Department of Education
Cathleen P. Black, Chancellor

Public Comment Analysis

Date: January 31, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Closure of Academy of Collaborative Education (05M344)

Date of Panel Vote: February 1, 2011

Summary of Proposal

Academy of Collaborative Education (05M344, "A.C.E.") is an existing middle school located at 222 West 134 Street, New York, NY, 10030, in Community School District 5, in Building M092. It currently serves students in sixth through eighth grade. Building M092 also houses P.S. 92 Mary Bethune McLeod ("P.S. 92"), an existing zoned elementary school, St. HOPE Leadership Academy Charter School ("St. HOPE Leadership"), a 5-8 public charter school, and Democracy Prep Harlem Charter School ("Democracy Prep Harlem"), a 6-8 public charter school (that currently serves only sixth grade). The New York City Department of Education ("DOE") is proposing to close A.C.E. 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 approved, A.C.E. would close at the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year. Current students who have not graduated would be offered seats at other District 5 schools, or could apply to charter schools in District 5 or throughout the City. (Students who do not meet promotional requirements following the closure would continue to have access to appropriate courses to support their progress toward promotion. For example, if a current sixth grader does not meet promotion standards to enter seventh grade in 2011-12, he/she may repeat sixth grade at his/her new school).

The DOE's proposal to close A.C.E. at the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year, rather than phase A.C.E. out over two years, is driven by the fact that enrollment at A.C.E. is too low to sustain a two-year phase out. Enrollment at A.C.E as of November 1, 2010 is 13 students in sixth grade, 42 students in seventh grade, and 79 students in eighth grade. Parents of current sixth- and seventh-grade students would be informed about middle school transfer options in Spring 2011. P.S. 92, St. HOPE Leadership, and Democracy Prep Harlem would remain "co-located" after A.C.E. is closed. 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. Once Democracy Prep Harlem has completed its expansion and A.C.E. has closed, there would be approximately 900-930 students served in the building and a utilization of 106-109% of target

capacity. Many buildings operate effectively at above 100% capacity. Utilization above this level is often due to class sizes larger than DOE targets, particularly at charter schools.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at Academy of Collaborative Education on January 12, 2011. At the hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 60 members of the public attended the hearing, 8 people spoke and 6 questions were submitted. Also present at the meeting were Community Education Council 5 President Dianne Johnson, CEC 5 representative Nianette Jackson, ACE SLT representative Mae Ellen Glover, Democracy Prep representative Immanuel George, P.S. 92 SLT Representative Tamika Ingram, St. HOPE Principal Ventura Rodriguez, Deputy Chancellor Kathleen Grimm, District 5 Superintendent Gale Reeves and Deputy Director of the Office of Public Affairs Jenny Sobelman.

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

1. Mae Ellen Glover of the ACE SLT stated that school leadership has faced many challenges; the school was chaotic, there were many fights, and many discipline problems, such as throwing books out of the school's windows. She spoke on behalf of all ACE teachers that they have attended additional professional development workshops and training in behavior management. She expressed the opinion that ACE and Principal Rashaunda Shaw did not fail the community, the DOE failed the community.

2. Dianne Johnson, President of CEC District 5, spoke as an individual member of the CEC, and expressed the opinion that ACE has done the best that it could with their students, and that it is time to make sure that another middle school is placed in District 5.

3. Multiple commenters expressed the opinion that the phase-out of ACE was a "done deal".

4. Multiple commenters said that the school is making progress and needs more time. Commenters expressed the opinion that there are a lot of external factors working against the school's progress and the DOE provides few opportunities for professional development, but that teachers at the school are hard working.

5. A student asked the panel why the State says that ACE is a good school, while the DOE says that the school has not made any progress. She expressed satisfaction with her education at ACE, said that she wants to attend college and that if she was not learning she and her parents would have transferred her out of ACE.

6. Multiple commenters stated that work had been done to improve safety conditions at the school.

7. A commenter expressed the opinion that the prior Board of Education would not have allowed ACE to close, but instead would have provided more support to make the school

successful. The commented further expressed the opinion that the current approach and leadership are focused on a business model instead of an educational model.

8. Multiple commenters asserted that ACE receives numerous low-performing students with severe behavior issues/problems, making safety and discipline a barrier to educating ACE's students.

9. Multiple commenters asserted that the DOE failed to provide the support to work with the school's student population and continued to enroll more students with behavioral issues in the school.

10. One commenter asked why ACE has no vice principal or dean.

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

11. 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 comment 1, the DOE has not asserted that any specific person or group of people has failed the community. In response to the challenges faced at ACE, the DOE offered numerous supports to the school. The support covered needs in the areas of leadership, instruction, operations, student support, and safety and security. Despite such extra support, the school has continued to perform poorly. Details on these supports are provided in the EIS.

With regard to comment 2, there currently are plans to expand the number of middle school seats available in the building following the closure of ACE. Democracy Prep Harlem is an existing public charter school in M092 that currently serves 109 students in sixth grade. As part of its charter, Democracy Prep Harlem is to expand one grade per year until it serves grades six through eight. When Democracy Prep Harlem completes its expansion and achieves "full scale," it will serve approximately 300-325 students at M092.

With regard to comment 3, the decision to implement a proposal is not made until the Panel for Educational Policy votes on the proposal. The PEP's vote for this proposal will take place on February 1, 2011.

With regard to comment 4, the school has performed poorly on its Progress Report score and Quality Review rating as far back as 2007. Based on these low Progress Report scores and low

Quality Review rating, the DOE initiated a comprehensive review of ACE with the goal of determining what intensive supports and interventions would best benefit its students and the community. After completing that review, the DOE believes that only the most serious intervention—the closure of ACE—will address the school's longstanding struggles and allow for new school options to develop in Building M092 that will better serve future students and the broader community. As described in response to comment 1 above, the DOE has provided extensive support to the school in numerous areas of need.

With regard to comment 5, in 2009-2010, only 3% of students were performing on grade level in English—making ACE the second-lowest performing middle school in New York City. Additionally, last year, only 9% of students were performing on grade level in math—making ACE the seventh-lowest performing middle school in New York City. In 2008-2009, performance in math was in the bottom 4% of middle schools in New York City. Such data indicate the school is unable to serve its students properly, regardless of the school's standing as indicated by its State Accountability Status.

With regard to comment 6, the DOE has provided support to ACE regarding the school's safety and security. Nonetheless, the school continues to perform poorly in other areas, and the DOE believes the school's struggles can only be addressed by the most severe interventions, the closure of ACE.

With regard to comment 7, as described in response to comment 1 above, the DOE has provided extensive support to the school in numerous areas of need. Due to the school's inability to turn around—as evidenced by several years of performance ranking among the worst schools in the City—while receiving intensive support, the DOE proposes severe intervention—the school's closure.

With regard to comment 8, while ACE serves a high-needs population—21% of students require special education services and 9% are English language learners—many other schools serve similar populations, achieving drastically different results. For example, from the 40 schools with populations most similar to ACE, one school, I.S. 206 Ann Mercerau, 22% of students require special education services and 34% of students are English language learners. At that school, 42% of students are on grade level in math and 21% are on grade level in English. Though student performance is still not as high as we would like, students at I.S. 206 are nearly four times more likely to be on grade level in math and seven times more likely to be on grade level in English.

With regard to comment 9, the DOE has provided support to ACE for serving its student population, as indicated above in the response to comment 1. Additionally, as indicated above in response to comment 8, many schools serving similar student populations achieve drastically different results. Finally, students with behavioral disabilities as documented by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) participate in the middle school admissions processes in the same manner as their non-disabled peers. Again, as described above in the response to comment 8, many schools serving similar populations, including similar populations of students with documented behavioral disabilities, achieve better different results.

With regard to comment 10, the hiring of vice principals and deans is up to the discretion of the school's principal, as principals decide how to allocate funds from school budgets.

With regard to comment 11, 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 to the proposal were made in response to public feedback.