



Date: March 22, 2010

Topic: Analysis of Proposed Re-siting of University Heights Secondary School (10X495) and Co-location with Existing Schools in School Building X470

Date of Panel Vote: March 23, 2010

Summary of Proposal

In the 2010-2011 school year, University Heights Secondary School (UHSS)—an existing high school serving grades 9-12 with approximately 450 students -- will move from its current location on the Bronx Community College Campus to the South Bronx Campus. On the South Bronx Campus, UHSS will co-locate with Mott Haven Village Preparatory Academy. South Bronx Campus currently houses two other schools, Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports and New Explorers High School; however, these schools will re-locate to the newly constructed Mott Haven Campus for September 2010.

UHSS is being relocated due to increasing enrollment at CUNY. CUNY had asked the DOE to relocate UHSS out of the Bronx Community College Campus two years ago, but there was not an available site for the school to move into at that time. Next fall, two schools currently housed on the South Bronx Campus will be relocating into newly constructed school buildings, which will create space on the South Bronx Campus that University Heights can occupy beginning in September 2010.

The South Bronx Campus has the capacity to serve 1,073 students. Mott Haven Village Prep enrolls 350 students. When the Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports and New Explorers High School leave the South Bronx campus at the end of the current school year, there will be plenty of available space in the building to accommodate University Heights Secondary School, which is already operating at full capacity with total enrollment of approximately 450 students.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearings

Two joint public hearings were held regarding this proposal. The first joint public hearing was held in school building X810 on the CUNY campus on March 9, 2010. All interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Twenty-two members of the public

as well as representatives of Assemblymember Vanessa L. Gibson, Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. and Council Member Fernando Cabrera spoke in opposition to the proposal, citing concerns that the juvenile detention center is near the new location in the South Bronx. The public expressed concerns that the school would be forced to use Transportable Classroom Units (“TCUs”), and that programs available at UHSS’s current location – such as the LYFE program and access to college courses – would not be available at the South Bronx location. Speakers argued that the current location is safe, friendly, and raises students’ own expectations by putting a college education within reach – assets, they felt, would be lost if the school were forced to move.

The second joint public hearing was held in school building X470 on March 11, 2010, and all interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 308 members of the public attended the hearing. Seventy-one members of the public and Assemblymembers Vanessa L. Gibson and Nelson L. Castro spoke in opposition to the proposal. Opponents spoke about how the college campus environment – including the physical space, adult influence, and proximity to college students – were why students chose to attend the school. They emphasized the importance of the LYFE program in addition to the historic connection with the college campus. Many were also concerned that money invested by students and families into their current building may be lost if the school were forced to move. Speakers also cited concerns regarding the distance of the new location from the current location, the perceived safety of the South Bronx neighborhood. Three members of the public, all from South Bronx campus, did not oppose or support the proposal, but clarified that they will welcome UHSS when it moves, and defended the safety of the neighborhood.

Summary of Issues Raised in Written and Oral Comments and Significant Alternatives Suggested

A total of 59 written comments and no oral comments regarding this proposal have been received; comments were received from UHSS students and parents. All 59 comments were opposed to the proposal. Those in opposition to the proposal stated their belief that the quality of UHSS will suffer if it moves. These individuals also mentioned that University Heights is one of the best high schools in the area. Many people stated that there are limited high quality high schools in District 10. Moving the school affords students few alternatives.

One letter was from Assemblyman Nelson L. Castro. He noted his opposition to the move of UHSS since it is the only high school within the 86th Assembly District (the district he represents). He notes that UHSS has received funding from elected officials and the DOE to equip the school with a new auditorium, a music room, and a daycare center for teenage mothers to allow them to finish their education. The letter states that students feel safe attending UHSS and that they look forward to attending college as a result of their interactions with Bronx Community College students. Indeed, he notes that up to 90 percent of UHSS students attend Bronx Community College and other CUNY colleges. He notes that if the school is relocated, students will incur higher costs, especially if the MTA eliminates student Metro Cards. The students at UHSS hand-delivered over 200 letters to the Assemblyman’s office and also met with him to discuss their concerns about the re-siting of UHSS.

One advocacy organization submitted general comments objecting to all proposed co-locations of schools being considered by the Panel on March 23, 2010. A summary and analysis of these comments is included in the attached appendix.

No significant alternatives were proposed.

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

The main concern raised at the joint public hearings was that, because of the limited high school options in District 10, losing a strong high school option will be especially problematic. However, there are 26 other high schools in District 10, 18 of which received an A or B grade on their 2008-2009 Progress Reports. The DOE believes that there are sufficient options for the students in District 10 and across the City.

Another concern raised was that the school will begin to suffer if it is no longer located at CUNY. Commenters noted that moving University Heights will sever its historically strong partnership with CUNY. However, CUNY is committed to maintaining its partnership with UHSS and has promised to maintain the following services:

- CUNY will continue to make classroom space and facilities available to UHSS students and invite them to college-sponsored workshops, programs, and other events.
- College Now will expand course offerings for UHSS students.
- Bronx Community College will continue to support UHSS membership and participation in its Collaborative Education Network. Since its inception in 2001, UHSS has been a valued member of this 40-member community-based group, which includes Bronx middle and high schools and small businesses.
- CUNY will continue to maintain its longstanding support for UHSS students and teachers through the College Now, Upward Bound, Summer Intensive English, Global Studies, and other joint programs.

With respect to concerns raised about the LYFE center, the DOE will move the LYFE center with UHSS to the South Bronx Campus to ensure that the program will continue to be an option for those who need it. Finally, concerns that UHSS will have to use TCU's are unfounded. The majority of UHSS classroom space will be in the main building – as opposed to in TCU's.

The letter from Assemblyman Castro noted several reasons for his opposition to the proposed re-siting. While the DOE recognizes that resources have been committed to upgrades to the school's current location and understands the multiple reasons that students and families feel an attachment to the Bronx Community College campus location, University Heights cannot remain in its current space. University Heights is being relocated in response to increasing enrollment at CUNY. CUNY asked the DOE to relocate University Heights out of the Bronx Community College Campus two years ago but there was not an available site for the school to move into at that time.

No changes have been made to the proposal. It will be presented to the Panel for Educational Policy as it is currently posted.

A copy of the educational impact statement for this proposal can be obtained at http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/676176D9-06BC-42A9-9C45-C5D3C5110CD3/76861/X470_UniversityHeights_EIS_2210_Final1.pdf.

Appendix: Response to General Comments Regarding Proposed Co-locations of Schools

Summary of Issues Raised and Significant Alternatives Suggested

One advocacy organization submitted general comments objecting to all proposed co-locations of schools. In opposing the DOE's proposed co-locations, the comments cited the following reasons: (1) the DOE did not use accurate data in analyzing the utilization and capacity of school buildings; (2) the utilization formula used by the DOE is inadequate and assumes inappropriate target class sizes; (3) charter schools and the DOE's new small schools enroll fewer high needs students than district and citywide averages, leading to higher concentrations of high needs students in district schools; and (4) the expansion of charters and new small schools has eliminated critical space from existing district schools.

The comments suggest a moratorium on any new co-locations until an independent review is conducted to assess the capacity in existing public school buildings and make determinations about the amount of space required to reduce class size to mandated levels.

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

The comments assert that the DOE did not use accurate data in analyzing utilization and capacity of school buildings. The data used in analyzing the utilization and capacity of school buildings comes from "The Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report" (also known as the "Blue Book"), which is the standard by which the DOE measures the maximum capacity of a school building compared to the enrollment. These calculations are based on information provided by principals in the Annual Facilities Survey conducted by the School Construction Authority. In addition to considering the Blue Book information, the DOE conducts a physical survey of school buildings and takes into consideration current programming prior to proposing a change in utilization.

With regard to the comment regarding the use of inappropriate target class sizes, the DOE does use aspirational targets for school buildings but feels that these goals are appropriate for ensuring a quality education for all students. The DOE understands that building usage varies by schools and leaves programming decisions to school leaders. However, it is important to have a standard means of assessing the use of our limited physical plant resources consistently across the city. The class size targets used for the 2008-2009 Blue Book calculations of target capacity and utilization are lower than those used for determining historical capacity and utilization.

Specific reference was made to targets in the City's Contracts for Excellence (CFE) class size reduction plan. DOE proposals for the co-locations of schools are based on current class sizes and the available space in each applicable building according to the citywide instructional footprint which prescribes the number of classrooms needed for each school. Proposals are not based on the space needed for a school to achieve class size reduction targets. The CFE targets are aspirational, are predicated upon levels of State CFE funding that may not occur due to the

national recession, and do not reflect current class sizes. The DOE does not believe that the proposed co-locations will increase class size.

The comments assert that charter schools and the DOE's new small schools enroll fewer high needs students than the citywide and district averages, thereby leading to higher concentrations of high needs students in district schools. It is important to note that charter school admissions are done by lottery as required by State Education Law. Charter schools do in fact serve the full range of public school students as do the DOE's new small schools. The new small schools that have been created over the last six years are serving English language learners and special education students at a higher rate than schools citywide, with better outcomes. On average the new schools have a graduation rate of 75%. During the 2008-2009 school year, ninth-grade enrollment at new schools included 14.2 percent special education students and 13.6 percent English language learners, compared to 12.8 percent special education students and 10.3 percent English language learners citywide. When looking across a school's entire population, they also serve more special education students and ELL students than the citywide average. In 2008-2009, new schools served an average of 12.3 percent special education students and 12.6 percent English language learners compared with 11.6 percent and 10.8 percent, respectively, citywide.