

Public Comment Analysis

Date: February 8, 2012

Topic: The Proposed Co-location of New School 27Q362 (27Q362) with P.S. 215
in School Building Q215 Beginning in 2012-2013

Date of Panel Vote: February 9, 2012

Summary of Proposal

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) proposes to site a new zoned elementary school, 27Q362 (27Q362, “27Q362”) in school building Q215 (“Q215”), located at 535 Briar Place, Far Rockaway, NY 11691, in Community School District 27. If this proposal is approved, 27Q362 would be “co-located” with P.S. 215 in school building Q215 for three school years.¹ In a separate Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) that was also published on December 12, 2011, the DOE has proposed that P.S. 215 gradually phase out and eventually close because of its low performance and its inability to turn around quickly to better support student needs. P.S. 215 is currently a zoned elementary school serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade and offering a pre-kindergarten program. 27Q362 would be a new DOE zoned elementary school that would continue to serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade and would offer a pre-kindergarten program (pending continued availability of funding).

If the proposal to phase out and eventually close P.S. 215 is approved, P.S. 215 would no longer admit kindergarten students and would no longer offer grades one and two or its pre-kindergarten program after the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year. Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, after P.S. 215’s kindergarten, first grade, and second grade are phased out, P.S. 215 would serve one less grade in each subsequent year until it completes its phase-out and closes in June 2015. Current students in grades two, three, and four would continue to be served by P.S. 215 and be supported as they progress toward completion of elementary school at P.S. 215. If this proposal is approved, current students in kindergarten and first grade would be served by the new zoned elementary school, 27Q362. A pre-kindergarten program would also be offered by 27Q362 in Q215 (pending continued availability of funding).

¹ A “co-location” means that two or more school organizations are located in the same building and may share common spaces like auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias.

27Q362 would open in Q215 as a zoned district elementary school serving the same zone as P.S. 215. In the 2012-2013 school year, 27Q362 would serve 36 students in pre-kindergarten, 100-110 students in kindergarten, 105-115 students in first grade, and 95-105 students in second grade for a total of 336-366 students in pre-kindergarten through second grade. 27Q362 would then grow to serve 441-481 pre-kindergarten through third grade students in the 2013-2014 school year and 546-596 pre-kindergarten through fourth grade students in the 2014-2015 school year. 27Q362 is expected to reach full scale in 2015-2016 when it would serve approximately 651-711 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.

If both proposals are approved, 27Q362 would be co-located with P.S. 215 as P.S. 215 phases out. Once 27Q362 has completed its expansion and P.S. 215 has completed its phase-out, 27Q362 would be the only school in Q215.

In 2010-2011, Q215 had a target capacity to serve 575 students, and the building enrolled 653² students, including pre-kindergarten, yielding a building utilization rate of 114%.³ In the 2011-2012 school year, 681 students are enrolled in the building, including pre-kindergarten, yielding a building utilization rate of 118%.⁴ Once 27Q362 reaches full scale in 2015-2016, it is projected to serve 651-711 students, yielding a utilization rate of 113%-124%. Please note that building capacity and utilization figures are not always a precise indicator of whether a school is under- or over-utilized. Where appropriate, the Office of Space Planning will conduct a detailed walk-through of the building in order to assess the amount of available space in the building.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearings

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at P.S. 215 on January 20, 2012. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 250 members of the public attended the hearing, and 23 people spoke. Present at the meeting were Chancellor Dennis Walcott; Community School District 27 Superintendent Michele Lloyd-Bey; District 27 Community Education Council President Coralanne Griffith-Hunte; CEC 27 members Gina Davis, Joshua Hirschman, Raymond McNamara and Jennifer McNamara; P.S. 215 Principal Susan Hofmann; P.S. 215 School Leadership Team members Donna Hamlet and Shyl Ley; Rebecca Rawlins and Drew Patterson from the Division of Portfolio Planning; Joseph Edwards representing Congressman Meeks; Paul Smyth representing State Senator Smith; and City Council member Sanders.

² October 31, 2011 unaudited register.

³ All references to building utilization rates in this document are based on target capacity data from the 2010-2011 Enrollment, Capacity, Utilization Report ("Blue Book"). Utilization rates referenced for the 2010-2011 school year only include the number of students estimated to be regularly attending the school, and do not include Long Term Absences ("LTAs"), students who have been absent continuously for 30 days or more as of October 31, 2010.

⁴ The utilization rate reported here may differ from that published in the 2010-2011 Blue Book because the building enrollment figures referenced throughout this document and used in the calculation of utilization rates for the 2012-2013 school year and beyond are based on the unaudited enrollment as of October 31, 2011. This methodology is consistent with the manner in which the DOE conducts planning and calculates space allocations and funding for all schools. In determining the space allocation for co-located schools, the Office of Space Planning will conduct a detailed site survey and space analysis of the building to assess the amount of space available in the building.

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

1. One commenter expressed opposition to turning P.S. 215 into a charter school.
2. SLT member Donna Hamlet asked why the administration would remain in the building as the school phases out. She asked why the school would be replaced rather than just replacing the principal.

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

3. One commenter detailed the challenges of being a teacher and spoke of his concern for his own school.
4. One commenter voiced his opposition to Mayor Bloomberg's education policies.

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

There were no comments related to this proposal.

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

Comment 1 disagreed with a charter school opening at P.S.215.

The DOE has no intention to locate a charter school at P.S. 215. The DOE has proposed to co-locate a new zoned elementary school, 27Q362, which would serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade and would offer a pre-kindergarten program (pending continued availability of funding) when it reaches full scale in building Q215 in 2015-2016.

Comment 2 asked about changes to P.S. 215 leadership with regard to the phase-out decision.

For the majority of schools we investigate, we see hope that the school can turnaround, and so we may replace the principal, change staff, invest in new programs or mentor teachers, and sometimes reconfigure grades to help the school change trajectory. But, in some cases, we are left with a set of schools that we know – based on quantitative and qualitative data – do not have the ability to improve quickly; and a decision is made to propose to gradually phase out the school and give future students a better opportunity.

At the end of this multistep process, our analysis and engagement directed us to a set of schools that quantitative and qualitative indicators show do not have the capacity to significantly improve. Deciding what course of action can best support the students and community of a struggling school is not easy, but we are compelled to act based on our commitment to ensuring

that every student has access to high-quality school.

No single factor determines whether a school will phase out or not. Leadership, while very important, is still only one component of a school. The school culture and conditions at P.S. 215 have not enabled increased student achievement. It is our belief that phasing out this school and bringing in higher quality schools will provide better options for the community and families in the future.

Comments 3 and 4 do not directly relate to the proposal, and are addressed in the Public Comment Analysis for the proposal to phase out and eventually close P.S. 215.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to this proposal.