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**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION - DIVISION OF
PORTFOLIO PLANNING**
Q311 MS incubation @ Q744 - 11/28/12

1 [START RECORDING]

2 FEMALE VOICE: If we could have your
3 attention? Oh, love you all - - start to
4 translate. Is there anyone who needs a Spanish
5 interpreter?

6 FEMALE VOICE 2: Yes.

7 FEMALE VOICE 1: Spanish interpreter can
8 move over here and - - so that they can listen
9 to it in Spanish.

10 INTERPRETER: [Foreign language]

11 MR. JUAN MENDEZ: Good evening. This is a
12 joint public hearing of the Department of
13 Education, Community Education Council, and the
14 School - - Teams for the proposed temporary co-
15 location of the new school, M.S. 311 (24Q311)
16 with existing schools City Leadership Academy
17 (24Q293), Pan-American International High School
18 (24Q296), VOYAGES Preparatory (24Q744), and
19 Queens Transition Center (75Q752). The Elmhurst
20 Educational Campus, Building Q744 beginning in
21 the 2013-2014 school year and continuing through
22 2014-2015 school year, and the proposed re-
23 siting and co-location of M.S. 311 with the
24 District 75 school, the new building Q311
25 beginning in the 2015-2016 school year.

1 I am Queens High School's Superintendent,
2 Juan Mendez [phonetic]. We have asked District
3 24 Community Location Council and the school
4 leadership teams of the respective schools in
5 this building to participate in this joint
6 public hearing. I'm joined tonight by Phuong
7 Nguyen, Principal, Civic Leadership to my left,
8 Principal Minerva Zanca from Pan American
9 International High School, Dr. Joan Klingsberg,
10 Principal, VOYAGES, Fritzy Sannon-Brown,
11 Principal, Queens Transition.

12 I am going to ask them to introduce the
13 members of their respective SLTs. I'll begin
14 with Phuong Nguyen from Civic Leadership.
15 [Cheering.]

16 MS. PHUONG NGUYEN: Good evening, everyone.
17 The members of the SLT members who are here
18 today are Mr. Malik Selus, my Dean [cheering],
19 Mr. Shell Dowdrum [phonetic], who is our
20 community - - [cheering], Mr. - - , who is the
21 DTA [phonetic] President [cheering], Mr. James
22 Welsh, who is the - - [interposing, cheering].
23 I just want to say that I'm really proud of the
24 CLA community and representing our schools.
25 Thank you for showing up [cheering]. Back at

1 you.

2 MR. MENDEZ: Now, introducing the members of
3 the school leadership team from Pan American
4 International High School, Principal Minerva
5 Zanca.

6 MS. MINERVA ZANCA: Good evening, everyone.
7 I would like to introduce the Treasurer of the
8 PTA, Enrique Andrade [clapping, cheering].
9 Thank you.

10 MR. MENDEZ: Introducing members of the SLT
11 for VOYAGES, Dr. Joan Klingsberg [cheering].

12 DR. JOAN KLINGSBERG: Could have been bad
13 right now. [Laughing] Thank you all for
14 coming. I'd like to introduce my - - team, Mr.
15 Michael Cardona, - - among one of his names
16 [cheering]. - - UFT Program Director - -
17 Community House [cheering], and Sylvia Sanchez,
18 Director of Counseling. [Cheering]

19 I also want to thank all of the students
20 that are here, and our staff and counselors that
21 are here to support us as well. [Clapping]

22 MR. MENDEZ: Introducing members of the SLT
23 for Queens Transition Center, Principal Fritzy
24 Sannon-Brown.

25 MS. FRITZY SANNON-BROWN: Well, thank you,

1 everyone. My members - - unfortunately are not
2 here this evening. Due to Hurricane Sandy, we
3 had to reschedule parent/teacher conferences, so
4 they are meeting with our parents and our
5 families today. I'm happy to be here, and thank
6 you, everyone [clapping].

7 MR. MENDEZ: Representing District 74
8 Community Location Council on behalf of Nico
9 Comayani [phonetic], we are expecting soon to
10 arrive, is Maria Domico [phonetic] from the CDC.

11 This hearing is being recorded. The purpose
12 of this hearing is for you to provide comments
13 about the proposal; because I describe the
14 proposal - - before I describe the proposal, I
15 want to make sure that you are all aware of the
16 opportunity to provide your input. All those
17 who wish to speak must sign up in the speakers'
18 sign up area located just outside the auditorium
19 doors. The sign-up list will close in 15
20 minutes. Speakers will be given the floor in
21 the order that they sign if they sign up. All
22 comments are limited to two minutes.

23 There may be elected officials who arrive at
24 different times throughout this evening. If
25 they wish to speak, we will do our best to

1 accommodate them at the first opportune moment.
2 Those who are here at the start of the public
3 comments segment will be asked to speak first.
4 All comments will be mentioned - - comment to be
5 published and then from them provided to the
6 Panel of Education Policy the evening before the
7 panel votes. That vote is scheduled for
8 December 20th.

9 In addition, we welcome any comments and
10 feedback you may have at any time before the
11 panel votes on both proposals. The email
12 address and phone number where comments may be
13 made are: d24proposals@schools.nyc.gov. I
14 repeat, d24proposals@schools.nyc.gov, and the
15 telephone number, 212-374-7621. The number
16 again: 212-374-7621.

17 The proposal summary: The New York City
18 Department of Education is proposing to
19 temporarily co-locate M.S. 311, a new district
20 middle school in Elmhurst Educational Campus,
21 Building Q744 located at 45-10 94th Street,
22 Queens, New York 11373 in Community School
23 District 24. In September 2013, before it
24 becomes a new construction building Q311,
25 located at 97-11 44th Avenue, Queens, New York

1 11368 by the 2015-2016 school year. M.S. 311
2 will be co-located temporarily in Q744 with
3 Civic Leadership Academy, an existing high
4 school serving students in grades 9 through 12,
5 and American International School, an existing
6 International high school serving students in
7 grades 9 through 12, VOYAGES Preparatory, an
8 existing transfer school serving students in
9 grades 9 through 12, and P752 at Q744, one site
10 of a multi-site District 75 school, Queens
11 Transition Center serving students in grades 8
12 through 12.

13 A co-location means that two or more school
14 organizations are located in the same building
15 and they share common space like auditoriums, -
16 - , and cafeterias. After two years in Q744,
17 M.S. 311 will be resided and co-located with a
18 yet-to-be-determined District 75 school in new
19 building Q311, which is designed to accommodate
20 a middle school and a District 75 school, and is
21 expected to be completed for occupancy by the
22 2015-2016 school year.

23 In 2017-2018 when M.S. 311 achieves full
24 scale, it will serve approximately 800 to 825
25 students in 6th through 8th grades. On September

1 24, 2012, Community Location Council 24, CC24,
2 voted to create a new temporary incubation zone
3 for M.S. 311 beginning in 2013, and a long-term
4 zone for this school when it moves into Q311
5 beginning in September 2015. For the 2013 and
6 2014, and 2014-2015 school years, all the
7 students living in this incubation zone will be
8 zoned for M.S. 311. The full M.S. 311 zone will
9 take effect in September 2015 when M.S. 311 will
10 be resided to Q311. If the proposal to co-
11 locate M.S. 311 in Q744 is approved, beginning
12 in September 2013, - - students living in the
13 M.S. 311 incubation zone will be zoned to M.S.
14 311. Q744 has been identified as an - -
15 utilized building. Q744 has the capacity to
16 serve 1,482 students. In the 2012-2013 school
17 year, the building will serve only 1,116
18 students, yielding a utilization rate of 75%.

19 If the proposal is approved, there will be
20 sufficient space to accommodate Civic
21 Leadership, American, VOYAGES, D752 and Q744,
22 and M.S. 311. In the final year of M.S. 311's
23 incubation, the Q744 building will serve
24 approximately 1,268 to 1,425 students, yielding
25 a building utilization rate of 86% to 96%. To

1 address overcrowding and plan for efficient use
2 of new buildings, the Department of Relocation
3 frequently employs the strategy of incubating a
4 school until it can be recited to new
5 construction, and this proposal, M.S. 311, will
6 follow the same strategy. M.S. 311 would
7 incubate grades 6 and 7 in its temporary
8 location in Q744 until September 2015 when it
9 will be recited to Q311 and serve students in
10 grades 6 to 8. That incubation of M.S. 311 in
11 Q744 will help alleviate middle school
12 overcrowding in Corona Elmhurst in September
13 2013, two years before new construction is
14 available. Q744 is located less than half a
15 mile from Q311, and its facilities include
16 science labs appropriate for middle school-aged
17 students.

18 Now what I have to do is call Maria DiAmico
19 [phonetic] who is representing Micobiani
20 [phonetic] from CC24. Has she arrived yet?
21 Since she has not arrived - - she is not here
22 yet, so we'll skip to - - as soon as she
23 arrives.

24 Now we are going to proceed with public
25 comments, and I'm going to invite the principals

1 from the respective schools on campus who have
2 an opportunity to speak. The first speaker is
3 Dr. Joan Klingsberg, Principal from VOYAGES
4 Preparatory.

5 MS. KLINGSBERG: Good evening, everyone. As
6 Superintendent Mendez said, my name is Joan
7 Klingsberg, and I'm the principal of VOYAGES,
8 the transfer school - - . I'm one of four
9 principals in this building and as the first one
10 to speak, I'd like to once again welcome
11 everyone to our building, and thank you for
12 coming. I'd particularly like to thank
13 Superintendent Mendez, our network leader Doug
14 Jones, who's back there, and all of the staff
15 students and supportive family and friends who
16 took the time to come out tonight.

17 We at VOYAGES are extremely proud of our
18 accomplishments. Despite the fact that our
19 student body is comprised exclusively of overage
20 and undercredited students, we rank among the
21 top 20 high schools in the city. For those of
22 you who might not have seen the recent rankings
23 that were put out this week, we have copies here
24 and you should feel free to pick one up.

25 VOYAGES, as defined by city criteria, is a

1 well-developed A school, and if you were to
2 ask anyone associated with us what our
3 distinguishing feature is, you were hear over
4 and over again that it is our culture. We
5 simply do things very differently on this floor,
6 and although the differences work for us, they
7 were undoubtedly - - dangerous for any school
8 sharing space on our floor. I can offer
9 countless examples of this, but I respect
10 everyone's time. I will stay with the simple
11 ones. We use the public address system
12 regularly throughout the day, so we will be a
13 chronic disturbance to all other classes on our
14 floor. Our students use lockers every period
15 located on both sides of the floor, thereby
16 ensuring constant interruptions for any other
17 school on our floor with a different bell
18 schedule. The open spaces, particularly the
19 center corridors, are regularly used for awards
20 ceremonies, town halls, and as lounge spaces for
21 students during lunch and on free periods. It
22 is simply inappropriate and inconceivable to
23 have 11- to 14-year-olds on the same floor as
24 the 18- to 21-year-olds lounging and hanging
25 around together.

1 Taking our distinguishing features away
2 from our students to support another school
3 would be a major violation and significantly
4 impact our success. More importantly, however,
5 are the significant safety issues they were
6 certainly create should another school share our
7 space. The threats to safety, security and
8 success posed by placing a middle school on any
9 floor of this building will be highlighted over
10 and over again this evening, and we certainly
11 hope that they sink in to the powers that be.

12 The building council comprises all different
13 schools in this building collectively have over
14 a century of educational experience, and
15 together in consultation with all other
16 constituents in the building, including
17 security, facility, and kitchen staff, designed
18 a viable plan for the incubation for the middle
19 school, and we are all deeply disappointed and
20 saddened by the city's dismissal of it. Copies
21 of the proposed plan are also available on the
22 other side of the article, and we are hoping,
23 after hearing everyone here tonight, the city
24 will reconsider its plan so we can all move
25 forward in showing the safety and success of all

1 our schools. Once again, I thank you all for
2 coming, and I will now turn it over to Mr.
3 Michael Cardona, UFT [phonetic] Chapter Leader
4 of VOYAGES Preparatory High School. Thank you.

5 MR. MICHAEL CARDONA: - - . Thank you
6 again for coming. As the Chapter Leader of
7 VOYAGES Preparatory High School, I'm here
8 tonight to represent all of our New York team
9 members.

10 Our entire staff supports the plan developed
11 by the building council, and strongly agrees it
12 is the only one that ensures the safety and
13 continued success of our schools. We strongly
14 encourage the city to reconsider their plan to
15 dismiss it. Thank you for your time.

16 MS. KLINGSBERG: I will now turn it over to
17 - - Phuong Nguyen.

18 MS. PHUONG NGUYEN: Good evening, everyone.
19 My name is Phuong Nguyen, and I'm the founding
20 principal of Civic Leadership Academy. Before I
21 begin, I would like to welcome everyone here,
22 and to thank Superintendent, Juan Mendez, Sarah
23 Jones [phonetic], my network leader, my school
24 community, and my colleagues, for taking the
25 time to attend this meeting and support us in

1 this process.

2 For the past four years, we've been told
3 that we are the only high school building in
4 Queens that is underutilized. We don't deny
5 that the building is underutilized; however, the
6 underutilization is by design on the part of the
7 Department of Ed, not by circumstance because
8 our schools are not under-enrolled, but - -
9 decision to place a transfer school which
10 generally has an enrollment of 150 to 200
11 students in a building that is designed for
12 three small schools with an enrollment of 432,
13 guaranteed that this building would always be
14 underutilized.

15 Every time we have been informed about the
16 building's status, we have responded with
17 suggestions on how we can use this space. Time
18 and time again, DOE has not been responsive,
19 never giving our proposals any real
20 consideration. Today, we find ourselves in a
21 similar situation. We were informed recently
22 that a middle school, M.S. 311, was being
23 considered for incubation here for the next two
24 years until the construction of their building
25 is complete. I'm not going to discuss why

1 housing two groups of students with two
2 completely different developmental needs is not
3 a good idea because my colleagues and fellow
4 community members will do so comprehensively. I
5 am going to focus instead on the conditions that
6 need to be respected and established in order
7 for all the schools to continue to thrive and
8 grow on this campus.

9 As you know, the high school - - has just
10 been released. As Dr. Klingsberg has already
11 shared with you, VOYAGES and CLA are both A-
12 rated schools and made the top 25 schools in New
13 York City based on our scores from this report.
14 This achievement is a tremendous celebration for
15 us, because it reflects the culmination of years
16 of hard work and unrelenting focus on students'
17 success. Failure is not an option in either
18 school. We have developed a strong culture
19 where students are expected to succeed and
20 attend college. If you are a failing student at
21 either of our schools, it is in spite of our
22 efforts to help you, not because we allowed you
23 to fall through the cracks.

24 Several factors contribute to our success.
25 One key factor is that all the schools co-exist

1 in a peaceful campus which allows each school
2 to focus on what is important, mainly our
3 students. The four schools are not integrated
4 into the life of each other, but we have
5 established a campus culture where we are all
6 respectful of each others' boundaries and
7 culture. As a result, troubles between schools
8 are minimal. The physical layout of the
9 building supports this peace, because it allows
10 us to clearly identify the boundaries for our
11 students and maintain them. Adding another
12 school would blur these boundaries. Knowing how
13 important it is to maintain space that is
14 uniquely identifiable as each school, the
15 principals and I collaborated to formulate a
16 plan that would allow us to maintain our
17 identity, as well as allowing M.S. 311 space
18 that is uniquely their own; but our proposal,
19 like our other proposals, was rejected by the
20 DOE with no room for negotiation.

21 If the co-location moves forward, it would
22 be most logical to consider the ideas of the
23 existing schools, since we know the space and
24 what is needed to create successful new schools.
25 If you want to maximize M.S. 311's chances of

1 building a strong foundation, then you have to
2 seriously consider the voices of all the
3 stakeholders.

4 In closing, I strongly urge you to respect
5 the needs of the current schools in making your
6 decision. By letting our voices be active in
7 the creation of the co-location plan, you are
8 acknowledging that our school's needs are just
9 as important as those of M.S. 311. I sincerely
10 hope that this is the case, and that you
11 understand that we have worked way too hard to
12 create successful schools to allow it to falter
13 in the face of conflicts that might arise as a
14 result of the co-location because our voices
15 were neither heard nor respected.

16 Thank you for your time, and I hope you've
17 really heard what we all have shared with you
18 today, and seriously consider our points before
19 making this decision. Have a good evening.

20 MS. NGUYEN: The first SLT member I'd like
21 to call up is Mr. Malik Selus.

22 MR. MALIK SELUS: Hi, good evening everyone.
23 [Background noise.] My name is Malik Selus.
24 I'm the Dean here at Civic Leadership Academy.
25 I'm responsible for the welfare and safety of

1 over 450 students that occupy our halls. My
2 first priority is the safety of my kids. I call
3 them my kids because, well, they're my kids.
4 [Cheering.]

5 We share a building with three other
6 schools, each with their own very different
7 style. As administrator, I also deal with
8 students' personal problems as they adjust not
9 only to high school life, but their transition
10 from child to teenager, then young adult. The
11 average person is around 13 years of age, and
12 coming from junior high school is frightening
13 and a huge culture shock for many of them. Many
14 students struggle with this adjustment. They
15 come into a situation where students are three
16 to four years their senior and are light years
17 ahead of them in physical and emotional
18 development. Occurrences of bullying and fights
19 are not an everyday occurrence, but are reality
20 among students.

21 If we bring in these junior high school
22 students who are younger than a typical incoming
23 freshman, we place them at a higher risk for
24 these acts. The thought that an 11-year old is
25 passing in the hall, sharing the bathroom,

1 having daily interaction with an 18-year old
2 is a safety issue for me. These children will
3 be - - to a culture that they will be nowhere
4 ready for, socially or physically. Our school
5 has maintained a culture of high academic goals
6 and respect for one another that is a constant
7 work in progress. If we have to focus on the
8 safety and well-being of these young children,
9 we will be spending more time and manpower with
10 an already - - .

11 These young children are impressionable and
12 easily susceptible to their surroundings, and
13 their - - desire to fit in and be cool leaves
14 them vulnerable to negative influences. As a
15 parent, myself, I don't want my child - - .
16 Thank you.

17 MS. NGUYEN: The next person I'd like to
18 call up is Mr. James Welsh.

19 MR. JAMES WELSH: - - . All right. My
20 name is Mr. James Welsh. I'm the Honors
21 Coordinator and Music Teacher at Civic
22 Leadership Academy. [Cheering.] - - .

23 CLA has currently enrolled over 450
24 students, the smallest class of which is our
25 seniors, the next smallest the juniors, and so

1 on. With our current enrollment projections,
2 every year, our senior class has been replaced
3 with a freshman class of nearly double in size;
4 thus, our numbers two years from now will be far
5 above those currently stated. Additionally, the
6 numbers quoted in the proposal report quote
7 statistics for 2011, for last year. We are
8 already above that number this year, and will
9 continue to grow.

10 No classroom goes unused at our school.
11 This fact is self-evident from any walk through
12 our classrooms during school hours. In fact, we
13 are so short on rooms on the fourth floor that
14 we recently had to move a Spanish classroom to
15 the basement just to provide enough space to
16 conduct education. We regularly have teachers
17 sharing classes and spaces, fully utilizing
18 spaces provided to us. In short, CLA is already
19 too big a school for the fourth floor alone.
20 Adding another school to consume valuable room
21 space will not help alleviate this problem;
22 instead, creating a further struggle to use the
23 limited spaces to which we are already afforded.

24 One of the reasons our school is unique is
25 that despite its high academic - - , it has

1 unlimited unscreened status. We do not screen
2 our students, and we will allow any and all to
3 join our - - . This has resulted in both high
4 achievers and those that require special needs,
5 both academically and physically. 21.4% of our
6 students have IEPs, which means that at least
7 one in five students have special needs. These
8 students need a space to have their speech
9 therapy, their physical therapy, their mandated
10 counseling. We do not look at this as
11 underutilization; instead, we look at this as
12 providing mandatory services so that all our
13 students will have every opportunity to succeed.

14 Both music, specifically at Leadership
15 Academy and theater with Pan American, are
16 housed in the basement of the campus. The
17 structural design of the building allows these
18 programs to thrive. Students are active and
19 involved in their respective artistic
20 disciplines and the classes provide a form of
21 expressive outlet to all involved. These rooms
22 cannot be placed on another floor. The
23 resultant noise inherent to the subject matter
24 will distract classrooms around them and create
25 disharmonious relationships.

1 The structural design is the reason the
2 schools are placed as they currently are. The
3 building is designed with subjects and spaces in
4 mind. The core rooms are designed for large
5 performing groups and they are utilized as such.
6 An unfinished room in the basement is clearly
7 designed for storage and is so used. Open
8 spaces in the basement and first floor are
9 designed this way because of the need for
10 therapy, after school programs, our nurse's
11 office, etc. When the building was designed, it
12 was built in this fashion to be used as a
13 school; so how can the design be faulty now?

14 There are two cafeteria spaces in the entire
15 school. If you'd like to come to a lunch period
16 for either room, you would see they are already
17 to full capacity. Adding another 125 to 150,
18 next year alone, new students would place these
19 rooms beyond that level. It is not as if we can
20 ask students to take lunch at 9:00 a.m. or 2:00
21 p.m., thus they will be overcrowded. This will
22 result in a struggle for space or a perceived
23 invasion of personal space amongst the students.
24 To date, there has always been a peaceful
25 coexistence between schools, and that balance

1 will be disturbed once the lunch period is
2 overcrowded by new students.

3 The same can be said for the inevitable
4 bathroom sharing. Remember, that while we have
5 cameras in the halls, we clearly do not in the
6 bathrooms. Must we monitor each bathroom with
7 an already taxed staff just to prevent these
8 possible confrontations? That being said, who
9 is to say that would even be effective? Again,
10 students will fear as if they have suffered a
11 loss of liberties and will be unnerved for it.

12 Besides fighting, there are other concerns.
13 As middle school students tend to less
14 emotionally mature and confident in themselves
15 developmentally, they have a tendency to idolize
16 older peers. This may result in unwanted
17 intermingling with students many years their
18 senior, many years an adult in some cases. Who
19 is to say that relationships may not form from
20 these interactions? Who is to guarantee that
21 these relationships will be purely platonic?
22 Neither middle school nor high school students
23 always make the right decisions in these
24 matters. That much is repeatedly shown to be
25 self-evident.

1 Lastly, even in a Utopian, best-case
2 scenario, where fights, bullying, and
3 inappropriate relationships do not occur, there
4 is more to worry about. As has always been the
5 case at many high schools, disagreements and
6 hard feelings can extend - - on the incubation
7 of the school campus. A shared space may also
8 result in a conflict over the limited multi-
9 purpose rooms we have. The rooms are filled to
10 capacity now, with some classes topping 65
11 students. What will happen if we then have to
12 split that space in half? The outside areas are
13 used to run various outside after-school
14 programs, which have repeatedly been proven to
15 increase student retention, attendance, and
16 motivation. What will happen when they do not
17 have the space to continue to operate like they
18 have in the past?

19 You will hear various reasons for why we are
20 not being used at capacity. This is a
21 misrepresentation of numerical figures. Ask the
22 students on campus, anyone that attends here can
23 usually tell you that.

24 Thank you for your time, and please
25 reconsider your decision. [Cheering].

1 MS. NGUYEN: - - .

2 MS. KLINGSBERG: I'm taking the microphone
3 back. We also have a person - two people,
4 actually, from Voyagers who want to speak; so
5 I'm going to introduce Sylvia Sanchez again, our
6 Director of Counseling. [Cheering.]

7 MS. SYLVIA SANCHEZ: Good evening, everyone.
8 My name is Sylvia - - Sanchez. I'm the Director
9 of Counseling here at VOYAGES Preparatory High
10 School. I've had the pleasure of working here
11 at VOYAGES for the past five years as a
12 passionate social worker. Our students, over
13 250 for a transfer school, are overage and
14 undercredited. All of them struggled in
15 traditional high schools before coming here, and
16 all of them are still at risk of dropping out.
17 We are the last chance they have to obtain a
18 high school diploma. We do not act lightly in
19 taking these students into our community.
20 Students participate in a rigorous interview
21 process to assess their needs, and time and time
22 again, they have told us of their previous
23 experiences of overcrowding in their traditional
24 schools. - - and the teachers and counselors,
25 and subsequent inability to develop strong

1 relationships and support systems. Time and
2 time again, we hear no one even knew my name or
3 cared if I graduated.

4 The school culture of integrating academics
5 and counseling in a safe space allow them to
6 grow and become productive young adults. Our
7 students have the - - franchise, in part by
8 overcrowded buildings and classrooms. Every
9 single one of them decided to find a school
10 environment like this, one which allows them to
11 learn and increase the likelihood that they will
12 succeed, both academically and personally.

13 For our school having the space to address
14 students' social and emotional needs, as well as
15 their intellectual needs is not a luxury, it's a
16 necessity. As stated by the Department of Ed,
17 the department strives to ensure that all
18 students in New York City have access to a
19 higher quality school at every stage of their
20 education. In this particular stage for our
21 students, it means the quality of services will
22 be compromised. Having another school can and
23 will disrupt this approach. It will create the
24 same issues that led them to their initial
25 failure to succeed as students in their

1 traditional high schools.

2 Middle school students ages 11 to 14 and
3 high school students ages 16 to 21, especially
4 overage students such as ours, are mentally
5 different. Our population are handling adult-
6 like situations and issues which most schools
7 are not necessarily confronted with yet. Why
8 would we accelerate the developmental process of
9 middle schoolers by engaging them in issues that
10 they're not necessarily mentally prepared to
11 handle?

12 Middle school students and high school
13 students, especially overage students such as
14 ours, are emotionally different. Where there
15 are student populations, there are more likely
16 to engage in high-risk behaviors, with the
17 reality of a high rate of young single parents,
18 pregnancies, engaging in substance abuse,
19 homelessness, sexual identity, intimate
20 relationships, it will be detrimental for middle
21 school youth, at this impressionable age, to
22 face this, resulting in imitating behaviors.
23 Middle school students and high school students,
24 especially overage students such as ours, are
25 physically different. A 19 to 20-year old

1 crossing paths with an 11-year old in our
2 hallways, by nature of stature, it can create an
3 intimidating environment for both middle
4 schoolers and our population. Why would we
5 jeopardize this by sharing space?

6 Perhaps most importantly, without privacy,
7 we cannot effectively counsel our students and
8 if we cannot effectively do that, we fail them.
9 Part of the success with students is being able
10 to successfully have counseling sessions in a
11 designated and private space such as our
12 offices, creating a trusted environment to them.
13 This shared experience has allowed our
14 counselors to enter into these students' lives,
15 experience their struggles, failures, healing
16 processes, and most importantly, their
17 accomplishments. Are we going to compromise the
18 work we have done with them in the past five
19 years and done it successfully?

20 We do thank you for your time, and I hope
21 you reconsider. [Clapping.]

22 MS. KLINGSBERG: I'd like to introduce
23 Edward Ponty, one of our faculty.

24 MR. EDWARD PONTY: Okay, all right. Okay,
25 thank you all for taking the time and

1 consideration to come out here. My name is
2 Edward Ponty. I'm the English teacher at
3 VOYAGES Preparatory High School. Being an
4 English teacher and not an accountant - - by the
5 cold calculus of number crunching, I can assure
6 you that the aloof mathematics of determining
7 the designation of underutilized space - - does
8 absolutely no justice to the culture of the - -
9 this preparatory high school, a culture created
10 by passionate students and staff who are allowed
11 to do what they do because of the space they are
12 afforded.

13 You don't have to be Asian to know that - -
14 floor is really bad Fung - - . Without any - -
15 , I would say that this school is a true
16 sanctuary for our high-need, at-risk population.
17 We have students here who find stability; dare I
18 say even an uncommon serenity here, that sadly,
19 is not as easily found among some of our more
20 troubled students' home lives. Disruption to
21 their routines do not happen without cost, and
22 are seldom taken lightly by our population. The
23 departure of a staff member, a sudden change in
24 schedule, or shifting academic expectation can
25 send students into a spiraling anxiety, anger,

1 or even despair. Students come to VOYAGES
2 knowing it is a space that welcomes them. They
3 come to VOYAGES knowing that the teachers and
4 counselors have space to accommodate their
5 needs. They come to VOYAGES because it's a
6 space that welcomes them and supports both their
7 academic and personal needs.

8 Imagine then, in our fifth year, where are
9 our school has achieved a - - letter grade of A,
10 achieved a number two ranking out of all
11 transfer schools, and achieved a top-20 ranking
12 out of all NYC public schools in general,
13 imagine after these hard-fought accomplishments,
14 imagine the impact of a thoughtless, top-down
15 decision to force such a school to cut a single
16 floor, one floor, in half, in half, that is a
17 mandate for failure if I've ever heard one; and
18 the Department of Education had best be prepared
19 for the consequences if - - follow through, or
20 if the DOE would like to avoid the public
21 relations fiasco of a top-down mandate based on
22 the dubious metrics of money per square footage
23 as a measure of value, then the DOE would do
24 best to heed the age-old adage if it ain't
25 broke-

1 [Crowd says] Don't fix it.

2 MR. PONTY: If it ain't broke-

3 [Crowd says] Don't fix it.

4 MR. PONTY: If it ain't broke-

5 [Crowd says] Don't fix it!

6 MR. PONTY: Thank you. Right on.

7 [Cheering.]

8 [Crosstalk]

9 MR. MENDEZ: Thank you. At this time, I
10 would like to call Sandra Pelid [phonetic], a
11 parent from one of the schools. [Clapping]

12 MS. SANDRA PELID: Good evening. I want to
13 start off by saying that I am so proud that my
14 daughter is a student at VOYAGES Prep. We've
15 made a difference - - [cheering].

16 My name is Sandra Pelid and I would thank
17 you for this opportunity to make a testimony
18 about the DOE's proposed plan to co-locate - -
19 at the Elmhurst educational complex. I'm a
20 parent of a student here at VOYAGES, a New York
21 City Council candidate in the 2013 election - -
22 , and a concerned citizen.

23 Administrators, teachers, students, and
24 parents begin each school year with the highest
25 hopes for the success of their students and the

1 school as a whole. A school's success is
2 measured by the school environment, students'
3 standardized test scores, graduation rates,
4 school safety, and other criteria. As a parent
5 of a student at VOYAGES, I know that the
6 faculty, staff, and administration here is
7 nurturing a sensitive to the needs of this
8 particular student population. Unfortunately,
9 they lack the full resources for - - to support
10 the student body. [Crosstalk]

11 I searched out this school specifically
12 because a child in my care needed an environment
13 which would allow her to excel and would nurture
14 her unique talents, while also teaching her the
15 - - skills and academics necessary for smooth
16 transition into adulthood. I do not see how
17 adding an entirely new student body to this
18 building will benefit any of the students in any
19 way; in fact, I think it will cause overcrowding
20 and an unfair - - of the negro resources, which
21 will prove to be detrimental to all the
22 students' education and social - - . In fact,
23 co-location will take precious time and
24 resources away from the existing schools because
25 the administrators and faculty will be required

1 to engage in additional tasks to manage
2 scheduling and resources between five schools in
3 one building.

4 I understand that it is the DOE's mandate
5 to educate every child in the city of New York,
6 but we should at all times begin from a place of
7 good and provide the best education and the best
8 environment possible. - - , I know that there
9 are unique challenges with the student body at
10 VOYAGES, ranging from truancy and - - to
11 substance abuse, and it is my contention that
12 the addition of a new population will only add
13 to the stress of the administrators who must
14 continually maintain an appropriate environment
15 for all.

16 In the case of VOYAGES and the three other
17 high schools currently located in the building,
18 the student body ranges in ages from 13 to 21,
19 and I do not feel that the students of M.S. 311,
20 some of whom may be as young as 11 years of age,
21 should be exposed on a regular and ongoing basis
22 to young people who are physically and socially
23 more mature, and dealing with issues of late
24 adolescence and young adulthood.

25 When speaking to my daughter and other young

1 people, it became clear that the presence of
2 young children - - no matter how supposedly
3 temporary, will create uncomfortable and
4 possible - - situations for all involved, and it
5 is my hope that the DOE and this committee will
6 recommend another alternative. Last year, the
7 New York City budget was \$16.5 billion, and the
8 New York City education budget for fiscal year
9 2013 is \$24.4 billion. With the vast real
10 estate resources at the DOE's disposal, it is my
11 hope that a more appropriate solution can be
12 found for the students, administrators, and
13 faculty of M.S. 311. I want you to find another
14 solution. Eleven-year olds don't belong in this
15 building with these students who are flourishing
16 and doing well in this situation. Again, an
17 underutilized building, according to your
18 definition, according to the DOE's definition,
19 does not take into account the human needs of
20 each individual student here in this building,
21 and that's what we need to look at. Thank you.

22 [Cheering, clapping]

23 MR. MENDEZ: Now, we will proceed with the
24 regular speakers. Please be reminded that all
25 comments are limited to two minutes with the

1 exception of SLT members who spoke prior to
2 this time. So I'm going to go down the list. I
3 would like to call Lisa Ericka James [phonetic]
4 from Pan American International High School.

5 MS. LISA ERICKA JAMES: Good evening members
6 of the panel, principals, parents, teachers, and
7 students. My name is Lisa Ericka James, and I'm
8 the theater teacher at Pan American
9 International High School. I've been in
10 education for 15 years, and I joined the PAIHS
11 [phonetic] community last year.

12 I come before you this evening to discuss my
13 concerns about the displacement of my students
14 and myself from the theater which is located in
15 the basement. The genesis of the theater
16 instruction at PAIHS dates back to fall of 2010.
17 I was hired to create a qualified theater
18 program. In doing so, I was afforded the
19 physical space to allow my English language
20 learning students to flourish and to be fully
21 self-expressed.

22 The theater course just started a year ago
23 with the upper classmen only, and we produced
24 two full live theater shows. As of now, the
25 program is - - in its capacity as the master of

1 the entire school. Not only with daytime
2 instruction, but also including the PAIHS
3 Afterschool Theater Academy, this provides our -
4 - students with a positive outlet. It keeps
5 them off of the streets and builds community in
6 a safe environment. It both raises their self-
7 esteem while accelerating their English language
8 acquisition process.

9 The PAIHS Theater Academy is more than a
10 performance class. We a formidable, thriving
11 program. I attribute the success of this
12 program mostly to the fact that we are within an
13 isolated space where the students can explore
14 their capacity to get up in front of an audience
15 fully and freely. Due to the nature of theater,
16 we are unavoidably loud. Placing us in and next
17 to the traditional academic classroom will rob
18 the theater students from being fully expressed.
19 In addition, it will defeat the purpose of our
20 theater program instruction and the curricula
21 that we have worked so hard to develop.

22 As you can see, we are a young program that
23 has just begun to take off. Relocating us will
24 jeopardize the momentum that we have built
25 creating this program. I am pleading on behalf

1 of my already-established students who have
2 greatly benefitted from their work in the arts.
3 My request to the members of the panel, to the
4 Department of Education, is this: In order to
5 maintain the continuity of the theater program
6 at PAIHS, please strongly reconsider allowing to
7 keep the theater space - - and the music room
8 directly next door serving - - Academy.

9 Thank you very much for your time, and for
10 listening to our concerns. [Clapping, cheering]

11 MR. MENDEZ: The next speaker, Michael
12 Martinez. [Clapping] Michael Martinez.
13 [Cheering, crosstalk]

14 MR. MICHAEL MARTINEZ: My name is Michael
15 Martinez. I'm from the school Civic Leadership.
16 I would like to express that eventually, like my
17 teacher, Mr. Welsh, has said - - has said that
18 is necessarily - - occupying, eventually we
19 need it, because as many as some individuals as
20 there are my friends, that are part of what we
21 do as a community is that we need that space so
22 that we can learn that education is not in
23 jeopardy. Right now, we are the next future.
24 We are the next people that are going to take
25 over once you leave.

1 So, I would greatly appreciate [crosstalk]
2 so that you don't take our space - - we need it.

3 [Cheering, clapping]

4 MR. MENDEZ: Next on the list, Gabriel
5 Williams [phonetic]. [Cheering, clapping,
6 crosstalk]. Next up, Brandon Ramos [phonetic].

7 [Cheering, clapping].

8 MR. BRANDON RAMOS: [Background noise.]

9 I've been at the school four years, and - - so
10 my family went before me. My brother, David - -
11 came to the school, and I've been going to the
12 school for four years, yeah. My school uses all
13 the space, uses it good. [Laughing.] - -
14 pretty awesome. We all spend time in there.

15 Everyone is sharing - - the music room's amazing
16 - - . [Cheering, clapping.] - - for too much
17 crowdedness. I think it's cool, it's good the
18 way it is. It's not just as crowded - - .

19 [Laughing.] It's about people - - social
20 problems, obviously, the majority, and - -
21 interacting with people - - problems, yeah.

22 [Laughing.] I love my school, and I think it's
23 very well utilized. If anything, I think we
24 should get a bit more space - - way too crowded.

25 [Laughing.] There you go. I'm done. That's

1 all. [Cheering, clapping.]

2 MR. MENDEZ: I would like to call Melisa
3 Infante [phonetic]. [Cheering, clapping,
4 crosstalk.]

5 MS. MELISA INFANTE: I go to CLA. I believe
6 that the environment we are in is calm and
7 collect because we don't evade each other's
8 space. Now, if you decide to bring any more
9 kids, ugh, sorry. If you decide to bring in
10 more kids, things in this place will be, like,
11 very overcrowded. We only have a limited amount
12 of space, and, so, that's just it. Putting
13 aside all the - - of the space, I am worried for
14 the little kids. Not only will there be all
15 this bullying; not only will there be all this
16 bullying, how do you know they won't feel - -
17 because aren't they like, honor students,
18 whether they're supposed to be smart? We don't
19 want them to feel dumb or anything because of
20 bullying.

21 Also take into consideration that they're
22 the youngest ones that will enter, and I believe
23 they will try to follow the steps of their
24 elders and not to be - - and not to be taking in
25 the steps of their elders, and who do you

1 suppose that the elders will be talking about
2 or doing? Now that the issue will arise with
3 us, the students. If you just start to add the
4 kids here, what will happen to the afterschool
5 programs that we worked so hard to keep? All of
6 the participants of the afterschool programs
7 will become close, or have become close, almost
8 like family, and I speak from experience,
9 because I've gone through a lot of afterschool
10 programs, and that's mostly how I've become
11 friends and familiar with people in the school.
12 That's how I started in my freshman year. I
13 started because of programs.

14 So, please take into consideration of the
15 children of - - of students that forever - I
16 apologize. So, please take into consideration
17 the lives of the students that will be forever
18 change because of the decision you will make,
19 not only because the numbers seem right.

20 So, thank you for your time, and I hope you
21 make the right decision. [Cheering, clapping,
22 crosstalk.]

23 MR. MENDEZ: I would like to call Huberto
24 Gomez.

25 MR. HUBERTO GOMEZ: I would just like to

1 question before.

2 MR. MENDEZ: You just want to speak your
3 turn. Very well. So the next person on the
4 list is Martha Gomez. [Clapping.]

5 MS. MARTHA GOMEZ: Thank you for the
6 opportunity to give my opinion. I'm the mom of
7 one of the seniors, and my son goes here for
8 Valencia, but I - - for coming. They have the
9 same opportunity that my son have, have quality
10 education - - just that, so I would have to say
11 if you take in consideration all the parents,
12 and you take consideration everything that we
13 have important here today, because I don't
14 really think - - already. I was - - too.
15 Thank you. [Clapping.]

16 MR. MENDEZ: Next up - - is Rachel Bowman
17 [phonetic]. [Cheering, clapping.]

18 MS. RACHEL BOWMAN: Good evening, everyone.
19 I'm going to be brief. I am the director for
20 the afterschool program at Civic Leadership
21 Academy, and I have had the pleasure to be here
22 for the past four years and witnessed the
23 progression and the challenges we face in this
24 unique space here at this complex. It really
25 baffles me how this idea has come about to

1 include more students in a space that's
2 limited, and where I've always felt that the
3 students here have already been cheated in many
4 ways. I' grew up in many different high schools
5 and I've watched us try so very hard to create
6 an identity of a true high school here, to have
7 a real team, to have clubs, to have football, to
8 have basketball, to do things here that aren't
9 very easy because we don't have a real - - . We
10 don't have a true gymnasium. We actually had to
11 be so creative and we had to work so hard to
12 create these things for these students that they
13 have a right to have; and to consider bringing
14 in more students in a space that is already so
15 limited is really beyond my comprehension.

16 I'm really concerned about this decision. I
17 truly hope that people are really thinking
18 strongly about this; the parents, the students.
19 This is your community; you have a right, you
20 have a voice, and you should say something. I'm
21 very proud of you being here today. I'm proud
22 of the students who stepped up here. This is
23 really, really - it makes me really proud to
24 see. Again, reconsider strongly. Please, don't
25 take any more away from these students. They

1 deserve more, not less, and that goes for all
2 the students. [Cheering, clapping.]

3 MR. MENDEZ: - - call Perry Stevens
4 [phonetic]. Perry Stevens. [Cheering,
5 clapping, crosstalk.]

6 MR. PERRY STEVENS: Hello there. I'm Perry
7 Stevens. I'm from VOYAGES. - - bother me. I
8 want to say that even though it may be
9 beneficial for other students to occupy the - -
10 ; in fact, we are now trying to become young
11 adults and some may be, we need to be in our own
12 age group - - to our mental growth. We would
13 feel as we are backtracking - - if they were to
14 come here. Not saying that they are not
15 welcome, but it just would create the wrong
16 environment.

17 Also, grudges and misunderstandings, such as
18 bullying and - - ; not saying that we may
19 instill upon the young students, and they might
20 - - from us, so whatever. You know what comes
21 with that and [laughing], all right. I wouldn't
22 want my own child to attend a school at the age
23 of 11 or 13, and be amongst 21-year olds at
24 VOYAGES; it's not appropriate for me. I have a
25 sister that's 18 years old, and I'm already

1 uncomfortable once I leave her to go to
2 school, not knowing anything she's doing, you
3 know?

4 I feel VOYAGES is the best alternative, and
5 if this would have occurred years before I came
6 or even this year, I may not be able to graduate
7 the same day. I may have been distracted - -
8 trying to be cool, you know. It's easy for kids
9 of all ages, or even adults, to get caught up
10 and want to fit in with other people and follow,
11 you know? Also, to my knowledge - - come here
12 that music production will be taken away. - -
13 music, and I feel like you wouldn't want to take
14 away from other students something that they
15 feel like was a talent. It might be their only
16 talent - - what else? Influences, such as
17 gangs. Now, VOYAGES may not have gangs or
18 involved in substance abuse or inappropriate
19 language, but even crowds - - [laughing,
20 crosstalk, cheering, clapping].

21 MR. MENDEZ: Demetro Sinata - - Demetro
22 [crosstalk]. I would like to call Jose Ortiz.
23 [Crosstalk.] Daphne Colward [phonetic].
24 [Cheering, clapping, crosstalk.]

25 MS. DAPHNE COLWARD: Hi, good evening,

1 everybody. I definitely want to thank
2 everybody for being here and being supportive -
3 - come on anybody's floor, okay? So I have a
4 few things that I want to say. All right, so, I
5 read the 25-page report regarding the incubation
6 process, and what stood out to me were all the
7 figures and numbers.

8 Our schools are not figures and numbers, but
9 those with names. Names I can call by stories,
10 struggles, as well as accomplishments. A
11 proposal with numbers can't tell the stories of
12 those who - - encounter sessions. They are
13 pregnant. Feel for - - STD. Suffering from
14 drug addictions. Molested by a family member or
15 a - - . Many of us do this, come, due to the
16 privacy of our counselors' offices because many
17 have no one to talk to outside of our school.
18 To many, the counselors are there for them more
19 than their own families, and for that reason
20 alone is why they strive to come to school every
21 single day. That support.

22 Limiting our space will only take away from
23 the culture we strive to achieve each day, and
24 that's not just for our school; that's for all
25 the schools in the building. We will serve, and

1 will only serve as a continued reminder of how
2 another school has failed us.

3 This proposal works great on paper, but will
4 not work in our reality. Thank you. [Cheering,
5 clapping, crosstalk.]

6 MR. MENDEZ: Next on the list is Ruth
7 Caballero [phonetic]. Ruth? [Cheering,
8 clapping, crosstalk.] Civic Leadership Academy.
9 [Crosstalk.] And Nicole Cortez [phonetic].

10 MS. NICOLE CORTEZ: Hi. [Laughter.] Okay,
11 good evening, parents, students, teachers, and
12 staff. Our names are Nicole, Ruth Cabellero,
13 and Nicole Cortez from Civic Leadership Academy.
14 We are against the process against the
15 Department of Education's idea of putting middle
16 school students from M.S. 311 to attending this
17 building.

18 By doing this, you are keeping the middle
19 schoolers safe, as well as not crowding this
20 building. All the schools in this building are
21 basically - - . In Civic Leadership, we use all
22 classrooms and sometimes have to share a multi-
23 purpose room, as well as other classes. The
24 schools in this building fill all classrooms so
25 much that some - - . In the basement we have a

1 drama room, our music room, and a Spanish
2 room. These subjects are needed for students in
3 this building to graduate.

4 We have students from - - building, but we
5 thought it is unfair to take away these well-
6 used classrooms. There are students that can
7 end up getting bullied for taking away the small
8 amount of space that we have.

9 MS. RUTH CABALLERO: Another topic we would
10 like to talk about is, like, they're going to
11 take away the OST programs, like, it's really
12 important. Like, most of the programs that we
13 have is really important to me, like, a lot of
14 us. Like, you can't just take that away from
15 us. And we need extracurricular activities - -
16 .

17 Oh, yeah. This building has two lunch rooms
18 only, and we barely fit in like, you know, the
19 lunch rooms. We only have like two piers of
20 lunch, so they're going to fit in like more kids
21 - - kids? So we're going to see, like, we're
22 going to have some things - - [background
23 noise].

24 This basically is just really - - . We
25 don't need like little immature kids. No

1 offense to them. Like, it's not that we don't
2 want them; they're just - we don't have space at
3 all, and they're just really immature, we can
4 barely - - [laughter] not to our age level.
5 We're like 16-, 17-, and 21-year olds in the
6 school. They're too young, and they're not
7 ready for this.

8 So, just reconsider this, 'cause it's not a
9 good idea at all, okay? [Cheering, clapping,
10 crosstalk.]

11 MR. MENDEZ: At this time, I would like to
12 call Epileda Ramos [phonetic], and then Linda
13 Ramos [phonetic]. [Crosstalk.] Next on the
14 list is a Queens UFD Representative, James
15 Vasquez. [Clapping.]

16 MR. JAMES VASQUEZ: Thank you. My name is
17 James Vasquez. I'm a District Representative
18 for Queens High School - - Federation of
19 Teachers. That's the teachers union. I'm not
20 going sit here and repeat a lot of the things
21 that were said before. You already heard all of
22 the sentiments of the different school
23 communities here.

24 As an educator, we all understand exactly
25 what this is about. This is about our students,

1 our young adults, and their development and
2 their growth; making them successful citizens of
3 this country and in the world, making sure
4 they're going to be successful in everything
5 that they do.

6 The sad thing about it all is that the
7 Department of Education doesn't seem to
8 understand that. The Department of Education
9 does this only because they do these things from
10 an office downtown - - , and they make these
11 decisions based on - - . The truth of the
12 matter is, we understand that this community,
13 District 24, is overcrowded and does need space;
14 does need space to be able to house students in
15 the middle schools, and we understand the dire
16 need here.

17 The sad thing about this all is we can see
18 from the document that is produced here, is that
19 these are all numbers. These are all products
20 of something that they had to do only because
21 the law says so. The law says they have to put
22 these numbers out here, and they're putting this
23 out here. They - - to listen to the community
24 for a change. As educators, we understand what
25 matters most is what actually happens in the

1 schools; not what is done on paper and what
2 you see on a computer screen. Most of the
3 people that come up with these plans are sitting
4 - - and just figuring these things out, not
5 realizing the impact of what it does to the
6 school communities.

7 All of these schools here have been
8 successful schools and will continue to be
9 successful schools only if you listen to the
10 school communities themselves; and
11 unfortunately, the way the system is run, they
12 often leave out the voices of the community
13 itself.

14 With that in mind, I'm going to ask what
15 students that were not able to sign up to finish
16 with the last of my time. Thank you.

17 MALE VOICE: Hello, everybody. I would just
18 like to say that I have chorus first period with
19 Mr. Welsh, and it is probably the hottest
20 classroom in the school. There is no air down
21 there, and usually the window - in the morning
22 it's supposed to be, like, the coldest, and it
23 always gets hot. It's hot - - keep kids down
24 there all day 'cause they would, like, burn to
25 death, so [laughter]; and plus, I mean - - we

1 have an amazing chorus teacher, we have
2 amazing [cheering] because I think it's going
3 fine the way it is, so I just think that we
4 should be good, and just leave us and let us
5 rock. Thank you. [Crosstalk.]

6 MALE VOICE: I feel that we should have - -
7 because it - - program. I'm in the football
8 team, the - - football team, and I already come
9 to school, like, I love to come to school, like,
10 because I never had - - I have football after
11 school, and that's cut off from what I do in
12 school. Like, that's not all of it, because I
13 have amazing teachers. I have Ms. Stores
14 [phonetic], my coach, Mr. Meleki [phonetic]
15 speak before, he's my coach, and he tells me
16 what to do, and if it's cut off, I don't know
17 what it - it's just - I don't know. Where were
18 you? [Laughter.] - - it's not passionate.
19 And what if that's cut off? People come to our
20 games. We have games every week. Maybe a
21 playoff this week, so we might have it next - I
22 mean, we might have it next year, so just - I'm
23 saying that, please reconsider this decision
24 that we should have M.S. 311 at this high school
25 - - .

1 MR. ANTHONY CASIL [phonetic]: My name is
2 Anthony Casil, and I'm the co-captain of the
3 football team. I'd like to say that - - we also
4 said in the beginning of my season was that the
5 football team is not just a step to being a
6 player, it's a step to being an adult. - -
7 seriously in school - - in sports or whatever,
8 is how - - as an adult, and I feel that many of
9 us - - and I feel that - - individuals to
10 ourselves, I feel like we become, like, more
11 like mature men, and I feel like they've been -
12 - through football and throughout the school for
13 many of us kids, and I feel that - - kids out of
14 trouble and has kept us going, and has stepped
15 up the tally increasingly, amazingly.

16 I feel that - - is not so big, 'cause you
17 know, I've been here since I was in 9th grade,
18 and I seen how - - has gone - - and I feel that
19 taking away out the school is going to break the
20 fundamentals of the school, it's going to break
21 the - - , because we are what we see as, like,
22 our main thing. So it just really, you know,
23 that's a big part to us, that's a big part to -
24 - our foundation. It's like - - [laughter].

25 MR. ELCOR LA CUESTA [phonetic]: Are you

1 giving it to me? How you doing, everybody?
2 My name is Elcor La Cuesta. [Crosstalk,
3 laughter.] I'm a former transfer [phonetic]. I
4 went to CLA, and well, I kind of - - with what
5 they're trying to do to the school by adding
6 middle schoolers to this high school, and I
7 don't think that's the right choice.

8 I've actually grown to like the school a
9 lot, including the afterschool programs, and I
10 realized that if they add more schoolers to the
11 school, they're eventually going to cut off
12 things like afterschool and certain programs
13 which I'm involved in, such as football. I'm
14 just hoping that you reconsider, and don't bring
15 middle schoolers into this high school, 'cause
16 that'd be a total different environment for
17 them, and - - . [Cheering, clapping.] Think
18 of the family and what would the family do.
19 That's what I do. [Clapping.]

20 MR. MENDEZ: Next, - - Yensente Sells
21 [phonetic]. [Clapping, crosstalk.]

22 MS. YENSENTE SELLS: Hello, my name's
23 Yensente Sells, and I'm a current student at
24 VOYAGES. I came from Flushing High School which
25 is an overcrowded school. I didn't have any

1 attention - - needed, and when I needed
2 assistance, no one was ever there. VOYAGES is a
3 whole lot different atmosphere. The teachers
4 always guide you through whenever you need
5 assistance. They're always making sure that you
6 don't fall behind.

7 If we were to lose half of this - - , it
8 would go back to the overcrowded classrooms and
9 environment and it would - - . This includes
10 many of the other students that are enrolled in
11 VOYAGES. So they will lose focus in their work
12 and the teachers won't be able to give us the
13 attention nor assistance that we need. I hope
14 you will reconsider. Thank you for this time.
15 [Clapping.]

16 MR. MENDEZ: At this time, I would like to
17 call Israel Ortega. [Clapping, cheering.]

18 MR. ISRAEL ORTEGA: Good evening everyone.
19 My name is Israel Ortega, and I'm a student at
20 VOYAGES Preparatory High School. I transferred
21 from Milan City [phonetic] High School in
22 February of 2011, making it one of the best
23 decisions regarding my academics. In the three
24 years that I was at Milan City High School, the
25 first time I ever had a conversation with my

1 counselor was the day I made the choice to
2 transfer here. My counselor had no idea who I
3 was. My counselor's first words to me were,
4 "Oh, so you're Israel."

5 In VOYAGES, the amount of support from the
6 counselors is extraordinary. They support us in
7 our academics and our personal lives. Losing
8 half of the school floor would take away their
9 offices. Without their offices, there would be
10 not privacy. Counselors that often have one-on-
11 one sessions with their students will be
12 difficult without the comfort of their own
13 offices. Losing offices will make it more
14 difficult because they need their own work space
15 so they can perform their job comfortably in a
16 well-organized, professional manner.

17 So, with this - - , I disagree with the idea
18 of dividing VOYAGES Preparatory High School with
19 the middle school in regard to the space. These
20 are our voices and I know they won't fall on
21 deaf ears. Thank you, everyone, for your time.

22 [Cheering, clapping.]

23 MR. MENDEZ: At this time, I would like to
24 call Itiana Reyes [phonetic].

25 MS. ITIANA REYES: Good evening, everyone.

1 My name is Itiana Reyes, and I am a student
2 here at - - Mutual Academy. I'm also one of the
3 music majors of this school.

4 I came in 9th grade from a similar
5 environment to what you're proposing. We had
6 both a middle school and high school, and trust
7 me, it was chaos. It was a hard time to get the
8 high schoolers away from the middle schoolers
9 because the middle schoolers were just immature
10 and used to love when being on our floor, 'cause
11 it was divided between floors. Now imagine,
12 you're putting both ages in one same floor. We
13 had this problem with two different floors.

14 Another thing, you're also saying that you
15 might put them in the basement. In the basement
16 is where our music program is, and it is the
17 only thing that keeps me in the school and keeps
18 my grades up. With the help of Mr. Welsh, I am
19 progressing in both my voice, my education, and
20 my personality. He helped me grow as a person,
21 and if he leaves, I have nothing.

22 So, please reconsider, and thank you for
23 your time. [Clapping.]

24 FEMALE VOICE: I just want to reassure the
25 CLA community, we are not going to lose our

1 afterschool program. We will continue with
2 football; we will do what we need to do to make
3 sure you guys get the program that you want.
4 We've always done that; we're not going to veer
5 away from it, irregardless of what happens next
6 year, okay? [Crosstalk.]

7 MR. MENDEZ: This is Katy Parreras. Katy
8 Parreras, this is the last person. No? Okay.
9 So - - that we have heard your concerns
10 regarding the many issues, concerns of our
11 safety and the need to provide-

12 MS. VERONICA COVAMARCA: Sir?

13 MR. MENDEZ: Yes?

14 MS. COVAMARCA: My name was not called.

15 MR. MENDEZ: Your name is?

16 MS. COVAMARCA: Veronica Covamarca. It was
17 on the parent list.

18 MR. MENDEZ: I don't see your name on this
19 list, but you can come up and speak.

20 MS. COVAMARCA: Thank you. [Clapping,
21 crosstalk, laughter.] Okay, yes, I'm nervous,
22 and yes, I know I have two minutes, but to be
23 fair to the translator and everybody, I just
24 want to say thank you for giving me the podium.
25 Oh, God. I'm not good at this, but I feel that

1 my voice needed to be heard, so here I go. I
2 didn't interrupt nobody so I hope you let me
3 finish what I have to say, sorry.

4 Hi, everyone. My name is Veronica
5 Covamarca. I'm the proud mother of Anthony
6 Cooper. I'm here today to speak on his behalf.
7 I've been told that - if I choke up it's because
8 I'm a mom and I'm concerned, sorry.

9 I've been told that some of his classes or
10 programs, such as his art, music, and perhaps
11 his Honors with Mr. Welsh might be moved or cut
12 or interrupted or overcrowded. I'm here to
13 express my deep concern and disapproval. I have
14 been told that out of - - or now renamed M.S.
15 311, is that correct, has become overcrowded.

16 MR. MENDEZ: The new school.

17 MS. COVAMARCA: Oh, well, either way. Well,
18 I'm here to tell you, that's not any - - news,
19 okay? Um, UCC1 or MS-maybe I should have re-
20 worded that-has always been overcrowded. My son
21 is a current freshman that just came from ICC1,
22 and my son is an honor student all his life
23 until he went to ICC1. All ICC1 transfers will
24 need new teachers due to the same overcrowding,
25 and - - to allow him to grow. I believe this

1 problem needs to be filtered by the sixth
2 graders moving elsewhere, not asking this school
3 to take the extra issues at hand.

4 Now he attends Civic Leadership where they
5 have adequate space for him to learn and to grow
6 into a young college-bound professional. I know
7 that-sorry, I'm shaking. I know that if this
8 plan goes through, it will backfire on everyone;
9 the teachers with more children, the classes
10 divided, the overwhelming number of changes will
11 cause a terrible flux in the 9th, 10th, 11th, and
12 12th graders to graduate, making current students
13 uncomfortable and wanting to transfer perhaps to
14 other high schools. If this plan goes through,
15 where would the graduating 8th graders go who
16 want a better education at Civic Leadership
17 Academy? They wouldn't be able to come here
18 because the over flux would be run over by the
19 6th graders.

20 Civic Leadership Academy is currently
21 ranked, I was told by my son, in the top 20
22 schools in the district. They are in the top 20
23 because of the adequate space that is currently
24 provided. You have to ask yourself, no amount of
25 money or funding provided for the changes being

1 asked will account for the real devastation
2 the current students will feel. This is not
3 fair to the teachers, to the staff, and
4 especially the students. I feel that the
5 contracted funds or money that is needed to
6 expand to other schools allow the other 6th
7 graders to choose another zoned school, not this
8 school. That is the whole reason why I chose
9 this school for my son, because he has adequate
10 space. - - sorry.

11 I want to ask you a question. You wouldn't
12 put 1st graders with 6th graders, so why put 6th
13 graders with 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th graders? It
14 makes no sense. There is grade school, middle
15 school, and high school; there is a reason for
16 the division, to keep the younger kids safe and
17 to divide the sexual tension in the youth. Now,
18 imagine, mushing all that together, it would be,
19 in my mind, like - - chaos, confusion, and
20 disorder. It would go on for years afterwards,
21 and the statistics would show that the younger
22 kids would end up getting hurt and the cost
23 would be tremendous. Nothing is temporary. If
24 this goes into effect, it would end up being a
25 permanent change for the worst.

1 Please, hear my plea and don't change my
2 son's happiness and dreams at better education
3 in life by attending Civic Leadership Academy.
4 Just because you can do it, doesn't mean you
5 should. Thank you for listening. [Cheering,
6 clapping.]

7 MR. MENDEZ: Thank you again. I once again
8 say that we have heard your concerns. They have
9 been recorded. They will be transcribed. They
10 are going to be evaluated by the members of the
11 panel of Education Policy prior to making a
12 final reading.

13 This evening, I heard your concerns about
14 safety and the need to provide dedicated
15 bathrooms at the school; things such as the
16 importance of individual school cultures, and
17 the need to provide dedicated areas for each of
18 the schools in the building, concerns about the
19 age of students. I would like to state that we
20 have multiple school models called secondary
21 schools throughout the city that - - 6 through 12
22 model and most of them work quite well. We
23 acknowledge the specific needs and talents of
24 students at the school and evidence of such
25 acknowledgement is the recognition of your

1 current building facility.

2 All these concerns will be seriously be
3 taken into the consideration. Some things for
4 clarification - - class size is contractual,
5 thus not getting - - . You're not losing any of
6 your wonderful teachers that you currently have
7 in this school. We are trying to solve the real
8 problem of youngsters from the middle school,
9 many of which may be your own younger brothers
10 and sisters who need space to attend school in
11 the fall and who find their adequate space,
12 meaningful space special of dedicated school
13 community where those youngsters can attend.

14 Again, we welcome any comments and feedback
15 you may have at any time before the Panel for
16 Educational Policy votes on this proposal at its
17 December 20th meeting. The email address and
18 phone numbers where comments made be made are:
19 d24proposals@schools.NYC.gov, and the telephone
20 number is 212-374-7621.

21 Thank you for your participation. This
22 joint public hearing is now closed.

23 [END RECORDING]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

The prior proceedings were transcribed from audio files and have been transcribed to the best of my ability.

Pandora Redd

Date December 3, 2012