



Public Comment Analysis

Date: March 22, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Re-siting and Co-location of Unity Center for Urban Technologies (02M500) and the Manhattan Academy for Arts & Language (02M427) with Norman Thomas High School (02M620) and Murray Hill Academy (02M432) in School Building M620

Date of Panel Vote: March 23, 2011

Summary of Proposal

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to re-site Unity Center for Urban Technologies (02M500, “Unity”) and the Manhattan Academy for Arts & Language (02M427, “Manhattan Academy”) in school building M620 (“M620” or the “Norman Thomas Campus”), located at 111 East 33rd Street, Manhattan, NY 10016, within the geographical confines of Community School District 2 (“District 2”). If this proposal is approved, Unity and Manhattan Academy would be co-located with Norman Thomas High School (02M620, “Norman Thomas”) and Murray Hill Academy (02M432, “Murray Hill”). A “co-location” means that two or more schools are located in the same building and may share common spaces like auditoriums, gymnasiums, libraries, and cafeterias.

Unity, an existing 9-12 school, is currently housed in leased space located at 121 Sixth Avenue, Manhattan, NY 10013 in school building M897 (“M897”), within the geographical confines of District 2. Manhattan Academy is a new DOE high school that opened in September 2010. Manhattan Academy currently serves students in the ninth-grade, and will add one grade level per year until it serves grades 9-12 in 2013-2014. Manhattan Academy is temporarily sited in the United Federation of Teachers (“UFT”) headquarters, located at 52 Broadway, Manhattan, NY 10004, within the geographical confines of District 2.

Norman Thomas, an existing high school, serves students in grades 9-12. Murray Hill is a new DOE high school that opened in September 2010 and is phasing into M620. Murray Hill currently serves students in the ninth-grade, and will add one grade level per year until it serves grades 9-12 in 2013-2014. In addition, M620 houses a District 79 continuing education program which offers classes to adults after school hours Monday through Saturday.

In a separate Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) posted on December 20, 2010 and amended on January 20, 2011, the DOE proposed to phase out and eventually close Norman Thomas because an extensive review of data and community feedback indicates that the school is unable

to turn around. The Panel for Educational Policy (“PEP”) approved the proposal to phase out Norman Thomas at its February 3, 2011 meeting. Thus, Norman Thomas will no longer admit new ninth-grade students after the end of this school year, but would continue to serve students currently enrolled in the school. Norman Thomas’ enrollment will decrease gradually over the next three years and the school will complete phasing out in June 2014. For more details about that proposal, please visit the DOE’s Website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/changes/manhattan/normanthomas>. The DOE received oral and written comments from the public on the phase-out proposal. To read the Public Comment Analysis regarding the phase-out of Norman Thomas, please visit the DOE’s Website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/Feb32011Proposals>.

If this co-location proposal is approved, Unity and Manhattan Academy would be co-located with Norman Thomas and Murray Hill in building M620. Manhattan Academy, which is in its first year of phase-in at its current location, would continue to grow gradually in M620 by adding one grade level every year until the school reaches its full grade span of 9-12 in the 2013-2014 school year. Unity is already at full scale and would continue to serve students in grades 9-12. Unity and Manhattan Academy would be co-located with Norman Thomas as that school phases out. Long-term, Unity and Manhattan Academy would share space only with Murray Hill. Given that the phase-out of Norman Thomas was recently approved, the M620 building has adequate capacity to accommodate Murray Hill as well as Unity and Manhattan Academy at full operational capacity.

The details of this co-location proposal have been released in an EIS which can be accessed on the DOE’s Website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/Mar232011Proposals.htm>. Copies of the EIS are also available in the main offices of Unity Center for Urban Technologies, Manhattan Academy for Arts & Language, Norman Thomas and Murray Hill Academy.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearings

Three joint public hearings regarding this proposal were held, one at Manhattan Academy for Arts & Language at the UFT headquarters on March 8, one at Unity Center for Urban Technologies in building M897 on March 10, and one at Norman Thomas High School in building M620 on March 15, 2011. At the hearings, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal.

On March 8, approximately 12 members of the public attended the hearing and 1 person spoke. Present at the meeting were: District 2 Superintendent Daria Rigney; Manhattan Academy Principal Siv Boletsis; and Manhattan Academy’s School Leadership Team (“SLT”) representatives Nancy Green Madia (UFT Chapter Chairperson), Katherine Rojas, Jacqueline Washington, and Tara Delgado. Elzora Cleveland, Community Educational Council (“CEC”) President for District 2, confirmed prior to the hearing that she would be able to attend, but was unable to do so.

On March 10, approximately 40 members of the public attended the hearing and 5 people spoke. Present at the meeting were: Manhattan High Schools Superintendent Elaine Gorman; Unity Principal Fausto de la Rosa; and Unity's SLT representatives Elena Brito, Shyanne Stays, Gladis Cruz, Jualiana Garcia, and Daniel Skilins. Elzora Cleveland, CEC President for District 2, confirmed prior to the hearing that she would be able to attend, but was unable to do so.

On March 15, approximately 35 members of the public attended the hearing, 1 person spoke and 3 questions were submitted. Present at the meeting were: Manhattan High Schools Superintendent Elaine Gorman; Norman Thomas Principal Philip Martin, Jr.; Norman Thomas' SLT representative Kelly Powell; Murray Hill Principal Anita Manninen-Felix; Murray Hill's SLT representative Esther Shraga; Unity Principal Fausto de la Rosa; Unity's SLT representatives Elena Brito, Edward Santana, and Shyanne Stays; Manhattan Academy's SLT representative Nancy Green Madia; and CEC 2 representative Mary Silver.

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

1. Nancy Green Madia, Manhattan Academy's SLT representative, expressed her support for the proposal. She noted that while the UFT has been very accommodating, Manhattan Academy needs to expand and there is not enough space at the current location. She also mentioned that she looks forward to moving to a permanent home with facilities such as a gym and a library.
2. Daniel Skilins, Unity's SLT representative, expressed his support for the proposal and noted that he looks forward to the co-location, which will be a move towards improvement for the school.
3. Anita Manninen-Felix, Principal of Murray Hill, expressed her support for the proposal. Addressing the public comment regarding safety issues, she stated that the parents at her school were also initially concerned about the co-location with Norman Thomas. However, she mentioned that when Murray Hill moved in, the Norman Thomas staff, particularly Norman Thomas Principal Martin, was very welcoming and willing to collaborate. She said that no negative incidents have occurred since the move. She also noted that the parents, staff and community are working together to ensure safety.
4. Superintendent Elaine Gorman mentioned that the CEC 2 is considering the proposal in its entirety and may decide later to issue a statement.
5. A commenter noted that he is grateful to be a student at Manhattan Academy and for those who are supporting the proposal to re-site the school in the Norman Thomas Campus. He expressed excitement about the move and the future expansion of Manhattan Academy.
6. A commenter expressed her concern that the ninth graders who already applied for Unity through the High School Admissions Process would now have to attend school at a different location. She stated that these students should be given the opportunity to re-submit their applications.
7. Several commenters mentioned that parents of students attending Unity weren't given the choice to make their own decisions regarding the move, but rather the decision has been made for them.
8. A commenter expressed her opposition to the proposal. She stated that her son who used to attend Norman Thomas, where he faced problems, such as being assaulted at school

and receiving low grades, is doing much better at Unity. She asserted that faculty at Norman Thomas do not pay attention to the students.

9. A commenter noted that she did not know what the proposal was and would like to get a better understanding of it.
10. A commenter asked if Unity students would have to wear uniforms.
11. Several commenters noted their concern regarding safety issues at the Norman Thomas Campus. One commenter, in particular, asked about the presence of gangs at the Norman Thomas Campus.
12. A Unity teacher expressed her support for the proposal. She stated that even though the school will be changing its location, everything else, including faculty, will remain the same. She also responded to a commenter's concern regarding the fear of gang prevalence at the Norman Thomas Campus, saying that the faculty couldn't guarantee the safety of students off-campus even at Unity's current location. Furthermore, she clarified that Unity will have no connection to Norman Thomas or any other co-located school in the building, other than sharing space.
13. An attendee asked if there were other alternatives for Unity other than moving to Norman Thomas.
14. An attendee inquired when the Office of Enrollment would visit Unity to address concerns that the parents have.
15. An attendee asked if they could visit the Borough Enrollment Center to change schools for their children.

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

16. A staff member at Norman Thomas inquired about the personnel changes that will occur due to the phase-out. She asked if the excessed Norman Thomas staff will be automatically absorbed into Unity or Manhattan Academy; if not, she asked if they would be given opportunities to apply for the jobs at those schools.

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

Comments 1, 2, 3, 5 and 12 are in support of the proposal and therefore do not require a response.

Comment 4 was a statement and does not require a response.

With regard to comment 6, students who applied to Unity or Manhattan Academy through the High School Admissions Process for a ninth grade seat, have already been given the opportunity to submit a New High Schools Choice Form in order to apply to another school for September 2011. The New High Schools Choice Form was due to middle school guidance counselors on February 28, 2011. Current 8th grade students who receive a match to Unity or Manhattan Academy and do not wish to attend the school in the new location should contact the Manhattan Borough Enrollment Center to see where there may be available seats for new ninth graders.

In response to comments 7 and 13, the DOE's lease on building M897, where Unity is currently located, expires at the end of this school year. As a result, the school must move to a new location for 2011-2012 in order to continue to serve its students. The DOE did have conversations with school leadership about the move. The DOE believes that the M620 building is the best option for the re-location of Unity, given the availability of space in the building.

Building space is scarce in many neighborhoods in New York City. Due to space availability constraints, we must use existing public school buildings in the most efficient manner possible. After a thorough assessment of under-utilized school buildings in Manhattan, and specifically in District 2, the DOE identified building M620 as the best possible option for the re-siting of Unity. The utilization rate of building M620 during the current school year is 80% of target capacity. This means that the building is under-utilized and has additional space to accommodate additional students. The phase-out of Norman Thomas, which was approved by the PEP at its February 3, 2011 meeting, will provide additional space for other schools in the building. Building M620 has adequate capacity to accommodate Unity at full organizational capacity next year and beyond and it is the best and most viable option for Unity in District 2.

In response to comment 8, it is important to clarify that although the students at Unity will move to the Norman Thomas Campus, they will continue to be enrolled at Unity, taught by Unity teachers, and supervised by Unity administrators. The concerns of this particular parent have been addressed through a follow-up phone call between the Office of Student Enrollment and the parent in regards to a safety transfer placement in an alternative school for her son.

With regard to comment 9, detailed information about the proposal is available on the DOE's Website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/Mar232011Proposals.htm>. Spanish and Bengali translations of the proposal are also available online. In addition, hardcopies of the EIS are available in the main offices of Unity Center for Urban Technologies, Manhattan Academy for Arts & Language, Norman Thomas High School, and Murray Hill Academy. DOE staff remained after the conclusion of the hearing to discuss the proposal with the parent who asked this question.

In response to comment 10 inquiring about school uniforms, decisions regarding the use of school uniforms rest with the school's principal/administration. Unity does not currently have a uniform policy.

With regard to comment 11, safety at Norman Thomas has improved over the past three years. The DOE recognizes, however, that safety is still a concern among parents, students and staff. The DOE will continue to work closely with all co-located schools in the M620 building to improve safety and security.

School safety agents are allocated to schools based on each building's projected enrollment. As the enrollment at the Norman Thomas Campus fluctuates as new schools grow and Norman Thomas phases out, the number of safety agents at the school will be adjusted. The NYPD School Safety Division looks at a set of variables to determine the number of safety agents to deploy to a particular school building, including the crime rate, size and design of the building, enrollment, and grade span.

In addition, the Office of Youth Development (“OSYD”) supports schools in maintaining a safe, orderly and supportive school environment. OSYD works directly with Children’s First Network Safety Liaisons and schools to establish and implement integrated safety, discipline and intervention policies and procedures, to promote respect for diversity, and to nurture students’ pro-social behavior by providing them with meaningful opportunities for social-emotional learning. We encourage all schools to seek support from OSYD to address any issues involving safety and security, including gang related issues.

With regard to comment 14, the DOE’s Office of Student Enrollment plans to hold an information session for Unity parents in April 2011. In conjunction with Unity’s principal, the Office of Student Enrollment will notify parents of the meeting date once all necessary arrangements have been made.

In response to comment 15, parents and students may visit the Borough Enrollment Office at any time to discuss their options. Borough Enrollment Offices are open Monday through Friday from 8 am to 3 pm. Contact information for the Manhattan Borough Enrollment Offices is provided below.

Address	Districts Served	Phone Number
333 Seventh Avenue, 12 th Floor New York, 10001	1, 2, 4	718-935-2383
388 West 125th Street, 7 th Floor New York, 10027	3, 5, 6	718-935-2385

For additional information, please visit the DOE’s Website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/NewStudents/Peak+Enrollment.htm>.

With regard to comment 16, Murray Hill and Manhattan Academy are expected to hire additional teachers as they phase in to the Norman Thomas Campus. New schools follow the hiring process consistent with the procedures set forth in the collective bargaining agreement between the DOE and the UFT. A new school that is phasing in to replace a school that is closing or phasing out, shall be required to hire up to 50% of the most senior qualified staff from the closing or phasing out school if sufficient number of staff apply, until the impacted school is closed. In accordance with existing labor contracts, excessed Norman Thomas teachers would be able to apply for other City positions, and any excessed teacher who did not find a permanent position would be placed in the Absent Teacher Reserve (“ATR”) pool, meaning that they would continue to earn their salary while serving in the capacity of a substitute teacher in other City schools. Unity is not expected to hire additional staff next year. However, if staff positions become available, Unity will hire teachers in accordance with the 18-D process described above.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to this proposal.