Department of Education
Cathleen P. Black, Chancellor

Public Comment Analysis

Date: January 31, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Phase-out of the School for Community Research and Learning (08X540)

Date of Panel Vote: February 1, 2011

Summary of Proposal

The School for Community Research and Learning (08X540, "SCRL") is an existing high school located in school building X450 ("X450" or the "Adlai E. Stevenson Campus") located at 1980 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx, NY 10473, within the geographical confines of Community School District 8 ("District 8"). It currently serves students in grades nine through twelve. The New York City Department of Education ("DOE") is proposing to phase out and eventually close SCRL based on its poor performance and the DOE's assessment that the school lacks the ability to turn around quickly to better support student needs.

If the proposal to phase out SCRL is approved, SCRL would no longer admit new ninth-grade students at the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year. Current students will be supported as they progress towards graduation while remaining enrolled in SCRL. The school will serve one grade less in each subsequent year until it completes its phase-out in June 2014. In cases where students do not complete graduation requirements by June 2014, the DOE will help students and families identify alternative programs or schools that meet students' needs so that they may continue their education after SCRL completes phasing out. SCRL is currently co-located with seven other schools: Gateway School of Environmental Research and Technology (08X295, "Gateway"), Pablo Neruda Academy for Architecture and World Studies (08X305, "Pablo Neruda"), Millennium Art Academy (08X312, "Millennium"), Antonia Pantoja Preparatory School (08X376, "Pantoja Prep"), Bronx Community High School (08X377, "Bronx Community"), Bronx Bridges High School (08X432, "Bronx Bridges"), and Bronx Guild (08X452, "Bronx Guild").

In 2009-2010, the X450 building had a target capacity to serve 3,355 students, and a target utilization rate of 77%. In 2010-2011, the eight schools within the building are projected to enroll a total of 2,700 students, of whom 2,391 are in grades 9-12, which would yield a utilization rate of 80% of target capacity. If this proposal is approved, the five fully phased-in schools located in the building would continue serving students at their current enrollment levels,

while Bronx Bridges and Pantoja Prep would continue to add grades as they expand to full scale in 2013-2014. SCRL would no longer admit new ninth-grade students at the end of this school year and would complete its phase-out in June 2014. The DOE does not anticipate proposing any other new schools on the Adlai E. Stevenson Campus at this time.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at X450 on January 13, 2011. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 20 members of the public attended the hearing, and 6 people spoke. Present at the meeting were: Community Education Council ("CEC") 8 representative Otis Thomas; Citywide Council on High Schools ("CCHS") representative Denise Sullivan; SCRL Principal John Tornifolio; SCRL School Leadership Team ("SLT") member Shantel Patterson; Millennium Principal Maxine Nodell; Bronx Community Principal Flora Greenaway; Bronx Community SLT member Steven Lee; Bronx Bridges Principal Pablo Villavicencio; Bronx Guild Principal Sam Decker; Pablo Neruda Principal Sabrina Cook; Gateway Principal Clifford Siegel; Gateway Parents' Association President Raul Giansante; A Pantoja Prep SLT member; Deputy Chancellor Eric Nadelstern; Network Leader Barbara Gambino; and Cluster Leader Debra Maldonado.

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

1. Denise Sullivan, a representative of the CCHS, commented that it is unfortunate that the school is being phased out.
2. A representative of District Councilwoman Annabel Palma stated that:
    a. Though the school has faced challenges, it has also received new leadership and made progress.
    b. However, it is not making enough progress and students need equal educational opportunities.
    c. These hearings are an important part of the decision making process.
3. A representative of Assemblyman Peter Rivera stated that if the school is closed there should be a smooth transition.
4. A commenter stated that though fewer community members attended this year's hearing than attended last year's hearing, this does not indicate that the community agrees that the school should be closed.
5. A commenter stated that the Educational Impact Statement ("EIS") by the DOE did not portray the school accurately. He also stated that:
    a. The school has shown some positive results. The school received a Proficient score on the Quality Review. Though the school's Progress Report grade decreased, 76% of ninth graders earned 10 credits, and the graduation rate increased.
    b. In the first meeting that the DOE held with the community, representatives stated that no decision had been made. This was a dishonest statement.
6. Multiple commenters stated that the school should be supported rather than closed and that the closing of the school may negatively impact the campus.

The DOE received the following comment not directly related to the proposal to phase out SCRL:

7. A commenter stated that the school has a student center and salaries should be used to buy a new computer for it.

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

8. The DOE received a comment concerning all phase-out proposals calling for a moratorium on school closings, which stated that the DOE is the servant of the people and is not acknowledging the community's opposition to these proposals. The commenter suggested a facilitated discussion process which would work towards consensus.

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

With regard to comments 1, 2(a-c) and 6 related to the DOE's decision-making process in connection with phase-out proposals: deciding to phase out a school is the toughest decision the DOE makes. Every year, the DOE identifies which schools are having the most trouble serving their students. The DOE compiles a preliminary set of schools that could possibly be considered for intensive support or intervention by looking at all schools that receive a grade of D, F, or a third consecutive C or lower on the Progress Report, and schools that receive a rating below Proficient on the Quality Review. The DOE also takes into account how the State assesses the school's performance, by including schools identified as Persistently Lowest Achieving ("PLA") in this first group.

Elementary and middle schools that score higher than their district average in English Language Arts and math, high schools with graduation rates higher than the Citywide average, schools earning a Well Developed or Outstanding score on the Quality Review, or schools receiving a Progress Report for the first time are removed from the list and not considered for significant actions.

With this smaller set of schools, the DOE engages in in-depth conversations with school communities and networks to get an even better sense of what is happening at this school, and whether more significant action is needed. We continue to consider performance data, school culture, and demand information. Eventually, we are left with a set of schools that are not serving their students well enough and need more aggressive supports and intervention.
Based on an extensive review of data and community feedback, the DOE has determined that SCRL is unable to turn around and cannot provide a high-quality education to its students, notwithstanding its new leadership and recent incremental improvements in graduation rate and credit accumulation. The DOE believes that only the most serious intervention—the gradual phase out and eventual closure of SCRL—will address the school's longstanding performance struggles and allow for new school options, like Bronx Bridges and Pantoja Prep, to continue to develop in building X450 that will better serve future students and the broader community. We are proposing to phase out SCRL because we think it is the right thing for our students.

The Panel for Educational Policy ("PEP") will make a decision about this proposal on February 1, 2011. All public comment received at the joint public hearing or through the dedicated e-mail address or phone number will be taken into consideration by the PEP in reaching a decision.

With regard to comment 3 related to the process of phasing out a school and opening new replacement schools: the DOE will work with all the schools located in building X450, including SCRL, to ensure a smooth transition as SCRL phases out. Pantoja Prep, which currently serves students in grades 6-9, and Bronx Guild, which currently serves students in grade 9, are still phasing in to building X450, adding one grade level every year until reaching their full grade spans of 6-12 and 9-12, respectively. The DOE will provide support to all schools in building X450 during the phase-out period of SCRL.

Comment 4 notes that although this year's joint public hearing was not as well attended as last year's, it does not indicate that the community supports the proposal to phase out SCRL. The DOE takes community feedback very seriously during this process. In the past, the DOE has withdrawn or made significant changes to proposals based on community feedback. As stated earlier in this document, the PEP will make a decision about this proposal on February 1, 2011. All public comment received at the joint public hearing or through the dedicated e-mail address or phone number will be taken into consideration by the PEP in reaching a decision.

With regard to comment 5(a) related to the school's academic progress: in 2010, the 4-year graduation rate (including August graduates) at SCRL was 53%, well below the Citywide average of 63% for the class of 2010. This graduation rate puts SCRL in the bottom 12% of all high schools for 2009-2010 and in the bottom 18% of high schools in the Bronx. Although 76% of first-year students at SCRL earned at least 10 credits, only half of second-year and third-year students earned at least 10 credits in 2009-2010. As noted in the EIS describing the phase-out proposal which was initially published on December 10, 2010 and subsequently amended on December 14, 2010 and January 12, 2011, SCRL earned an overall D grade on its 2009-2010 Progress Report, with a D grade on both the Student Performance and the Student Progress sub-sections, and a C grade for School Environment. This represents a continuing pattern of decline for SCRL, which earned an overall C grade on its 2008-2009 Progress Report and an overall B grade in 2007-2008. In addition, the New York State Department of Education named SCRL as one of the PLA schools in December 2010.

Again, while some progress has been made in graduation and credit accumulation rates, after a careful analysis the DOE has determined that the school is ill-equipped to dramatically improve student outcomes within the current structure.

With regard to comment 5(b) related to community meetings held prior to the decision to propose phasing out SCRL: our goal for every proposal is to reach out to communities prior to the publication of a phase-out proposal. We want to talk to school leaders, parents, SLTs, CECs, and local Community Based Organizations ("CBOs") about our ideas. The DOE makes very clear during these meetings that it has not settled on any proposals yet, and it is there to hear feedback and new ideas. Prior to issuing this proposal, the DOE sought and received feedback from the SCRL community about strategies to better support students and improve outcomes at the school. On November 15, 2010, the Bronx High School Superintendent, Elena Papaliberios,

held meetings with the school's SLT and parents to identify successes and persistent challenges at SCRL and to discuss strategies to work together to better serve students. At these meetings, Superintendent Papaliberios explained the factors that lead the DOE to believe the school is struggling. They also reviewed what supports had been put in place at the school already. The DOE also distributed "Fact Sheets" for each school with which we met. These are available on our website and spell out, in an easy-to-understand way, potential intervention strategies, the rationale behind them, relevant data, and clear instructions on how to offer feedback. We integrated much of this valuable feedback into our decisions, helping shape our decisions on which intervention to implement for a particular school.

With regard to comment 6 related to the support and resources offered to SCRL: all schools receive support and assistance from their superintendent and Children First Network team, a group of educators who work directly with schools. This team helps schools identify best practices, target strategies for specific students in need of extra help, and prioritize competing demands on resources and time. Each school community chooses the network whose support best meets its needs, and each network works to improve student achievement in all of its schools.

The EIS describing the proposal to phase out SCRL delineates a range of instructional, operational, and leadership supports provided to SCRL. In addition, a number of resources were provided to support students' social/emotional and academic needs, particularly for struggling students. In particular, the DOE offered the following supports:

Leadership Support:

- Helping the principal develop SCRL's Comprehensive Education Plan and set school goals.
- Training school leadership in writing curriculum and implementing the new state standards.
- Connecting administrators with other schools to learn effective practices that could be replicated at SCRL.

Instructional Support:

- Training around improving classroom instruction, curriculum planning, and lesson design.
- Helping SCRL select grade-team and department leaders; team leaders meet weekly to discuss ways to improve school culture and student achievement.
- Supporting the school's use of data to improve instruction for English Language Learners ("ELL"), special education students, and students performing below grade level.

Operational Support:

- Coaching on budgeting, human resources, recruiting and retaining talented teachers, and compliance issues.
- Helping the school maximize its budget resources to align with school needs.
- Working with the school to increase student attendance and prevent freshman long-term absences.

Student Support:

- Training for the guidance counselor on how to use scholarship reports and graduation tracking systems.
- Helping SCRL create afternoon classes for math and social studies.
- Creating opportunities for students to participate in campus athletic teams and clubs.
- Developing the Lehman College partnership, which gives students access to literacy tutoring, work-study, and a campus health clinic.

For more information, please see pages 5 and 6 in the second amended EIS: http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/Feb12011Proposals.

Given the school's lack of success despite supports—whether as part of a centralized effort to support all schools or individualized plans for SCRL—it is apparent that SCRL has not developed the proper infrastructure to meet the needs of its students and families. The school culture and conditions have not enabled increased student achievement. It is our belief that phasing this school out and bringing in higher quality schools will provide better options for the community and families in the future.

With regard to comment 8, the central goal of the Children First reforms is 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. To ensure that as many students as possible have access to the best possible education, since 2003 New York City has replaced 91 of our lowest-performing schools with better options and opened 474 new schools: 365 district schools and 109 public charter schools. As a result, we've created more high-quality choices for families.

Based on feedback from communities in 2009 and 2010, the DOE made improvements to its timeline and process for communicating with schools and families early and often throughout the investigation and decision making process. This year, we talked to school leadership, parents, SLTs, CECs, elected officials, and local CBOs about our ideas about how to improve struggling schools. We convened these meetings to discuss our proposals and to hear feedback and new ideas.

The Department developed and distributed "Fact Sheets" for each school we talked with. These fact sheets described proposals, the rationale behind them, included relevant data, and provided clear instructions for how to offer feedback. They were posted on our website and distributed at meetings.

When we announced the Department's recommendation to propose the school for phase out, dedicated teams of educators and engagement specialists spent several days back in these schools meeting with teachers, parents, and students.

In January, Joint Public Hearings were held for all proposals and public feedback was collected at these meetings and through dedicated email and phone numbers. The Department's analysis of public comment will be available on-line prior to the vote.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to this proposal as a result of public comment.