



Public Comment Analysis

Date: January 31, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Phase-out of Metropolitan Corporate Academy High School (15K530)

Date of Panel Vote: February 1, 2011

Summary of Proposal

Metropolitan Corporate Academy High School (15K530, “MCA”) is an existing high school located in the K806 building at 362 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217 within the geographical confines of Community School District 15. It currently serves students in grades nine through twelve. The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to phase out MCA based on its poor performance and the DOE’s assessment that the school lacks capacity to turn around quickly to better support student needs.

If the proposal is approved, MCA would no longer admit new ninth-grade students after the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year. Current students would be supported as they progress towards graduation while remaining enrolled in MCA. 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 high school education after MCA completes phasing out.

MCA is currently co-located with the Brooklyn School for Career Development (75K753, “SCD”), a District 75 high school. SCD currently enrolls District 75 students, students with disabilities, in grades 9-12. A “co-location” means that two or more school organizations are located in the same building and may share common spaces like auditoriums, gymnasiums, and cafeterias.

In 2009-2010, K806 had a target capacity of 419 students, and the building enrolled 461 students, yielding a utilization rate of 117% of target capacity. In 2010-2011, there are 390 students projected to be enrolled in the building, yielding an estimated utilization rate of 94% of target capacity. Regardless of whether this proposal is approved, the District 75 program, SCD, would continue serving its current students in Building K806. SCD students take classes in the K806 building, but many of the students participate in job training activities at work sites, so not all of the enrolled District 75 students are in the building at the same time.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at the Metropolitan Corporate Academy High School on January 18, 2011. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 84 members of the public attended the hearing, and 20 people spoke. Present at the meeting were MCA Principal Lennel George; MCA Parent Teachers Association (“PTA”) President Malaika Abdul-Waheed; SCD School Leadership Team (“SLC”) members Ann Mingo and Darlene Shockness; SCD Site Coordinator Ruben Gomez; Community Education Council (“CEC”) 15 President Jim Devor; Staten Island / Brooklyn High School Superintendent Aimee Horowitz; District 15 Superintendent Anita Skop; Deputy Chancellor Marc Sternberg; Melissa Harris of the Office for Family Information and Action.

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

1. The PTA President commented that MCA provides essential services to the highest need students and therefore should not be closed.
2. The CEC 15 President commented that:
 - a. The school has not received the support that it needs.
 - b. The DOE has not proposed a replacement school for MCA or indicated what the plans for the building will involve. Mayor Bloomberg’s statement that parents do not send their children to failing schools because they are failing is not true.
 - c. Students at MCA enter over age and require more than four years to graduate.
3. United Federation of Teachers representatives commented that MCA has been neglected by the DOE, which also includes its original partner, Goldman Sachs, and therefore the school should not be closed.
4. New York, City Council Member (District 33) Stephen Levin commented that he opposes the proposal to phase out MCA. He also stated that students do not have sufficient resources and the school does not have adequate physical facilities.
5. Multiple commenters commented that the DOE has not provided sufficient past supports to MCA, especially in regards to safety and facilities. In particular:
 - a. The commenters noted that the school needs an auditorium, space for meetings, and a cafeteria.
 - b. There are no enough hallways, lockers, and restrooms.
 - c. The building has incurred multiple environmental violations and may not be suitable to house a school.
6. MCA students commented that:

- a. The school currently provides opportunities for students to become involved in student government.
 - b. Closing MCA would deny students an opportunity to speak their mind and express their opinions.
 - c. MCA provides a welcoming and motivating environment that teaches students to open up and succeed, and enables students to feel supported and move forward despite their struggles at home. MCA feels like a family or a refuge.
 - d. MCA students are succeeding despite the lack of resources, primarily due to the support of helpful teachers.
 - e. With more resources, like a sports teams, students would become more motivated.
7. An MCA teacher commented that the school has a strong community service program which has been recognized by partners including the VA Medical Center.
 8. Multiple commenters noted that MCA has low scores on its Progress Reports because it serves a large number of high needs students, especially self-contained special education students.
 9. A commenter stated that Mayor Bloomberg has created an educational environment that relies too heavily on testing and directs funding away from teaching and learning.
 10. A commenter asked how the DOE can expect schools serving high need students to succeed without providing appropriate resources to the school.
 11. A commenter asked what percentage of this year's and last year's students at MCA were over-age.
 12. Multiple commenters noted that the school would improve with increased support from the DOE .
 13. A commenter questioned whether the new replacement school would perform any better than MCA and pointed out that several of the schools proposed for phase-out were opened during the Bloomberg administration.
 14. A student questioned whether the DOE understands what issues students at MCA face.

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

15. 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**

- Comments 2A, 3, 6D, 6E, 10, and 12, note that MCA did not receive sufficient supports. In fact, the DOE has provided the following supports to MCA:
- Leadership Support:
 - Helping the principal develop MCA's Comprehensive Education Plan and set school goals.
 - Connecting administrators with other schools to learn effective practices that could be replicated at Metropolitan.
 - Training and coaching the principal to enhance instructional and organizational coherence.
- Instructional Support:
 - Working with the school to create teacher teams that meet weekly to review and develop consistent assessments of student work; teams also use data to improve instruction for English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students performing below grade level.
 - Providing training to the principal, assistant principal, and teachers on using data to improve student achievement, using data to evaluate, develop, and monitor teaching practices, lesson-planning using understanding by design, writing meaningful observations, student engagement, implementing new state standards in Social Studies, and the use of ARIS, Progress Reports, and the Quality Review rubric.
- Operational Support:
 - Helping the school implement and allocate more than \$54,000 in grant funding, which has been used for extended-day violence prevention programs, and \$115,000 in School In Need of Improvement funds from the state.
 - Coaching staff on budgeting, human resources, recruiting and retaining talented teachers, and compliance issues.
- Student Support:
 - Providing training to guidance counselors on using scholarship reports and graduation tracking systems.
 - Supporting partnership programs with NY City College of Technology, NY Public Library, and City College.
 - Working with the school to establish relationships with community-based organizations, such as Hospital Audiences Inc., College Summit and College Now, through which students take college courses and participate in conflict resolution and theatre arts programs that focus on health and self-esteem.
 - Supporting extensive after-school activities such as tutoring, Regents and SAT exam prep courses, and dance and arts.
 - Helping the school address violent incidents and student suspensions by creating a school crisis management team made up of school leadership and social service

professionals.

Given MCA's lack of success despite the above supports—whether as part of centralized efforts to support all schools or individualized plans for MCA—it is apparent that MCA has failed to develop the proper infrastructure to meet the needs of its students and families.

Comment 6E states that MCA does not offer any sports. According to the 2010-2011 High School Directory, MCA currently offers the following sports: Basketball, Track, and Weightlifting Clubs.

- Comment 2B notes that the DOE has not outlined or proposed a replacement school for MCA or indicated its future plans for the building. As noted in the EIS for this proposal to phase out MCA, if this proposal is approved the DOE fully intends to utilize the space in the building that will be made available as MCA phase out. The DOE is currently evaluating the needs of the community and the space made available in the building. In a separate EIS, the DOE will propose to site a new school in the building in the 2012-2013 school year. That proposal would be posted at least six months prior to the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year and would include a description of the replacement school, admissions policy, and future programs that may be offered at the school.
- Comments 2D and 11 inquire about the number of students at MCA who are over age and require more than four years to graduate. In fact, MCA has a relatively low number of students entering over age. In 2009-10, only 7% of students at the school were over age on entry to the school, which puts MCA in the bottom 6% overall in the city and in Brooklyn for over age students.
- Comments 1 and 8 note that MCA provides essential services to high need students and therefore its Progress Report scores are lower than other schools. Like most New York City public schools, MCA serves a high-need population: 18% of students require special education services and 3% are English language learners. But other schools serving similar students have achieved far better results.
 - At the 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.
 - At Belmont Preparatory High School, a Bronx school, 17% of students require special education services and 18% of students are English language learners. That school achieved a 69% four-year graduation rate in 2009-2010, with 63% of students earning Regents diplomas.
- Comments 4 and 5A-C note that the DOE has not improved the building in which MCA is housed. However over the last ten years the DOE has made several facilities upgrades to the building, which have included:
 - replacing all windows and the boiler plant;
 - building and completing a high school Science lab;

- upgrading antiquated bathrooms;
 - and more recently began construction on a fitness center. While the building is not equipped with a traditional cafeteria or auditorium, a double classroom space on the first floor serves the same purpose.
 - The DOE is not aware of any environmental violations at the building.
- Comments 6A, 6C, and 7 discuss the distinct extracurricular programs and enrichment opportunities that are currently offered at MCA. MCA would continue to offer students a range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities as the school phases out, including the community service program. The DOE is confident that other schools available to students who would have otherwise attended MCA also provide similar programs and enrichment opportunities. Moreover, the DOE anticipates that the new school that would phase in to the building in 2012-2013 would also offer a wide variety of extracurricular programs and enrichment opportunities.
 - Comment 6B notes that closing schools denies students an opportunity to express themselves. Students or other community members impacted by phase-out proposals may express their opinions about the phase out during joint public hearings and through the dedicated e-mail address or voicemail box set up for this proposal. In New York City, we are striving to create a system of great schools. To accomplish this goal, we've 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 more good choices for families. MCA will continue to serve students as it phases out so all current high school students will be able to complete high school at MCA, assuming they continue to meet promotional standards.
 - Comment 13 notes that several new schools that have opened in the last 8 years have been proposed for phase-out. Currently, 8 out of the 25 schools proposed to phase out and close opened after 2003. The DOE has created 365 schools in the past 8 years. The 8 schools scheduled for phase out this year represent less than 2% of the total schools created by the DOE since 2003. In any case where a school is failing to serve its students, we must take appropriate action.
 - With regard to comment 2(c) and 9, the DOE believes that every student deserves a quality education regardless of their background. MCA has struggled for years to provide a high-quality education to its students. The DOE has offered considerable support to the school, but despite these efforts, MCA's performance continues to be low. As a result, there is a need to provide better options for families in the community.
 - Comment 14 notes the challenges that students at MCA face. The DOE understands that students often come to school with a variety of social/emotional challenges that, if not addressed, can have a profound impact on their academic experience. To address these challenges, the DOE's Office of School and Youth Development ("OSYD") helps schools to create and maintain a safe, orderly and supportive school environment for students because school safety, climate and culture have a profound effect on students' academic achievement and behavior.

- With regard to comment 15, 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.