



Public Comment Analysis

Date: November 16, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Truncation of P.S. 121 from a K-6 to a K-5 school

Date of Panel Vote: November 17, 2011

Summary of Proposal

P.S. 121 is an existing zoned elementary school located in buildings Q121 and Transportable Classroom Unit (TCU) Q915, at 126-10 109th Avenue, Ozone Park, NY 11420, in Community School District 28. It currently serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade and offers a pre-kindergarten program.

This is a proposal to implement a “grade truncation,” meaning that the school would no longer enroll sixth grade students after the current 2011-2012 school year. If this proposal is approved, at the close of the 2011-2012 school year, all fifth and sixth grade students who meet promotional standards from P.S. 121 would attend middle school. During the 2011-2012 school year, P.S. 121 fifth and sixth students would participate in the Middle School Choice Process. In September 2012, P.S. 121 fifth and sixth grade students who are promoted from P.S. 121 would enter middle school as sixth and seventh graders, respectively. Beginning in September 2012, P.S. 121 would only serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade and would continue to offer a pre-kindergarten program (subject to funding and demand).

Prior to June 2010, students in District 28 could attend their zoned middle school, or they could apply to middle schools that managed their own admissions processes on a school-by-school basis. In June 2010, the District 28 Community Education Council voted to adopt “Middle School Choice.” Zoned students still have priority for admission to the zoned school for the zone in which they reside. P.S. 121 students are also eligible to attend a zoned school outside of the zone in which they reside, to the extent that space is available after students within the zone in which the school is located have been admitted. Students are also eligible to attend non-zoned schools.

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) strives to ensure that all students in New York City have access to high-quality schools at every stage of their education. The proposed grade truncation offers significant benefits to the students currently in fifth grade at P.S. 121.

Middle schools typically enroll students beginning in sixth grade. P.S. 121 students who wait until sixth grade to apply to middle school are limited to those schools that still have available seventh grade seats. In particular, there are several un-zoned choice middle schools in District 28 that rarely have open seventh grade seats because seats become available only if sixth grade students leave the school. Therefore, students who would remain at P.S. 121 through sixth grade if this proposal is not implemented would have fewer opportunities to enter those choice middle schools than their peers who start middle school a year earlier.

This proposed grade truncation will provide P.S. 121 students access to the same range of middle school options as their peers throughout District 28. In addition, it addresses problems that exist for middle school students and the middle school as a whole when students start middle school through multiple entry grades (sixth and seventh).

This proposal also addresses some disadvantages that students may be experiencing while they remain at P.S. 121 for sixth grade after their grade size has been reduced by the number of students who exercised the option to enter middle school in sixth grade. By entering middle school in sixth grade rather than seventh grade, students at P.S. 121 will have more opportunities to take advantage of the enriching, high-school preparatory experiences offered at middle schools.

Finally, if this proposal is implemented, P.S. 121’s grade span from K-6 to K-5 would reduce the school’s enrollment by approximately 164 students, freeing up additional space that P.S. 121 could use to accommodate additional lower-grade students or to meet other needs in the school. P.S. 121 is also overcrowded, and truncating P.S. 121’s sixth grade will reduce the building’s utilization rate and alleviate overcrowding.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearings

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at P.S. 121 on November 2, 2011. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 5 members of the public attended the hearing, and 2 people spoke. Present at the meeting were District 28 Superintendent Dr. Beverly Fflokas-Bryant; District 28 Community Education Council President Sandra Williams-Clarke; Principal Evelyn Vadi, Frank Soriente and Danielle Hawkins representing the School Leadership Team; and Rebecca Rawlins from the Division of Portfolio Planning.

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

1. Nancy Northrop, president of Presidents Council for District 28 expressed:
 - a. That she has concerns regarding the role of the SLT in the decision making process.
 - b. She discussed a study about the benefits of K-6 schools and cited that P.S. 101 and P.S. 174 do not want to truncate at this time.
2. An SLT Member responded from the audience to Ms. Northrup's comments:
 - a. He stated that the SLT was involved in the process and that DOE was present at those meetings and that the majority of the school wanted to truncate.
 - b. He said that he was aware of several studies and that the decision to truncate was carefully considered and that the SLT was in favor of the truncation.
3. Joanne Franco, an SLT member, stated:
 - a. Fifth and sixth grade parents should be aware of issues pertaining to safety, transition, and psychological and physical well-being of their children at this age.

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

There were no written and/or oral comments submitted.

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

Comment 1(a) relates to the SLT's role in the decision making process surrounding grade reconfigurations. There is nothing in the Chancellor's Regulations that requires approval from the SLT for truncation. The DOE maintains the final decision on the matter, subject to PEP approval, but we do carefully consult with the Principal and the school community. Ultimately, the Principal will work closely with the SLT and school community to make a decision that is in the best interest of students. The truncation of P.S. 121 was a Principal initiated truncation.

Comment 1(b) pertains to a study about K-6 schools. Please refer to comment 2 below regarding the benefits of the truncation of P.S. 121. In regard to comments about P.S. 101 and P.S. 174, each school is individually assessed and the DOE engages the stakeholders and school community prior to proposals that are in the best interest of the students at each particular school.

Comment 2 expresses support for the proposal and does not require a response.

Comment 3 is a general comment regarding various factors to consider in a student's transition from elementary to middle school. The truncation of some K-6 elementary schools in District 28 is part of an effort to positively impact access and choice for students and their families, as well as learning conditions within schools. While the DOE recognizes all students are different and each child's transition to middle school will be different, we believe that these grade alignment proposals would enable students to have greater access to middle schools of their choice and

would offer significant benefits to students. As stated in the Educational Impact Statement, this proposal should be particularly beneficial to current and future fifth grade students at P.S. 121. The proposal addresses some disadvantages that students may be experiencing while they remain at P.S. 121 for sixth grade after their grade size has been reduced by the number of students who exercised the option to enter middle school in sixth grade.

Elementary schools have fewer resources to provide the types of extracurricular activities and enrichment opportunities for sixth grade students that are available to sixth grade students (and other students) in a full size middle school. Middle schools typically have extremely varied and rich instructional offerings, especially in the sciences and languages, as well as extra-curricular activities. Middle schools' space and facilities are also better aligned than those of elementary schools to support these programs. By entering middle school in sixth grade rather than seventh grade, students at P.S. 121 will have more opportunities to take advantage of these enriching, high-school preparatory experiences.

Changes Made to the Proposal

As a result of public feedback, the DOE will continue to recommend that P.S. 121 truncate from a K-6 to a K-5 school for the school year 2012-13.