

### **Public Comment Analysis**

Date: February 23, 2016

Topic: The Proposed Consolidation of Young Scholars' Academy for Discovery and Exploration (16K636) with Brighter Choice Community School (16K627) in Building K304 Beginning in the 2016-2017 School Year

Date of Panel Vote: February 24, 2016

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### **Summary of Proposal**

On January 7, 2016, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) issued an Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) describing a proposal to consolidate Young Scholars’ Academy for Discovery and Exploration (16K636, “Young Scholars’ Academy”) with Brighter Choice Community School (16K627, “Brighter Choice”) in the 2016-2017 school year. The DOE proposed to consolidate Young Scholars’ Academy and Brighter Choice because both schools have struggled with low enrollment, which creates budgetary and programmatic challenges, and because consolidation would support enrollment at the consolidated Brighter Choice. Both schools are existing district elementary schools currently serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade and offering full-day pre-kindergarten (“Pre-K”) programs in building K304 (“K304”), located at 280 Hart Street, Brooklyn, NY 11206 in Community School District 16 (“District 16”). Brighter Choice and Young Scholars’ Academy are currently co-located in K304 with P.S. K140 (75K140), one site of an existing multi-sited District 75 program, serving students in kindergarten through second grade. A “co-location” means that two or more school organizations are located in the same building and may share common spaces such as the auditorium, gymnasium, library, and cafeteria. A “consolidation” means that two or more existing school organizations are combined into one school to operate and serve students more effectively. Proposals for consolidation seek to improve learning environments by combining the strengths and best practices of both schools and distributing resources to reinforce academic enrichment opportunities, interventions, and other supports. If this proposal is approved, Brighter Choice and Young Scholars’ Academy will be combined such that students, staff, and resources of Young Scholars’ Academy will become part of Brighter Choice and Young Scholars’ Academy will no longer exist as a distinct school option as of the 2016-2017 school year.

Consolidation decisions are made on a case-by-case basis in partnership with the Superintendent and impacted school communities. They are intended to improve under-enrolled schools and address the budgetary, programmatic, and performance challenges that arise as a result of low enrollment. A consolidation may also be proposed to allow the DOE to leverage a particularly strong school leader. Since most funding in schools’ budgets is allocated on a per-pupil basis based on Fair Student Funding per capita allocation levels, schools that struggle with low enrollment may also subsequently struggle with funding issues. For example, they may not be able to afford the full range of services or specialized instruction. Consolidations support healthy school enrollment so that schools have the budgets necessary to operate effectively. Other potential benefits of consolidations include increased access to resources and improvements in school performance.

Both Young Scholars’ Academy and Brighter Choice are under-enrolled. The DOE is proposing to consolidate Young Scholars’ Academy with Brighter Choice based primarily on the benefits students in both school communities would derive from the additional resources made available by consolidating the two school organizations into one. If this proposal is approved, Young Scholars’ Academy students attending the consolidated Brighter Choice will have access to a variety of academic and enrichment opportunities that Brighter Choice will provide. In addition to increased resources, the consolidation will allow the schools to combine the strengths and best practices of each individual school into a single, larger organization.

This proposal has been developed by the District 16 Superintendent in conjunction with the principals of Brighter

Choice and Young Scholars' Academy and the school communities through a collaborative planning process. In addition to working with the school communities, the Superintendent has worked closely with various DOE offices and the principals of Brighter Choice and Young Scholars' Academy to determine the best path to support the students at both schools. The collaborative planning process culminated in a decision to consolidate these schools into one stronger elementary school option.

Collaboration between Brighter Choice and Young Scholars' Academy has already begun. These schools are already co-located and staff from both schools have begun to increase collaboration, focusing on developing shared instructional practices, sharing resources, and building a cohesive school culture. In addition, the schools have planned a joint pep rally that will bring students from both schools together to discuss the proposed changes, and bring in student voice into what the consolidated school might offer and look like; these changes may include new school uniforms and a new school name. The schools are also engaged in shared activities, such as a student dance for both schools in the spring and joint Mother's Day and Father's Day activities. Such activities will continue throughout the year to ensure the consolidation, if approved, is seamlessly executed in the 2016-2017 school year.

If this proposal is approved, Young Scholars' Academy will be consolidated with Brighter Choice beginning in the 2016-2017 school year. The consolidated Brighter Choice will continue to serve students in grades kindergarten through five, and will continue to offer a full-day Pre-K program. Young Scholars' Academy will no longer exist as an individual school option, and current Young Scholars' Academy students will be accommodated at Brighter Choice.

The details of this proposal have been released in the EIS which can be accessed here:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2015-2016/February242016SchoolProposals> .

Copies of the EIS are also available in the main offices of Young Scholars' Academy, Brighter Choice, and P.S. K140.

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

The DOE held a Joint Public Hearing regarding this proposal at the K304 building on February 11, 2016. At that meeting, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on this proposal. Approximately 54 members of the public attended the hearing. There were 9 speakers. Individuals present at the meeting included: Deputy Chancellor of Teaching and Learning, Phil Weinberg; Acting District 16 Superintendent, Rahesha Amon; Community Education Council 16 ("CEC 16") President, NeQuan McLean; Young Scholars' Academy Principal, Beatrice Thompson; Young Scholars' Academy School Leadership Team ("SLT") member, Jimelle Fraser; Brighter Choice Principal, Fabayo McIntosh; Brighter Choice SLT member, Victor Iroh; and Eric Herman, Hallie Martin, and Greg Whitten from the DOE.

1. CEC 16 President, NeQuan McLean, commented as follows:
  - a. CEC 16 passed a unanimous resolution in support of the consolidation.
  - b. CEC 16 thinks this is a great change for the district and is excited for this to occur. This is about building a new school and a new school community. He has spoken with many parents and community members that are excited by this proposal.
2. Brighter Choice SLT member, Victor Iroh, commented that he is excited about this consolidation and thinks that this is best for all students.
3. Young Scholars' Academy SLT member, Jimelle Fraser, commented that she is excited about the consolidation, and looks forward to the collaboration and the increased resources in K304. She stated that the increased resources will be helpful for everybody.
4. Brighter Choice Principal, Fabayo McIntosh, commented as follows:
  - a. She is excited about this consolidation as a challenge of how to best serve all students.
  - b. Brighter Choice is continuously seeking ways to best prepare the children they serve to succeed in this world, and this consolidation offers an opportunity to serve more students.
  - c. Brighter Choice has begun collaborating with Young Scholars' Academy and will be creating an after school program modeled off of the current programs offered at Young Scholars' Academy. In addition to new after school programs, Brighter Choice will be offering new dual language programming and will begin an art program, coding program, and new school partnerships.

- d. She views this consolidation as a positive change and looks forward to working with everybody.
5. Young Scholars' Academy Principal, Beatrice Thompson, commented as follows:
  - a. This is her first year as principal of Young Scholars' Academy and when she first heard news of the consolidation proposal, she met Principal McIntosh and the school community in Brighter Choice and knew that this was a great decision.
  - b. She feels that this is going to be a great consolidation and she looks forward to continuing the work the two school communities have begun this year to fuse the consolidation and continue to move this plan forward.
6. Multiple commenters stated that they are excited about this consolidation due to reasons of: increased resources, belief in school leadership, and improved educational opportunities.
7. Multiple commenters stated that they feel the unification activities taking place between Brighter Choice and Young Scholars' Academy have gone extremely well.
8. Multiple commenters expressed appreciation for the work of everybody involved in planning for this consolidation.

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

**The following comments were submitted directly to members of the Panel for Educational Policy for consideration and were also submitted to the DOE for response.**

9. CEC 16 submitted written comments that they support the proposed consolidation of Young Scholars' Academy and Brighter Choice because it will create a student body large enough to increase and improve programming and support for all students, there is strong support for the proposed consolidation by parent leaders at both schools, the schools are already co-located in the same building, and it appears that the two school cultures will blend easily.

The DOE received zero (0) voicemails through the dedicated phone number for this proposal.

The DOE received zero (0) emails through the dedicated email address for this proposal.

### **Analysis of Issues Raised, Significant Alternatives, Significant Alternatives Proposed**

Comments 1-4(a-b), 4(d), 5-6, and 8-9 stated support and excitement for the consolidation, whereas comments 4(c) and 7 offer support and enthusiasm about the unification and collaboration activities that have begun with Young Scholars' Academy and Brighter Choice.

The DOE recognizes the praise for Brighter Choice and Young Scholars' Academy, and the unification and collaboration efforts that have begun in the school communities this year. The DOE appreciates the hard work and enthusiasm that the Brighter Choice, Young Scholars' Academy, and District 16 communities have contributed to the consolidation process thus far, and the DOE looks forward to continuing to work with the consolidated Brighter Choice and the District 16 community to continue to support students, families, and other individuals to provide the best educational options for all students.

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

No changes have been made to this proposal.