are unable to significantly improve student performance is neither efficient nor equitable. As detailed in the Aspire phase-out and closure proposal, the DOE has concluded that phasing out Aspire is appropriate due to the school's history of poor performance.

Because Aspire serves a shared zone with the other two schools on the campus, it is essential that the DOE provide sufficient school capacity to meet the needs of the students in this zone. After considering the most optimal way to meet this demand and to distribute space to schools, the DOE is proposing to open I.S. 556 in the X135 building in order to create a new middle school option that will better serve the families of District 11.

Once the phase-out is fully implemented, the DOE will cease to allocate funds to Aspire, and repurpose all remaining funds previously allocated to the school. The new school funding allocation is noted below. The DOE does not believe it would be efficient or equitable to use these funds in supporting Aspire as a comprehensive review indicates that Aspire does not currently have the capacity turn around quickly in order to best serve its students. New district schools are provided with a fixed per-school allocation and a variable per-pupil allocation of funds to cover start-up costs. Based on current one-time allocations for new schools, I.S. 556 will receive a fixed allocation of \$51,000 during its first year. In addition, I.S. 556 will receive approximately \$50,945 - \$55,375 in per-pupil allocations. Beginning in its second year of operation, I.S. 556 will receive \$100 per pupil enrolled in each new grade level, until it reaches its full grade-span.

All schools receive approximately \$225,000 in annual fixed Fair Student Funding (“FSF”) foundation allocations to fund administrative costs and an additional \$50,000 in Children First supplemental funding. Estimated FSF for I.S. 556 in its first year is \$507,431.75 - \$551,556.25. The student achievement and need-based allocations are not taken into account in this estimate because incoming students’ achievement levels and needs cannot be predicted. All money allocated through FSF can be used at the principal’s discretion. All dollar amounts are based on FY 12 allocations and are subject to change based on adjustments to the DOE’s overall operating budget.

Comment 4 inquires about how to access this proposal and submit feedback

The EIS for this proposal can be found on the Department of Education’s Web site:
<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2011-2012/Feb2012Proposals>.

Copies of the EIS are also available in the main offices of Aspire Preparatory Middle School, Bronx Green Middle School and Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement in Building X135.

Written comments can be sent to D11Proposals@schools.nyc.gov and oral comments can be left at 212-374-5159. Comments received prior to 6 p.m. on February 8, 2012 will be incorporated into this document, which will be available to the PEP prior to its vote on the proposal.

Comment 5 concerns how the Department of Education identifies underutilized space.

Building space is scarce in many New York City neighborhoods. Given this reality and the growing enrollment needs of our 1.1 million students, we must use our existing public school buildings in the most efficient manner possible. We must also work to ensure that students and families in every community have high-quality educational options.

To this end, each year the DOE’s Division of Portfolio Planning (Portfolio) publishes and requests school and community feedback on building utilization information and potential changes. This is a transparent process that applies consistent rules to all school buildings and considers school and community feedback prior to any decision-making.

It is important to note that a school’s inclusion in the list of under-utilized buildings does not signify that a space utilization change will be proposed for that building for the 2012-2013 school year. A school’s inclusion on the list is a way of formally recognizing space in the building and beginning a conversation about potential uses for the underutilized space. This list may be amended over the course of the school year.

Building X135 was not on the original underutilized list for the 2011-2012. However, the building was added to the list in the Underutilized Space Memorandum Addendum – January 25, 2012, after Aspire was proposed for phase out, because the building will become underutilized if the phase out proposal is approved. The January 25, 2012 addendum can be found here:
<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/6EBA8731-4A23-4E36-A528-157D795BA9CE/118275/UnderutilizedSpaceMemorandumAddendum012512.pdf>.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to this proposal.