

## **Public Comment Analysis**

Date: February 8, 2012

Topic: The Proposed Phase-Out of the Anna Gonzalez Community School (32K296) Beginning in 2012-2013

Date of Panel Vote: February 9, 2012

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A copy of the Amended Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) pertaining to this proposal can be found at the main offices of The Anna Gonzalez Community School, Achievement First Bushwick Charter School, and 75K053, as well as online at the following website:  
<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2011-2012/Feb2012Proposals>

### **Summary of Proposal**

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to phase-out and close The Anna Gonzalez Community School (32K296), an existing zoned middle school located at 125 Covert Street, Brooklyn, NY 11207, in Community School District 32, in Building K296 (“K296”) because of its low performance and inability to turn around quickly to better support student needs. The Anna Gonzalez Community School currently serves students in sixth through eighth grades. If this phase-out proposal is approved, The Anna Gonzalez Community School would no longer admit sixth grade students after the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year. One grade will then be phased out in each subsequent year. The Anna Gonzalez Community School will close after June 2014. Current students will continue to be served and supported by The Anna Gonzalez Community School as they progress toward completion of middle school. Current eighth grade students will be supported through the Citywide High School Admissions Process (“High School Admissions Process”) as they select a high school.

The Anna Gonzalez Community School is currently “co-located” in K296 with the following schools: P053K@I296K, a District 75 school (75K053, “P053K@I296K”),<sup>1</sup> and Achievement First Bushwick Charter School (84K538, “Achievement First Bushwick”).<sup>2</sup> P053K@I296K serves students who are autistic or intellectually disabled in grades six through eight. Achievement First Bushwick serves students in grades kindergarten through nine, but only serves students in grades kindergarten through four at K296.

On February 7, 2012, the DOE amended the EIS to correct the grade span that P053K@I296K serves at K296. The original EIS incorrectly stated that P053K@I296K serves students in grades

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<sup>1</sup> 75K053 is located at seven sites, including K296. The other six sites are: P053K@P838K located at 720 Livonia Ave., Brooklyn NY 11207; P053K@1088K located at 544 Seventh Ave., Brooklyn NY 11215; P053K@P104K located at 9115 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn NY 11209; P053K@Abraham Lincoln HS located at Ocean Parkway & West Ave., Brooklyn NY 11235; P053K@Kingsboro High School (Leon M. Goldstein) located at 1830 Shore Blvd., Brooklyn NY 11235; and P053K@P384K located at 242 Cooper St., Brooklyn NY 11207. This proposal will only impact P053K@I296K.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

four through eight. The amended EIS clarifies that P053K@I296K serves students in grades six through eight.

In a separate EIS posted on December 19, 2011, the DOE has also proposed to co-locate a new middle school, (32K562, "I.S. 562"), which would serve students in sixth through eighth grade when it reaches full scale in K296 in 2014-2015. This new middle school would serve students in the existing middle school zone for The Anna Gonzalez Community School. If the proposal to co-locate I.S. 562 in K296 is approved, it would provide a new middle school option for District 32 families and replace the seats lost by the proposed phase out of The Anna Gonzalez Community School. I.S. 562 would be co-located in K296 with The Anna Gonzalez Community School, P053K@I296K, and Achievement First Bushwick as The Anna Gonzalez Community School phases out and I.S. 562 phases in.

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

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at K296 on February 1, 2012. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 168 members of the public attended the hearing, and approximately 14 members of the public spoke. Present at the meeting were Principal Maria Barreto, Adrian Thomas, B. Simms, A. Hector, G. Bonas, and O. Oyelakin of the Anna Gonzalez Community School school leadership team ("SLT"), Kit Brauer of the Achievement First Bushwick SLT, and Victoria Lugo, Dianne Williams, and Lewis Tillman of the District 32 Community Education Council ("CEC"). Deputy Chancellor for Talent, Labor and Innovation David Weiner served as the Chancellor's Designee. Also present were Network Leader Daniel Purus, Yvonne Soto, Carrie Marlin, Melissa Torres, and Toby Shepherd from the DOE. 75K053's SLT was invited to participate in the hearing but it did not send a representative.

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

1. Victorina Lugo, the President of the CEC 32, made the following statements:
  - a. The CEC recognizes that, according to the data, changes are needed to improve performance so that students experience success.
  - b. CEC 32 seeks a commitment from the DOE that the name of Anna Gonzalez will remain at the K296 campus.
  
2. Adrian Thomas, an SLT member from The Anna Gonzalez Community School, stated that:
  - a. Many students at The Anna Gonzalez Community School are recent immigrants and, as a result, are subject to various difficulties. The Anna Gonzalez Community School has implemented unique programs including computer labs for technical awareness and transitional bilingual programming. These programs have been successful in helping children achieve success rapidly.
  - b. The DOE should look beyond student proficiency data to the "unseen successes" that cannot be reflected quantitatively.

3. Kathleen Leonard, a representative from the Council of Supervisors and Administrators, made the following statements:
  - a. Eleven of the schools being proposed for phase-out were opened under the Bloomberg administration.
  - b. New York City schools are not a place for experimentation to open and close schools for students who have already been traumatized by previous school closings.
  - c. Students have been turned away from schools because of low achievement and they are being sent to schools that will also now be closed.
  - d. The Mayor's strategy is to eliminate schools that the administration does not want to support, and open new schools that will not post student achievement data for years.
  - e. The Mayor needs to take responsibility for school performance and not give schools over to educational partnership organizations.
  
4. A representative from Community Board 4 stated that:
  - a. He opposes the closing of schools.
  - b. His children attended The Anna Gonzalez Community School and both graduated with A's. One is now a bank manager and the other is in college.
  - c. He feels honored and proud that The Anna Gonzalez Community School has been renamed after Anna Gonzalez.
  - d. The Anna Gonzalez Community School has many children who speak different languages and has been instrumental in assisting them transition to English.
  
5. City Council Member Erik Dilan stated that:
  - a. The Anna Gonzalez Community School has been a pillar of the Bushwick community and he will do everything in his power to prevent the phase-out of The Anna Gonzalez Community School.
  - b. Prior to phasing-out a school, the DOE should consider replacing the school administration.
  - c. Phasing out schools is inconvenient to parents.
  - d. The DOE has not asked community members to step forward and assist The Anna Gonzalez Community School.
  - e. He is glad that the DOE has chosen to rename the K296 campus after Anna Gonzalez.
  - f. He is against the co-location of charter and district schools. Public schools are not allowed to pick their children, unlike charter schools.
  
6. Assembly Member Raphael Espinal stated that:

- a. The DOE's actions are unfair.
  - b. The DOE should first look to changing the administration of an existing school or look to add programs to an existing school before deciding to phase out a school.
  - c. He is aware of schools that must collect bottles to pay for programs as well as schools with no internet, no library, and no art programs. In these instances, the blame for poor performance is on the DOE, not on the school.
  - d. He will work with the City Council to do everything he can to ensure that The Anna Gonzalez Community School remains open. And if The Anna Gonzalez Community School closes, he will make sure a charter school is not co-located at K296.
7. A commenter asked why the DOE is not supporting and giving extra resources to The Anna Gonzalez Community School instead of replacing it with yet another new school.
8. A commenter stated that:
  - a. She has a child enrolled at The Anna Gonzalez Community School who is doing great.
  - b. Opening a new school at K296 will not solve any of the current problems at The Anna Gonzalez Community School.
9. A commenter stated that:
  - a. The school has served the Bushwick community by visiting the elderly, by organizing canned food drives and by offering General Educational Development ("GED") and English as a Second Language ("ESL") programs for parents who speak Spanish.
  - b. The school is the only school in District 32 to offer transitional bilingual programming.
  - c. The great work of the teachers and the principal has made The Anna Gonzalez Community School a very important school for the City of New York.
10. A commenter stated that:
  - a. Not all students are low performing.
  - b. If given another chance, The Anna Gonzalez Community School can do better.
  - c. If The Anna Gonzalez Community School did not exist, he would not be enrolled in the Beacon program.
11. A representative from Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez's office stated that:
  - a. The Congresswoman is disturbed by the DOE's policy of assuming that it is always best to phase out a low performing school.
  - b. The DOE should invest in local schools that need resources.

- c. In 2008-2009, The Anna Gonzalez Community School was an “A” school and it has the opportunity to be an “A” school again if given the resources.
  - d. The Congresswoman will not support the co-location of any charter schools at The Anna Gonzalez Community School or the expansion of Achievement First Bushwick Charter School at K296.
  - e. Parents of current sixth and seventh grade students have questions about why their children will remain enrolled in an “F” school as it continues to phase out.
12. A commenter stated that she has been enrolled at the school for two years and she has learned more of the English language than ever before.
13. A commenter stated that her family has been going to the school for years and she would like for her nieces and nephews to attend the school also.
14. A commenter stated that:
- a. It is very unfair for the DOE to close the school when it received an A+ in 2009.
  - b. When students are not performing, the DOE should hire tutors for them.
  - c. Most parents are single parents who work long hours, go home tired, and cannot check their child’s homework.
  - d. The DOE should bring more tutoring, more programs, better teachers, better computers, and other resources to The Anna Gonzalez Community School instead of closing it.
15. A commenter asked the following questions:
- a. What changes are there going to be The Anna Gonzalez Community School?
  - b. What time will the changes happen, and when is that time coming?
  - c. How much time is there to wait before the phase-out of The Anna Gonzalez Community School and the phase-in of I.S. 562?
  - d. When is construction of school unit going to happen?
  - e. What is reason of the closing of this school?
  - f. Why is this proposal being made and who will it benefit?
  - g. What is the support that the DOE is going to bring to The Anna Gonzalez Community School?
  - h. What will be the opportunities available to kids when they graduate in 2014?
  - i. What is the benefit of being in school that has an F ranking?

Additionally, a number of questions were submitted in writing to DOE at the Joint Public Hearing:

16. Will the DOE ensure that the name of the building will be kept – The Anna Gonzalez Community School Campus? Will the DOE provide funding support to place the name on the building?
17. What will happen to existing community based organizations within the building?
18. How has the DOE taken parent feedback into account?
19. Why is the DOE giving new opportunities to I.S. 562, but is not giving opportunities to The Anna Gonzalez Community School?
20. Why not give The Anna Gonzalez Community School the resources it needs? The community needs this school, not a new school. The Mayor should evaluate the needs of poor communities first.

A number of questions or comments received at the Joint Public Hearing were not directly relevant to this proposal, including the following, were not directly relevant to this proposal:

21. A commenter stated that she asked her daughter if she wanted to be transferred out of The Anna Gonzalez Community School and her daughter told her to save the kids.

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**

Class Size Matters (“CSM”), submitted written comments objecting to all of the proposed phase-outs and truncations proposed by the DOE. In opposing the DOE’s proposal to phase-out and eventually close these schools, the CSM comments cited the following reasons: (1) none of the Educational Impact Statements for the proposals include discussion of how the proposed phase-outs or, where applicable, the co-locations would affect class size; (2) the Citywide Instructional Footprint does not include class size standards; (3) the Educational Impact Statements use utilization figures from the DOE’s Enrollment Capacity Utilization Report (“Blue Book”), which does not take into account the need to reduce class sizes in schools Citywide; (4) the community members, faculty, and families of schools that have been proposed for phase-out have opposed the proposed phase-outs and truncations; (5) the schools that have been proposed for phase-out and/or truncation have high concentrations of “at-risk” students, as defined as English Language Learner students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students.

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

Comment 1(a) is in support of this proposal and therefore a response is not required.

Comments 1(b), 4(c), 5(e), 16 relate to the name of The Anna Gonzalez Community School.

The DOE recognizes that 32K296 was recently renamed in honor of deceased community member Anna Gonzalez. In order to maintain this honorary memorial, the DOE has committed

to renaming the K296 campus in honor of Anna Gonzalez. The DOE has not, however, identified available funding to place the new name on the building.

Comments 2(a), 4(d), 9(b), 10(c) and 17 relate to existing programming at The Anna Gonzalez Community School, including programming for students with limited English proficiency.

The DOE recognizes the importance of the transitional bilingual education program at The Anna Gonzalez Community School and has committed to replicating the English Language Learner services currently offered at The Anna Gonzalez Community School at I.S. 562, as student demand necessitates. Other programmatic decisions, including the availability of after school programs, will be made by the principal of I.S. 562.

Comments 2(b), 3(a-e), 4(a, b), 5(a, b, c), 6(a-d), 7, 8(a, b), 9(a, c), 10(a, b), 11(a-c), 12, 13, 14(a-d), 19 and 20 challenge the DOE's strategy of phasing-out and replacing failing schools, including the criteria used to determine that The Anna Gonzalez Community School is a school in need of this intervention.

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.

The Anna Gonzalez Community School is a school that the DOE has determined warrants this intervention. As noted in the EIS proposing to phase-out The Anna Gonzalez Community School:

- The majority of students at The Anna Gonzalez Community School remain below grade level in English and Math. Last year, only 14% of students were performing on grade level in English, putting the school in the bottom 14% of middle schools Citywide in terms of English proficiency. Only 20% of students were performing on grade level in Math, putting the school in the bottom 6% of middle schools Citywide in terms of Math proficiency. In 2009-2010, the school scored in the bottom 12% of schools Citywide in English Language Arts proficiency and the bottom 9% in Math proficiency.
- The Anna Gonzalez Community School is not helping students to make adequate progress. The school is in the bottom 1% of middle schools Citywide in terms of learning growth in English and the bottom 9% of middle schools Citywide in terms of learning growth in Math. Learning growth measures annual student growth on State English Language Arts and Math tests relative to similar students. If those outcomes persist, students will fall further behind their peers in other schools.
- The Progress Report measures the progress and performance of students in a school as well as the school environment, compared to other schools serving similar student populations. On the 2010-2011 Progress Report, The Anna Gonzalez Community School received an overall grade of F, including F grades for Student Progress, Student Performance, and School Environment. The Anna Gonzalez Community School was the

only middle school in the district to earn an F grade on its 2010-2011 Progress Report.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in 2010-2011 the school was designated by the New York State Education Department as Persistently Lowest Achieving, which means that The Anna Gonzalez Community School was in the bottom 5% of Title I schools in the State in terms of student performance.

- The school's attendance rate remains below most middle schools. The 2010-2011 attendance rate at the school was 88%, compared to the Citywide middle school average of 92.6%, putting the school in the bottom 11% of all middle schools Citywide in terms of attendance.
- The Quality Review uses a four-tiered rubric (well-developed, proficient, developing, underdeveloped) to measure how well a school is organized to support student achievement.<sup>4</sup> The Anna Gonzalez Community School was rated "Developing" on its most recent Quality Review in 2010-2011, indicating deficiencies in the way that the school is organized to support student learning.
- Safety issues have been a concern at the school. On the 2011 New York City School Survey, only 22% of teacher respondents believed that order and discipline are maintained at the school and only 50% of student respondents believed that they were safe in the hallways, bathrooms, and locker rooms.
- Demand for seats at The Anna Gonzalez Community School is low. Only 30% of students in grades six through eight who were zoned to the school chose to attend the school in 2011-2012. Additionally, during the 2010-2011 school year, only 11% of students who applied to The Anna Gonzalez Community School ranked the school as their top choice.<sup>5</sup>

For these reasons, the DOE believes that The Anna Gonzalez Community School lacks the capacity to turnaround quickly to better serve its students and, therefore, future investments in the students in District 32 can be better leveraged for student achievement through a new school organization.

Moreover, the DOE believes that closing a struggling school and opening a new school with new leaders and staff is a successful strategy to provide all students with an excellent education. In June 2010 MDRC, an independent research group, issued a report on New York City'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).

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<sup>3</sup> P.S. 377 Alejandrina B. De Gautier (32K377), which serves students in grades kindergarten through eight, also received an overall Progress Report score of F in 2010-2011.

<sup>4</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/7EEB3889-6DC1-4867-9EC6-D684ADC31DD8/0/201112QRRubricwheader.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> 2010-2011 fifth grade applicants applying to middle school for the 2011-2012 school year.

The DOE counts on each of its schools to provide a high-quality education to its students—and it hold all schools of them all to the same high standard. If a school is not getting the job done for students – whether it was opened recently or not – the DOE is compelled to take serious action to ensure its students do not fall even further behind.

Comments 5(d) and 18 pertain to the process of engaging the community regarding the proposed phase-out and replacement of The Anna Gonzalez Community School, including engagement with community based organizations and elected officials.

The DOE is committed to engaging with the community, included its elected representatives, for all proposals that require a significant change in school utilization, as detailed in Chancellor’s Regulation A-190.

Prior to this Joint Public Hearing, the DOE held “early-engagement” meetings on October 21, 2011 with The Anna Gonzalez Community School staff and families. Additionally, the DOE has solicited feedback regarding this proposal via a dedicated phone line, a dedicated email address, and a dedicated online feedback form.

All written materials relating to the proposed phase-out and replacement of The Anna Gonzalez Community School have been made available in Spanish to the school community.

The DOE will continue to engage the community at every possible point regarding this and other proposals for the 2012-2013 school year.

Comments 5(f) and 11(d) pertain to future uses of K296, including the potential co-location of a new charter school or an expansion of Achievement First Bushwick Charter School.

The DOE notes that, at this time, there are no alternative or additional proposals to expand or open new schools in building K296.

Comment 11(e) and 15(i) pertains to enrollment options for current sixth and seventh grade students at The Anna Gonzalez Community School.

As noted in the EIS describing this proposal, the DOE remains focused on helping The Anna Gonzalez Community School students to succeed. If this proposal is approved, The Anna Gonzalez Community School would be provided with targeted, customized, and intensive supports aimed at the unique needs of the school and its students. These supports would be in the areas of budgeting, staffing, programming, community engagement, guidance, and enrollment including, but not limited to:

- Helping the school provide students with options that support their advancement, and fully prepare students for their next transition point;
- Working with school staff to foster a positive culture; and
- Supporting school leadership in efficiently and strategically allocating resources to ensure a consistent and coherent school environment focused on student outcomes.

Comments 15(a-h) inquire generally about DOE's proposal to phase-out and replace The Anna Gonzalez Community School.

More information regarding the specific changes to The Anna Gonzalez Community School can be found in the EISs regarding this proposal and the proposal to open and co-locate I.S. 562, both of which are available on the DOE's website at:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2011-2012/Feb2012Proposals>.

The DOE has no plans for capital improvement or new construction related to K296 at this time.

Class size is primarily determined by how principals choose to program students at their school within their budget. Thus, no particular proposal, in and of itself, necessarily impacts class size. The Citywide Instructional Footprint relies upon the current programming at a school (number of sections) to determine the baseline footprint allocation. Decisions to co-locate schools are not based solely on the utilization figures in the Blue Book. The DOE also considers the total number of classrooms in the building and the number of sections currently programmed at all schools in the building or projected to be programmed to determine the availability of excess space and the baseline footprint for each school.

The DOE acknowledges that there some members of the schools' communities that are opposed to the proposal, and/or prioritize smaller class sizes. However, given the schools' longstanding performance struggles, we believe that phasing out certain schools and/or creating new educational options by co-locating new schools will best serve the families in these communities.

With respect to CSM's comments regarding the particular types of students who attend phase-out schools, it should be noted that schools progress report grades are based in part on a comparison of the school with peer schools serving similar populations of students. Poor performance report grades thus indicate that a school is not serving its students well, both objectively and by comparison to other schools serving similar students. Moreover, the new schools proposed to open are anticipated to serve student populations similar to the phasing out school.

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

In response to public feedback, the following changes to the proposal were made:

- No changes have been made to this proposal.