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Chancellor

Public Comment Analysis

Date: February 8, 2012

Topic: The Proposed Opening and Co-Location of New High School 08X561 with Existing Schools Gateway School of Environmental Research and Technology (08X295), the School for Community Research and Learning (08X540), Bronx Guild (08X452), Millennium Art Academy (08X312), Pablo Neruda Academy for Architecture and World Studies (08X305), Bronx Community High School (08X377), Antonia Pantoja Preparatory Academy (08X376), and Bronx Bridges High School (08X432) in School Building X450, Beginning in 2012-2013

Date of Panel Vote: February 9, 2012

Summary of Proposal

On December 22, 2011, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) proposed to open and site 08X561, a new high school, in school building X450, the Adlai E. Stevenson Educational Campus (“X450” or “Stevenson Campus”), located at 1980 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10473, within the geographical confines of Community School District 8 (“District 8”). The proposed new high school, 08X561, would offer a rigorous academic program that would prepare students for post-secondary education or work.

If this proposal is approved, 08X561 would be co-located with Gateway School of Environmental Research and Technology (08X295, “Gateway”), an existing high school currently serving students in grades nine through twelve that is concurrently being proposed to phase out; Bronx Guild (08X452), an existing high school serving students in grades nine through twelve; Millennium Art Academy (08X312, “Millennium”), an existing high school serving students in grades nine through twelve; Pablo Neruda Academy for Architecture and World Studies (08X305, “Pablo Neruda”), an existing high school serving students in grades nine through twelve; Bronx Community High School (08X377, “Bronx Community”), an existing transfer high school serving students in grades nine through twelve; Antonia Pantoja Preparatory Academy (08X376, “Antonia Pantoja”), an existing secondary school serving students in grades six through ten that is still phasing in; Bronx Bridges High School (08X432, “Bronx Bridges”), an existing high school serving students in grades nine and ten that is still phasing in; and the School for Community Research and Learning (08X540, “SCRL”), an existing high school currently in its second year of phasing out pursuant to a proposal previously approved by the Panel for Educational Policy (“PEP”). In addition, X450 houses a pre-kindergarten program operated by P.S. 138 Samuel Randall (08X138, “P.S. 138”), and a Young Adult Borough Center, Stevenson YABC (08X507,

“YABC”).¹ A community based organization (“CBO”), Good Shepherd Services (“Good Shepherd”), is also located in building X450, where it partners with a number of schools on the Stevenson Campus, as well as with the Stevenson YABC program.

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. SCRL began phasing out in September 2011 and will no longer enroll students following the 2013-2014 school year. Antonia Pantoja will serve students in grades six through twelve when it reaches full scale in the 2013-2014 school year. Bronx Bridges will serve students in grades nine through twelve when it reaches full scale in the 2013-2014 school year.

In a separate EIS posted on December 22, 2011, the DOE proposed to phase out and eventually close Gateway. In the event that the phase-out of Gateway is not approved, the DOE would re-examine the availability of space in the building and would, as appropriate, revise the EIS to co-locate 08X561 in X450.

The proposed co-location of 08X561 in building X450 is part of the DOE’s central goal to create new school options that will better serve future students and the community at large. 08X561 would offer a rigorous academic program that would be open to students through the Citywide High School Admissions Process and would have a limited unscreened selection method giving priority to students residing in the Bronx.

If this proposal is approved, the new school would open during the 2012-2013 school year, when it would serve approximately 105-115 students in the ninth grade. 08X561 would gradually phase in by adding one grade per year. The school is expected to reach full scale in 2015-2016, when it would serve approximately 420-460 students in grades nine through twelve.

In 2015-2016, once Gateway and SCRL have completed their phase-outs and Antonia Pantoja, Bronx Bridges and the new high school have reached full scale, there will be approximately 2665-2975 students served in the building, which would yield a target building utilization rate of approximately 80% - 89%.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearings

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at the Stevenson Campus on January 27, 2012. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 131 members of the public attended the hearing, and 34 people spoke. Present at the meeting were Pablo Neruda SLT members Rossibel Taveras and Jeanette Pagan; Gateway SLT members Clifford Siegel and Yesenia Lopez; SCRL SLT member Peggy Orellana; Millenium SLT member Maxine Nodel; Bronx Bridges SLT member Hannah Ellis; Bronx Community SLT member Francis D’Souza; CEC 8 members Otis Thomas and Laverne Berry; PEP representative Wilfredo Pagan; and Amanda Cahn and Stephanie Crane from the Division of Portfolio Planning.

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

¹ Young Adult Borough Centers (“YABCs”) are evening academic programs designed to meet the needs of high school students who might be considering dropping out because they are behind or because they have adult responsibilities that make attending school in the daytime difficult.

1. Wilfredo Pagan, newly appointed Bronx borough appointee to the PEP stated that the borough president's office supports the community.
2. Multiple commenters expressed concerns about phase-out relating to Gateway's role in the community—for example, that Gateway is a community legacy for students and also that it is the hub where many students receive their first meal of the day.
3. Multiple commenters questioned the efficacy of phase-out as an intervention strategy; one commenter noted that Gateway itself had been a replacement school for Stevenson High School, which was closed, while another said that 11 of the schools being proposed for phase-out were opened under the Bloomberg administration, and another questioned what difference replacing Gateway with a new school of a different name will make.
4. One commenter noted that new schools (such as Gateway's replacement) won't report performance data for as long as four years.
5. Multiple commenters noted that Gateway will admit any student and that it is important to have a local high school that serves the general community, as opposed to new schools that turn away students.
6. One commenter pointed out that smaller schools in one building require the DOE to hire more school principals (and thus expend more money) than under the previous system, by which 1 principal and 12 assistant principals could serve an entire building
7. Multiple commenters (including two Gateway SLT representatives) stated that providing additional funding to Gateway—money that will instead go to Gateway's replacement—would be a more productive intervention than phase-out; multiple commenters also expressed the belief that Gateway could be a great school with the proper resources.
8. Multiple commenters expressed concern for English Language Learners served by Gateway; one commenter noted 15% of students are English Language Learners.
9. One commenter expressed concern for special education students at Gateway, noting that they comprise 25% of the school's population.

The following questions, comments, and remarks were made at the Joint Public Hearing and are not related to the proposal

10. One commenter stated that two minutes for each commenter during the hearing does not allow sufficient time for an argument.
11. One commenter asked why more than 60% of the PEP is appointed by a mayor who has no background in education.
12. One commenter stated that the mayor has not taken responsibility for any of the schools started under his administration.
13. One commenter said that Lehman High School went from an "A" to an "F" on its progress report overnight.
14. One commenter observed with disappointment the empty chairs at the dais, noting that it is hurtful to have so few people on the panel during a hearing about such an important issue.

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

The DOE received one written comment and no oral comments through the dedicated phone line and Web site for this proposal.

15. 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 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 voices support for the community and the Stevenson Campus and do not require a response.

The DOE acknowledges and commends the students, staff, leadership, and partners of Gateway for their hard work, dedication, and passion for the school.

Comment 2 concerns the legacy of Gateway and its role in the community. The DOE recognizes the important role that schools play in their communities and knows that schools throughout the city are not just educational institutions, but rich and tight-knit communities. The DOE expects that the replacement school will be fully engaged with its community and responsive to the community’s needs, serving a vital role as an anchor for the community.

Comment 3 notes that several schools opened under the Bloomberg administration, including Gateway, are proposed for phase-out and asks how the DOE can expect the new replacement schools to be successful if schools like Gateway couldn’t be successful. 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.

The DOE counts on each of its schools to provide a high-quality education to its students—and holds all schools to the same high standards. If a school isn’t 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 don’t fall even further behind.

This comment also concerns the differences between Gateway and the proposed replacement school. The proposed replacement school will not just be a renamed Gateway. Rather, it will be fundamentally different from Gateway, offering a new organization and new structures to better support student learning. The school will develop programs to meet the needs of its students and the community and will provide New York City high school students with a new option.

Comments 4 and 5 concern enrollment policies and performance data for new schools, including Gateway’s replacement. The school proposed to replace Gateway would have a limited unscreened admissions process, meaning that no students would be turned away based on their academic history or special needs. New high schools receive a Progress Report each year beginning in the year after the school opens. However, a new high school’s Progress Report does not include the full range of performance measures until the school has graduated its first class of students.

Comment 6 concerns the DOE’s policy of replacing large, underperforming, comprehensive high schools with multiple smaller schools.

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.)

The findings of this report speak to the promise of small schools and undergird the DOE’s commitment to opening small schools, as has been done on the Stevenson Campus.

Comment 7 concerns funding for New York City public schools. While every school across the city receives funding via the same formula, some schools have been less successful in serving students than their peer schools that serve similar populations. Additionally, Gateway has been given additional resources in the form of the many supports provided to the school through their Network. Despite these additional resources, Gateway has been unable to significantly boost student achievement.

New schools are funded in the same manner as other schools: funding follows the students and is based on need (incoming proficiency level and special education/ELL/Title I status). While it is true that new schools do receive start-up funding averaging \$30,000 per year over the first five years for an elementary or middle school and \$34,000 for a high school, the difference in funding between a new school and an existing school is marginal – the annual amount of startup funding is not even large enough to cover the salary of a first-year teacher.

Because Gateway has not been able to use its funds to successfully turn around, the DOE feels that resources—which are not substantially more for a new school than for an existing school—would be better allocated to a new school option.

Comments 8 and 9 state concern about special education students and English Language Learners at Gateway. In the 2011-2012 school year, 25% of the students at Gateway have an individual education program (“IEP”) and 13% of students are English Language Learners (“ELL”). If this proposal is approved, all current Gateway students who have IEPs or are ELLs will continue to have their needs met as they progress towards graduation.

The school that replaces Gateway would be limited unscreened and would admit students through the Citywide High School Admissions Process in the same way that Gateway currently admits its students. This means that the replacement school will admit students with IEPs and ELL students, and will do so in the same manner as general education students.

Not only will future English Language Learners and students with IEPs be admitted in the same way at the replacement school as they are at Gateway, they will also have their needs met at the new school. The new school will create programs that meet the needs of all students, while ensuring access to a general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible.

Comment 15 concerns class sizes in New York City schools. 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

No changes have been made to this proposal.