

Public Comment Analysis

Date: March 19, 2013

Topic: The Proposed Opening and Co-location of New Middle School (29Q289) with Existing School P.S. 156 Laurelton (29Q156) in Building Q156 Beginning in 2013-2014

Date of Panel Vote: March 20, 2013

Summary of Proposal

On January 22, 2013, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) issued an Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) describing a proposal to co-locate¹ a new middle school, 29Q289 (“29Q289”), in building Q156 located at 229-02 137 Avenue, Queens, NY 11413, in Community School District 29 (“District 29”).² If this proposal is approved, 29Q289 will be co-located in building Q156 with P.S. 156 Laurelton (29Q156, “P.S. 156”), an existing elementary and middle school serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade. If this proposal is approved, 29Q289 will serve students in sixth through eighth grade and will admit students through the middle school application process administered by the Office of Student Enrollment. 29Q289 will be open to students and residents of District 29 with priority admissions in 2013-2014 only for current fifth-grade students at P.S. 156. If this proposal is approved, 29Q289 will begin enrolling sixth-grade students in 2013-2014 and will add one grade per year until it is at full scale and serves students in sixth through eighth grade in 2015-2016.

On February 14, 2013, the DOE issued an amended EIS that provides updated information regarding the admissions methods of 29Q289.

In a separate Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) published on January 22, 2013, the DOE has proposed to truncate the middle school grades of P.S. 156 because of its low performance and inability to improve quickly to better support student needs. If the truncation proposal is approved, P.S. 156 will no longer enroll sixth-grade students after the conclusion of the 2012-2013 school year, will no longer serve seventh-grade students following the 2013-2014 school year, and will no longer serve eighth-grade students following the 2014-2015 school year. In 2015-2016 and beyond, it will continue serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade. P.S. 156 will continue to admit kindergarten through fifth-grade students in its zone. A student’s zoned school is determined by his or her home address.

If this proposal is approved, 29Q289 will be a choice middle school that will serve students in sixth through eighth grades. 29Q289 will be open to students and residents of District 29 through a limited unscreened admissions method, with priority admissions in 2013-2014 for current fifth grade students at P.S. 156. After the 2013-2014 school year, there will be no priority admissions and the school will be open to students and residents of District 29. Limited unscreened schools give admissions priority to students who demonstrate interest in the school by attending an information session, attending an open house event, or visiting the school’s exhibit at any one of the Middle School Fairs.

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

² Building Q156 has an adjacent transportable classroom unit (“TCU”) Q957, but 29Q289 is not expected to use the TCU.

According to the 2011-2012 Enrollment, Capacity, Utilization Report (“Blue Book”), Q156 has a target capacity of 876 students. In 2012-2013, Q156³ serves 598 students,⁴ yielding a building utilization rate of 68%.⁵

In 2015-2016, once P.S. 156 has completed its truncation and 29Q289 is at full scale, it is projected that there will be approximately 555-645 students served in Q156, thereby yielding an estimated building utilization rate of approximately 63%-74%.

If this proposal is approved, 29Q289 will replace the middle school seats that will be lost as a result of the truncation of the middle school grades of P.S. 156, and will provide a new educational option for families in District 29.

The details of this proposal have been released in an EIS which can be accessed here:
<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2012-2013/Mar202013Proposals.htm>.
Copies of the EIS are also available in P.S. 156’s main office.

Summary of Comments Received

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at building Q156 on February 28, 2013. Members of the School Leadership Team (“SLT”) from P.S. 156 were invited to participate and confirmed their availability to attend. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. While representatives from the Citywide Council for Special Education and Citywide Council for English Language Learners were invited, they did not choose to participate in the hearing. Approximately 61 members of the public attended the hearing and 9 people spoke. Present at the meeting were: Deputy Chancellor Shael Polakow-Suransky; Facilitator Greg Bethel; Community Education Council (“CEC”) 29 Member Cherly Rochelle; Noreen Little, Principal of P.S. 156; SLT Representative Kimberly Esteva; SLT Representative Beverly Dobson; Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (“CSA”) Representative Dorothy Morris; United Federation of Teachers (“UFT”) Representative Jennifer Williams; and Allen Miller and Savita Iyengar from the Division of Portfolio Planning.

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

1. CEC 29 Member Cherly Rochelle expressed CEC 29’s support for the proposed opening and co-location of a new middle school.
 - a. Ms. Rochelle stated that having a new middle school would provide families in District 29 with an additional high quality middle school option.

³ All references to building Q156 include the adjacent TCU.

⁴ 2012-2013 Unaudited Register (as of October 26, 2012).

⁵ All references to building utilization rates in this document are based on target capacity data from the 2011-2012 Blue Book and enrollment data from the 2012-2013 Unaudited Register (as of October 26, 2012) or charter headcount as of October 1, 2012. This methodology is consistent with the manner in which the DOE conducts planning and calculates space allocations and funding for all schools. In determining the space allocation for co-located schools, the Office of Space Planning will conduct a detailed site survey and space analysis of the building to assess the amount of space available in the building.

- b. Ms. Rochelle stated that having two schools will help better engage students, parents and staff.
2. P.S. 156 Principal Noreen Little expressed her support for the proposed opening and co-location of a new middle school.
 - a. Principal Little said that the creation of a standalone middle school would give a separate community for adolescents, which is what the students and parents in the community have asked for.
3. SLT Member Beverly Dobson, UFT Representative Jennifer Williams, and CSA Representative Dorothy Morris expressed their support for the proposed opening and co-location of a new middle school.
 - a. Ms. Dobson stated that the P.S. 156 staff is willing to work together with the staff of the new school.
 - b. Ms. Dobson stated that the proposed truncation and co-location was a better intervention than phase-out.
4. SLT Representative Kimberly Esteva expressed concern with the proposed opening and co-location of a new middle school.
 - a. Ms. Estefan stated that the new middle school would get additional money and resources and that this was unfair.
 - b. Ms. Esteva asked why P.S. 156 couldn't get more money and resources.
 - c. Ms. Esteva argued that co-location is not the right not the answer because she believes the new school will have more money and more resources which will negatively impact the elementary school students.
 - d. M.S. Esteva stated that co-location causes disparity: educationally, emotionally and socially.
5. One commenter stated that the new school should be separated from P.S. 156 and that a co-location would not allow the middle school students to develop and be prepared for high school.
6. A commenter asked whether at risk students have the same preference as general education students to the new middle school.
7. A commenter asked about the hiring process for the new middle school.
8. A commenter asked whether the new middle school will have a new staff and a new principal.
9. A commenter asked how the new middle school would be different from the middle school portion of P.S. 156 and whether there would be an improved educational approach.
10. A commenter asked whether there would be a disparity in resources between the new middle school and P.S. 156.

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

The DOE received no written and/or oral comments through its dedicated phone line and e-mail for the proposal.

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

Comments 1(a), 1(b), 2(a), 3(a), and 3(b) are in favor of the proposal and do not require a response.

Comments 4(a-c) and 10 concern the allocation of resources to both P.S. 156 and the proposed new middle school 29Q289 and whether there will be any disparity in resource allocation.

In New York City, we fund schools through a per pupil allocation. That is, funding “follows” the students and is weighted based on students’ grade level and need (incoming proficiency level and special education/ELL/Title I status). If a school’s population declines, the school’s budget decreases proportionally—just as a school with an increase in students receives more money. Even if the Department of Education had a budget surplus, a school with declining student enrollment would still receive less per pupil funding each year enrollment falls.

Fair Student Funding (FSF) dollars – approximately \$5.0 billion in the 2012-2013 school year based on projected registers – are used by all district schools to cover basic instructional needs and are allocated to each school based on the number and need-level of students enrolled at that school. All money allocated through FSF can be used at the principals’ discretion, such as hiring staff, purchasing supplies and materials, or implementing instructional programs. As the total number of students enrolled changes, the overall budget will increase or decrease accordingly, allowing the school to meet the instructional needs of its student population. In addition to the FSF student-need based dollars a school receives, all schools receive a fixed lump sum of \$225,000 in FSF foundation and \$50,000 in Children First Network Support to cover administrative costs.

New schools receive Fair Student Funding in the same manner as other schools. Funding follows the students and is based on pupil academic needs (i.e., special education, ELL, poverty, and/or proficiency status).

New district schools are provided with a fixed per-school allocation and a variable per-pupil Other Than Personal Services (“OTPS”) allocation of funds to cover start-up costs such as supplies and textbooks that may be required. This Other than Personal Services for new schools funding allocation is based on a fixed per-school amount, and a per-pupil allocation. Based on current one-time allocations for new schools, 29Q289 will receive a fixed allocation of \$80,000 and approximately \$42,085-\$46,515 in new school OTPS start-up per-pupil allocations during its first year. Thereafter, the school will receive \$100 per-student in OTPS based on projected registers for the newly added grade. In the case where there is no new grade phasing-in, the school will not receive an allocation in that year.

Principals have discretion over their budget and make choices about how to prioritize their resources. New schools may choose to hire fewer administrative staff (e.g. only a single assistant principal) freeing up dollars to be directed toward other priorities.

Comment 4(d) refers to the possible educational, emotional, and social disparity that could occur between students at P.S. 156 and students at the proposed new middle school 29Q289 as a result of co-location; and Comment 5 concerns the impact of the co-location on the developmental readiness of middle school students for high school.

P.S. 156 currently serves both elementary and middle school students. This co-location proposal would not change the grade levels served in the building.

Additionally, roughly half of our schools share space in a building. Co-locations allow us to use our limited facilities efficiently while simultaneously creating additional educational options for New York City families. This is necessary because we have scarce resources and a demand for more options.

There are numerous examples of mixed grade co-located school buildings or campuses in New York City where the schools are functioning and co-existing successfully, and that have not resulted in disparity between students of varying grade levels, whether emotional, social, or educational.

These examples include:

- The Julia Richman Educational Complex, which houses four small high schools, a K-8 school, and a District 75 program;
- Building M113 currently houses three schools: STEM Institute of Manhattan, a district elementary school, Harlem Success Academy 4, a charter elementary school, and Opportunity Charter School, which serves sixth through twelfth grade in District 3;
- Building M092 currently houses three schools: St. Hope Leadership Academy Charter School, a charter middle school serving students in grades fifth through eighth, P.S. 92, a district elementary school which serves students in grades K-5, and Democracy Prep Charter School, a charter middle school serving students in sixth through eighth grade.
- Building K324 currently houses three schools: M.S. 267, an existing middle school serving students in grades sixth through eighth, La Cima Charter school, a charter elementary school serving students in grades K-5, and Bedford Stuyvesant Collegiate, an existing charter secondary school, which is currently in the process of growing to serve students in grades 5-12. Members of the building council worked together to secure financing from KaBOOM to resurface the schoolyard and playground for all of the children at K324.

In the above examples, among many others, the middle schools co-located with elementary schools have successfully prepared their students for high school.

Comment 6 concerns the admissions process of the proposed new middle school 29Q289 and whether “at risk” students will have the same admissions preference to the new middle school as general education students.

If this proposal is approved, 29Q289 will be a choice middle school that will serve students in sixth through eighth grades. 29Q289 will be open to students and residents of District 29 through a limited unscreened admissions method, with priority admissions in 2013-2014 for current fifth grade students at P.S. 156. After the 2013-2014 school year, there will be no priority admissions and the school will be open to students and residents of District 29 through the District 29 Middle School Choice Process through a limited unscreened admissions method. Limited unscreened schools give admissions priority to students who demonstrate interest in the school by attending an information session, attending an open house event, or visiting the school’s exhibit at any one of the Middle School Fairs.

Current P.S. 156 sixth-grade students who do not meet promotional standards at the end of this school year will have the opportunity to enroll as sixth-grade students at 29Q289.

Middle school students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), with the exception of those recommending placement in a District 75 school, are admitted to schools in the same manner as general education students. Schools will create programs that meet the needs of all students, ensuring students with IEPs access to learn alongside their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible.

In accordance with DOE policy, ELL students are admitted to middle school in the same manner as their peers who are not ELL students. ELL students are placed according to the same placement criteria as their English-speaking peers. Students requiring ELL services will continue to receive appropriate services at the middle school they attend.

Comment 7 and 8 concern the hiring process at the proposed new middle school 29Q289.

29Q289 will need to hire additional teachers during each year of the grade expansion as the total number of students enrolled in the school increases over each of the next three years. The precise number of positions needed for the 2013-2014 school year will be determined once annual enrollment projections are released in the spring of 2013. Similarly, the number of new positions created to serve students in sixth through eighth grade will be determined based on annual enrollment projections available as the school grows to serve those grades.

29Q289 would follow the hiring process consistent with the procedures set forth in the collective bargaining agreement between the DOE and UFT, and hire no less than 50% of their staff from the most senior qualified staff from P.S. 156, if sufficient number of staff apply, until the impacted school has completed its truncation.

New administrative staff and non-pedagogical positions will be created at 29Q289 over the course of the school's phase-in. 29Q289 is expected to hire additional administrative and non-pedagogical staff as each new grade is added.

Comment 9 concerns the educational approach of the proposed new middle school 29Q289 and whether it is better than or different from that of P.S. 156's middle school.

The DOE strives to ensure that all students in New York City have access to a high quality school at every stage of their education. We count on each of our schools to provide a high-quality education to its students—and we hold all schools to the same high standard. If a school isn't getting the job done for its students, we are compelled to take serious action to ensure its students don't fall even further behind.

Of course, struggling schools must be given a real shot to improve. But if the school continues to struggle after receiving additional support, we must make the incredibly difficult decision to phase-out or truncate the school and replace it with a new option.

As detailed in the P.S. 156 truncation proposal, the DOE has concluded that truncating the middle school grades of P.S. 156 is appropriate due to the school's history of poor performance. The co-location of 29Q289 in building Q156 is intended to replace seats lost by the truncation of the middle school grades of P.S. 156 and to provide a new educational option for students and families in District 29.

29Q289 would be a new middle school under a separate administration from P.S. 156, with a focus in the humanities. The learning community would consist of three core pillars: critical thinking, civic responsibility, and academic readiness. All students would build and develop the skills to succeed in high school, college, careers, and life by way of thinking critically about community issues and taking responsible action to effect positive change. With an inquiry-based approach to learning, student thinking would be pushed to a deeper level of understanding of content and solutions to real life issues. Student discovery would be supported with thoughtful classroom discussions and tasks that guide students through the learning process and develop leadership capacity.



The central goal of the Children First reforms is simple: to create a system of great schools. Every child in New York City deserves the best possible education. This starts with a great school – led by a dedicated leader with a vision for student success.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to the amended proposal.