



## **Public Comment Analysis**

Date: January 31, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Phase-out of the Urban Assembly Academy for History and Citizenship for Young Men (09X239)

Date of Panel Vote: February 1, 2011

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## **Summary of Proposal**

The Urban Assembly Academy for History and Citizenship for Young Men (09X239, “UA History and Citizenship”) is an existing high school located in school building X410 (“X410” or the “William H. Taft Campus”) located at 240 East 172<sup>nd</sup> Street, Bronx, NY 10457, within the geographical confines of Community School District 9 (“District 9”). UA History and Citizenship is a single-sex school for male students in grades nine through twelve. The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to phase out and eventually close UA History and Citizenship based on its poor performance and the DOE’s assessment that the school lacks the capacity to turn around quickly to better support student needs.

UA History and Citizenship has struggled for a number of years, and it has experienced a steep decline in performance over the last couple of years. UA History and Citizenship received an overall F grade on its 2009-2010 Progress Report. This grade is indicative of a trend in declining student performance from the B grade the school received on the 2007-2008 Progress Report and the C grade the school received in 2008-2009. In 2009-2010, the 4-year graduation rate at UA History and Citizenship was 43%. In 2008-2009, its 4-year graduation rate was 55%, while in 2007-2008, it was 54%. In addition, UA History and Citizenship remained on the New York State Department of Education’s Persistently Lowest Achieving (“PLA”) list published in December 2010 after first being added to the list in January 2010.

If the proposal to phase out UA History and Citizenship is approved, UA History and Citizenship would no longer admit new ninth-grade students after the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year. Current students will be supported as they progress towards graduation while remaining enrolled in UA History and Citizenship. In cases where students do not complete graduation requirements in time for the June 2014 closure date, the DOE will help students and families identify alternative programs or schools that meet their needs so that they may continue their education after UA History and Citizenship completes phasing out.

UA History and Citizenship is currently co-located with five other schools on the William H. Taft Campus: Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School (09X227, “Bronx Expeditionary”), DreamYard Preparatory (09X329, “DreamYard”), Bronx High School for Business (09X412, “Bronx HS for Business”), Jonathan Levin School for Media and Communication (09X414, “Jonathan Levin”), and Bronx High School for Medical Science (09X413, “BHSMS”). All six schools in the building opened within the past decade and serve students in grades 9-12. BHSMS also serves students in grades 6-8. Building X410 also houses the Living for the Young Family through Education (“LYFE”) program.

In 2009-2010, X410 had a target capacity of 2,875 students, and the building enrolled 2,318 students, with a building utilization rate of 82% of target capacity. Currently, the six schools located on the William H. Taft Campus enroll a total of 2,334 students. In 2010-2011, the projected utilization rate of X410 is approximately 81% of target capacity. If this proposal is approved, the five other schools located on the William H. Taft Campus would continue serving students at their current enrollment levels. The DOE does not anticipate co-locating any other new schools in building X410 at this time.

### **Summary of Comments Received Prior to the Official Public Comment Period**

Certain comments were received during meetings with parents and community members prior to the comment period on this proposal. Although these comments were not received during the comment period, as a courtesy, the DOE wishes to acknowledge that nine written comments were received from students that expressed support for the school, citing the hard work of teachers and staff, the positive environment and sense of community among students and staff, and the enrichment activities available at the school. Comments similar to these are addressed in the analysis of issues raised, specifically responses to comments 1(h) and 5.

### **Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing**

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at X410 on January 20, 2011. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 120 members of the public attended the hearing, and 20 people spoke. Present at the meeting were: Community Education Council (“CEC”) representative for District 9 Marilyn Espada; UA History and Citizenship School Leadership Team (“SLT”) representatives Adhim DeVeaux, Kanau Ptah and Seku Brathwaite; Bronx Expeditionary SLT representative Jay Werner; Jonathan Levin Assistant Principal Florentino Rosa; Jonathan Levin SLT members Lesley Terry and Jeanette Logan; DreamYard Principal Rod Bowen; Bronx HS for Business SLT representative Carlos Bermudez; Citywide Council on High Schools (“CCHS”) representative Denise Sullivan; Jesse Mojica of the Bronx Borough President’s office; Assemblywoman Vanessa Gibson; Deputy Chancellor Marc Sternberg; Superintendent Elena Papaliberios; and Melissa Harris from the Office for Family Information and Action (“OFIA”).

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

1. Adhim DeVeaux, a representative from the SLT of UA History and Citizenship, stated that:

- a. Achievement of black and Hispanic/Latino boys tends to fall behind that of their peers. This is the population that the school serves, and the school should be compared to other schools serving similar populations. If other schools are serving these students better, this school should be closed. If not, the DOE should provide support to this school so that it can continue to serve this community.
  - b. New York City is one of the lowest performing districts in one of the lowest-performing states in terms of academic performance of black and Hispanic/Latino males. This school is doing twice as well as New York City in educating black males.
  - c. Also, girls tend to graduate at a higher rate than boys, so it is not fair to compare this school, which serves only males, to other schools which serve males and females.
  - d. If the DOE closes this school, black and Hispanic/Latino children would be sent to schools with lower graduation rates than this school has. These children will be less likely to graduate and more likely to be incarcerated or unemployed.
  - e. This school has lower performance because it accepts all children. Other schools with higher performance have screened admissions.
  - f. People from outside of the community that this school serves should listen to the needs of the community. People from outside the community should not make decisions about the best way to educate its students.
  - g. The school received an F this year, but received a B the previous two years. This is not a pattern of failure.
  - h. The school has a positive culture. Students travel abroad, and the school hosts celebrations. The school has a strong mentoring program. The school has a program with the Museum of Modern Art.
  - i. Students also achieve many scholarships, including over \$400,000 worth of scholarship funds supporting the class of 2010.
2. Jay Werner, a representative of the SLT for the Bronx Expeditionary Learning High School, commented:
    - a. This school used to be called Taft. Taft was closed, but the building serves similar students. Now, UA History and Citizenship will be closed, but the students are the same.
    - b. What is the DOE doing to change things so that students will be more successful in the future? What additional supports will be provided?
3. Assemblywoman Vanessa Gibson of the 77<sup>th</sup> Assembly District in Bronx County expressed concern about the proposed closure of UA History and Citizenship. She also expressed concern about the needs of young men of color that this school was designed to serve. She also stated that:
    - a. The community supports having a school based on the Urban Assembly model serving young men of the Bronx. The DOE should do everything possible to make this option available to parents.
    - b. The DOE needs to provide a long term strategy for families in this community. The DOE should examine why some of the new small schools have failed and are facing closure.

- c. The DOE should commit resources to innovative schools like this one, and enhance resources like mentoring, counseling, and training to improve the results of this and similar schools.
4. Denise Sullivan, a representative from the CCHS, stated that community members do not want the school to phase out. She also stated that:
  - a. If the DOE was concerned about the school failing in previous years, it should have been more present in the school.
5. Multiple commenters stated that the school is a strong and motivating community.
  - a. The school is like a family.
  - b. Teachers and students have strong relationships.
  - c. Students help each other.
  - d. The school helps students develop a strong cultural identity and understand their history. The school also provides strong volunteer service opportunities and helps students develop solid leadership qualities.
  - e. The school helps students learn to speak and read English and develop reading skills.
  - f. The school helps students learn life skills.
  - g. The school is safe.
6. A commenter stated that when the school began sharing space with a co-ed school, the school began to decline.
7. Multiple commenters asked what will replace UA History and Citizenship.
  - a. One commenter asked if UA History and Citizenship will be replaced by a charter school.
8. Multiple commenters said that the school has not received enough support, and suggested that the school could improve if given more time and support.
9. Multiple commenters noted that the school received a B on the Progress Report for two years before receiving an F, and stated that the school does not have a history of failing.
10. Multiple commenters noted that many students at the school are admitted to college and receive scholarships.
11. A commenter questioned the accuracy of DOE data.
12. A commenter asked how closing the school would make things better for a child who is graduating with honors.
13. A commenter asked what the City graduation rate is for boys of color.
14. Multiple commenters asked questions about resources:
  - a. When did teachers receive resources to meet students' needs?

- b. Did UA History and Citizenship receive support for helping its most vulnerable students?
- 15. A commenter asked why the DOE allowed the principal to be transferred to another school at the beginning of the year.
- 16. A commenter asked what will happen to the space made available on the Taft campus.
- 17. A commenter asked whether on-track juniors can easily transfer to other schools.

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

- 18. 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(a), 3(c), 4(a), 8 and 14 related to support and resources offered to the school: 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 Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) describing the proposal to phase-out UA History and Citizenship, which was posted on December 17, 2010 and amended on January 19, 2011, delineates a range of instructional, operational, and leadership supports provided to UA History and Citizenship over the previous years. Specifically, the DOE offered the following supports:

**Leadership Support:**

- Helping the principal develop UA History and Citizenship’s Comprehensive Education Plan and set school goals.
- Connecting administrators with other schools to learn practices that could be replicated at UA History and Citizenship.

**Instructional Support:**

- Providing extensive leadership training for the principal that emphasized special education and the teacher evaluation process.
- Training for teachers on aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessments to the new state standards.

- Helping teacher teams use data to improve instruction for English Language Learners (“ELL”), students with disabilities, and students performing below grade level.
- Working with the school to develop learning targets to measure and report student achievement through an on-line standards-based system called IMPACT.

**Operational Support:**

- Helping the school to align its budget resources with school goals and resolve any budget issues.
- Guiding the school in working with other schools on campus to ensure efficient and coordinated use of facilities and shared spaces.
- Coaching on budgeting, human resources, recruiting and retaining talented teachers, and compliance issues.

**Student Support:**

- Securing five internship and summer enrichment partnerships.
- Providing training to college counselors on how to use scholarship reports and graduation tracking systems.
- Providing training and ongoing support for the coordinator of the school’s mentoring program.
- Working with the school to create a Behavioral Intervention Team, and introduce peer mediation and intervention strategies as ways to help identify what factors are contributing to student behavioral issues. Also working with the school to build the capacity of their Dean of Discipline.

In addition, the DOE worked closely with the school community to implement a student advisory program and a peer mediation program to support students’ social/emotional and academic needs, particularly for struggling students. For more information, please see pages 5 and 6 in the EIS: <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/changes/bronx/UAHistory>.

Given the school’s lack of success despite the support and resources it has received—whether as part of centralized efforts to support all schools or individualized plans for UA History and Citizenship—it is apparent that UA History and Citizenship 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 in the Bronx will provide better options for the community and families in the future.

With regard to comments 1(a), 1(c) and 1(e), regarding the population of students that UA History and Citizenship serves, the Progress Report accounts for the unique student population that a school works with. For high schools, the percent of self-contained students is part of the peer index (both as part of the percent of students with Individualized Education Plans and again on its own), so peer schools tend to have roughly similar percentages of self-contained students. The graduation outcomes of self-contained students also receive additional weight in the weighted Regents diploma rate.

In addition, the high school peer index is based on the average 8<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency, double the percentage of special education students, double the percentage of self-contained students, and the percentage of overage students on entry to the school. As a result, schools in the same peer group generally have comparable mixes of students who were struggling academically before high school, who have an Individualized Education Plan (and particularly those with the most restrictive program recommendation), and who enter the school overage. We are particularly aware of the challenge of getting self-contained students to graduate, which is why we effectively give the percent of such students double-weight in calculating peer groups. As a result of our peer group methodology and the adjustments we provide within individual metrics for achieving strong outcomes with highly challenging student populations, a high school's Progress Report score accounts for and controls for the percent of self-contained, other special education, English Language Learners, or overage students, and the average 8<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency of the students it serves.

While UA History and Citizenship does serve a challenging population it does not follow that the school cannot be compared to any other school—it simply means that student characteristics must be considered when making a comparison. UA History and Citizenship has the second lowest graduation rate among its peer schools. Taking into account the student populations they are working with, other schools are achieving better outcomes than UA History and Citizenship is with its students. Like most New York City public schools, UA History and Citizenship serves a high-need population: 26% of students require special education services and 16% are English Language Learners. In 2009-2010, the 4-year graduation rate (including August graduates) was 43%. But other schools serving similar students have achieved better results:

- At Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies, a Bronx school, 25% of students require special education services and 19% of students are English Language Learners. That school achieved a 67% four-year graduation rate in 2009-2010, with 35% of students earning Regents diplomas.
- At High School for Violin and Dance, a Bronx school, 24% of students require special education services and 9% of students are English Language Learners. That school achieved an 83% four-year graduation rate in 2009-2010, with 70% of students earning Regents diplomas.

While all students are still not where we'd like them to be, these schools are getting better results while serving a similar mix of students to UA History and Citizenship.

Additionally, while in 2008-2009, the school's graduation rate for black males and Hispanic/Latino males was better than the Citywide rate for those populations (62% compared to 51% for black males and 53% compared to 50% for Hispanic/Latino males), this will likely not be the case in 2009-2010, as the school graduated only 43% of students (disaggregated results for 2010 are not yet available). Further, comparing its black and Hispanic/Latino male graduation to Citywide averages is misleading given that the school has a very small cohort of students (~75). While it is true that female students Citywide do graduate at a higher rate than male students it does not follow that we can't compare UA History and Citizenship to other schools in the same peer group which controls for incoming proficiency, special education status and designation and overage status.

Finally, there is another single-sex high school in New York City that serves mostly African American and Hispanic/Latino male students, Eagle Academy for Young Men in the Bronx (09X231, “Eagle”). Eagle is located in the Bronx and serves students in grades 9-12. That school achieved a 70% 4-year graduation rate in 2009-2010 and a 74% 4-year graduation rate in 2008-2009.

With regard to comments 1(b) and 13 related to the performance of the school’s African American and Hispanic/Latino male students: this school is not doing twice as well as New York City in educating African American and Hispanic/Latino males. In 2008-2009 the school’s graduation rate among African American males was 62% versus 51% among African American males Citywide, and among Hispanic/Latino males the school’s graduation rate was 53% versus 50% among Hispanic/Latino males Citywide.

With regard to comments 1(d), 2(a-b) and 12 related to the DOE’s approach to close and replace failing schools Citywide: the DOE strives to create great schools in every borough of New York City. To accomplish this goal, the DOE has replaced 91 of our lowest-performing schools with better options and opened 474 new schools. Of the 474, 365 are traditional public schools and 109 are public charter schools. As a result, we’ve created better options for families Citywide. For example, in the Bronx, Evander Childs High School graduated only 30.7% of its students in 2002, in its final year before phasing out. The new schools on the Evander Childs Campus are getting tremendous results with the same student population, graduating 80.3% of students in 2009. As of January 2011, the DOE is proposing to open seven new high schools in the Bronx in September 2011, which will provide the community with similar high quality options. Detailed information about new high schools is published annually in the High School Directory, available at DOE middle schools and Borough Enrollment Centers or on the DOE’s website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/Directory/default.htm>.

With regard to comment 1(f) and 3(a): The DOE sought community feedback both before and after it published its proposal to phase-out UA History and Citizenship. Prior to issuing the proposal, superintendents held parent meetings at struggling schools and asked school communities about what is and is not working. Superintendents also explained the Department’s thinking about why the school was struggling and what particular factors show this to be the case. Superintendents also reviewed what supports had already been implemented at the school. The Department developed and distributed “Fact Sheets” for each school with which we met. These fact sheets summarized the proposals and the rationales behind them. The Fact Sheets also included relevant data and clear instructions for how to offer feedback. They were posted on our website and distributed at meetings. In addition to the joint public hearings held after the proposal was published, the DOE also sought community feedback by requesting comment via dedicated e-mail address and phone number.

The DOE does carefully listen and consider the feedback it receives. It is clear to us that some students have had there are positive experiences and that there are strong student/teacher relationships in some of our most struggling schools. However, we must ultimately make a decision around the academic rigor of a school and whether or not it has the capacity to support

its students. It is our belief that UA History and Citizenship does not have the capacity to turn around quickly to meet the needs of its students.

With regard to comments 1(h-i), 5(a-g) and 10: UA History and Citizenship does offer a caring community where students can develop leadership skills and a strong sense of community, and the achievements of students who earn scholarships and matriculate to college are commendable. The DOE believes that the school community will continue to care for students as it phases out. In addition, the DOE believes that schools that students may choose to attend if they transfer out of UA History and Citizenship will also offer positive cultures and caring communities to help students achieve successful outcomes.

With regard to comments 1(g) and 9, pointing to the school's academic progress: UA History and Citizenship has struggled for a number of years, and it has experienced a steep decline in performance over the last couple of years. UA History and Citizenship received an overall F grade on its 2009-2010 Progress Report. This grade is indicative of a trend in declining student performance from the C grade the school received on its 2008-2009 Progress Report and the B grade the school received on its 2007-2008 Progress Report. Contrary to comments 1(g) and 9, UA History and Citizenship did not receive a B grade on its Progress Reports for the two years prior to receiving an F grade for 2009-2010.

In addition, UA History and Citizenship's most recent 4-year graduation rate of 43% is far below the Citywide average of 63% for the class of 2009. In fact, the 4-year graduation rate is among the lowest in the city, ranking in the bottom 1% of all high schools for 2010. UA History and Citizenship has the second lowest graduation rate of high schools in the Bronx. The school also ranks among the lowest in the City in terms of the percentage of students who earn 10 or more credits in a single year. In 2009-2010, only 50% of first-year students at UA History and Citizenship earned at least 10 credits. This credit accumulation rate places UA History and Citizenship in the bottom 2% among all City high schools.

With regard to comment 3(a): We have not yet determined what school model we will introduce into the community in the future. While we are not bringing in a new school this year because we have sufficient seats to accommodate future students, we are interested in working with the community to determine what program model would best meet the needs of the community and would consider new schools for this building in the future.

With regard to comment 3(b), 8 out of the 25 schools proposed for phase-out this year were opened since 2003, representing less than 3% of the total schools we've created since 2003. In any case where a school is failing to serve its students well, we must take appropriate action.

With regard to comment 6: the Department does not believe that sharing space with other schools—even those serving different populations of students—is related to a school's performance. Hundreds of schools across the city successfully share space and are able to provide a quality educational experience for students that results in high student performance.

With regard to comments 7(a) and 16 related to replacement plans for UA History and Citizenship: the DOE does not anticipate proposing to site any additional schools on the William H. Taft Campus in 2011-2012.

With regard to comment 11, the Progress Report, Quality Review, and New York State Annual School Report Card are three separate accountability systems used to evaluate schools in New York City.

**Progress Report Grade:** This letter grade (A through F) provides an overall assessment of the school's contribution to student learning in three main areas of measurement: (I) School Environment, (II) Student Performance, and (III) Student Progress. Schools also receive letter grades in each of these three categories. Schools receive additional recognition for Exemplary Student Outcomes by students most in need of attention and improvement. The overall Progress Report Grade is designed to reflect each school's contribution to student academic progress, no matter where each child begins his or her journey to proficiency and beyond. Schools are compared to all schools Citywide and to schools with student populations most like their own.

**Quality Review Score:** This separate accountability score is based on an on-site Quality Review of the school by an experienced educator. The score represents the quality of efforts taking place at the school to track the capacities and needs of each student, to plan and set rigorous goals for each student's improved learning, to focus the school's academic practices and leadership development around the achievement of those goals, and to evaluate the effectiveness of plans and practices constantly and revise them as needed to ensure success. The Quality Review Score is evaluated on a four point scale: Well Developed, Proficient, Underdeveloped with Proficient Features and Underdeveloped. The Quality Review Score is not incorporated into the Progress Report Grade and instead is treated as a different, equally important indicator.

**New York State Annual School Report Card:** This separate accountability indicator reports the school's status under the accountability system New York State has adopted under the federal No Child Left Behind Act ("NCLB"). The Progress Report is designed to supplement the State accountability system. A school's NCLB status is an important basis for assessing the number and characteristics of students in a school who have attained the goal of proficiency in literacy and mathematics. NCLB Status is not incorporated into the Progress Report Grade.

In October 2010—during the Progress Report verification period—the school administration was presented with all of the data underlying the calculation of all Progress Report measures, including graduates' diploma type, and had ample opportunity to review and update that data. The Graduation Rate and Regents diploma rate reflects that post-verification data.

With regard to comment 15: While the DOE works hard to develop a pipeline of talented principals to place into its neediest communities, it cannot impede a principal from accepting various job opportunities. UA History and Citizenship's principal voluntarily transferred to another school at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. It's also important to consider that, often times, involuntary leadership changes can be symptomatic of a school culture and community that is not working and needs a fundamental change.

With regard to comment 17, current tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students who are on track to graduate would complete high school at UA History and Citizenship if they continue to earn credits on schedule. As the school becomes smaller, students will be able to receive more individualized attention so that they can achieve their graduation goals and prepare for post-secondary education and/or career plans. All students are encouraged to meet with their guidance counselor to discuss their progress towards graduation. For additional information on enrollment options for rising ninth graders and current ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders at UA History and Citizenship, please refer to pages 7-8 and 10-13 in the EIS: <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/planning/changes/bronx/UAHistory>.

Transfers from UA History and Citizenship to another school may be available for the following reasons, among others: medical issues, safety concerns, sports, or travel hardship. For more information regarding a students' eligibility for a transfer, please see Chancellor's Regulation A-101, available at <http://docs.nycenet.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-11/A-101%20Final.pdf>.

With regard to comment 18, 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.