

Public Comment Analysis¹

Date: March 8, 2013
Topic: The Proposed Opening and Co-location of a New Middle School (23K668) with Existing Schools Riverdale Avenue Community School (23K446), General D. Chappie James Elementary School (23K631), and General D. Chappie Middle School (23K634) in Building K183 Beginning in 2013-2014
Date of Panel Vote: March 11, 2013

Summary of Proposal

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to co-locate a new middle school, 23K668 (“23K668”), in building K183 (“K183”) located at 76 Riverdale Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11212, in Community School District 23 (“District 23”). If this proposal is approved, 23K668 will be co-located in K183 with General D. Chappie James Middle School (23K634, “Chappie James Middle School”), Riverdale Avenue Community School (23K446, “Riverdale Community”) and General D. Chappie James Elementary School (23K631, “Chappie James Elementary School”). Riverdale Community is an existing zoned elementary school serving kindergarten through second grade and that is phasing in to serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade and also offers a pre-kindergarten program. Chappie James Elementary School is an existing elementary school that is currently serving students in third through fifth grade. Chappie James Middle School is an existing middle school serving students in grades six through eight. 23K668 will serve students in sixth through eighth grade at full scale and will admit students through the Middle School Choice Process. If this proposal is approved, 23K668 will begin enrolling sixth grade students in 2013-2014 and will add one grade per year until it is at full scale and serves students in sixth through eighth grade in 2015-2016.

In a separate Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”), published in January 11, 2013, the DOE has proposed to gradually phase out and eventually close Chappie James Middle School because of its low performance and inability to improve quickly to better support student needs. If the phase-out proposal is approved, Chappie James Middle School will no longer admit sixth grade students after the conclusion of the 2012-2013 school year. One grade will then be phased out each subsequent year. During the 2013-2014 school year, Chappie James Middle School will serve students in seventh and eighth grade and, in 2014-2015, it will only serve students in eighth grade. Chappie James Middle School will close after June 2015.

Chappie James Elementary School is in the process of phasing out and currently serves students in third through fifth grades. Chappie James Elementary School will close following the 2014-2015 school year.

On November 16, 2012, the District 23 Community Education Council (“CEC”) approved “unzoning” the middle schools located in the district. Thus, beginning in 2013-2014 fifth grade students will apply for middle school for the 2014-2015 school year through the “Middle School Choice Process” and there will no longer be any zoned middle schools in the district.

¹ The DOE will continue to accept comments concerning this proposal up to 24 hours prior to the Panel for Educational Policy’s (“PEP”) vote on March 11, 2013. Those additional comments will be addressed in an amended Public Comment Analysis which will be provided to the PEP before it votes on this proposal.

Thus, if this proposal is approved, 23K668 will be a District 23 choice middle school that would serve students in sixth through eighth grades. In the 2013-2014 school year, 23K668 will first offer priority to fifth grade students attending or currently zoned to Chappie James Elementary School and will then fill remaining seats through the District 23 Middle School Choice Process. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, 23K668 will be a choice middle school and will no longer offer priority to students who reside in the zone.

According to the 2011-2012 Enrollment, Capacity, Utilization Report (“Blue Book”), K183 has a target capacity of 760 students, but in 2012-2013, the building is serving only 534 students, yielding a building utilization rate of 70%.

If this proposal and the proposal to phase out Chappie James Middle School are approved, in 2015-2016, once Chappie James Middle School has completed its phase-out and 23K668 is at full scale, it is projected that there will be approximately 571-661 students served in K183, thereby yielding a estimated building utilization rate of approximately 75%-87%.

If both proposals are approved, 23K668 will replace the middle school seats that will be lost as a result of the phase-out and eventual closure of Chappie James Middle School and will provide a new educational option for families in District 23.

Summary of Comments Received

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at building K183 on February 20, 2013. Members of the School Leadership Team (“SLT”) from every school organization in the K183 building were invited to participate. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. While representatives from the Citywide Council for Special Education and Citywide Council for English Language Learners were invited, not all chose to participate in the hearing. Approximately 27 members of the public attended the hearing and 4 people spoke. Present at the meeting were: Deputy Chancellor Dorita Gibson; Senior Superintendent Lauren Feijoo; Community Education Council (“CEC”) 23 Member Sherry Ann Farrell; Principal Kierstan Ward, Principal of General D. Chappie James Middle School of Science; Chappie James Middle School SLT Representative Reginald King; Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (“CSA”) Representative Mildred Boyce; United Federation of Teachers (“UFT”) Representative Ualin Smith.

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

1. SLT Member and Parent Teachers Association President Reginald King expressed his opposition to the proposed replacement of Chappie James Middle School with a new middle school:
 - a. Mr. King questioned whether the new school will lead to better results than Chappie James Middle School.
2. UFT Representative, Ualin Smith, expressed her opposition to the proposed replacement of Chappie James Middle School with a new middle school:
 - a. Ms. Smith stated that there needed to be a plan to make the new school more effective.
3. CSA Representative, Mildred Boyce, expressed her opposition to the proposed replacement of Chappie James Middle School with a new middle school:
 - a. Ms. Boyce expressed concern that the new school would not do anything different from Chappie James Middle School and therefore would not create better results.
4. One commenter stated that a fourth school would result in too many schools in one building.

The DOE received a comment which does not directly relate to the proposal. That comment is summarized below.

5. One commenter stated that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. He expressed his belief that the proposal to replace Chappie James Middle School with a new school was insanity.

The following question was received during the Question & Answer period.

6. Is there enough space in the building for all four schools next year?

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

Comments 1(a), 2(a) and 3(a) question whether replacing Chappie James Middle School with a new school will create better results.

The DOE believes that closing a struggling school and opening a new school with new leaders and staff is a successful strategy to provide all students with an excellent education. To ensure that as many students as possible have access to the best possible education, under this Administration New York City has replaced 142 of the lowest-performing schools with better options and opened 576 new schools: 427 districts schools and 149 public charter schools. The new schools have outperformed schools in phase out both in ELA and Math in grades three through eight by wide margins. In ELA, new schools had 14.2 percentage points higher proficiency than schools in phase out, with 37.7% proficient in new schools and only 23.5% in schools in phase out in 2012. In Math, new schools had 23.2 percentage points higher proficiency than schools in phase out, with 50.8% proficient in new schools and only 27.6% in schools in phase out in 2012.

The DOE counts on each of its schools to provide a high-quality education to its students—and the DOE holds all schools to the same high standard. If a school is not getting the job done for its students, the DOE is compelled to take serious action to ensure its students don't fall even further behind.

Of course, struggling schools must be given a real shot to improve. But if the school continues to fail after receiving additional support, the DOE must make the incredibly difficult decision to replace the failing school with a new option.

Comments 4 and 6 concern the space changes that will result when the new middle school begins to phase in and whether all four schools will have enough space.

There will be sufficient space to serve all school organizations in building K183 pursuant to the Citywide Instructional Footprint (the "Footprint"). There are currently hundreds of schools in buildings across the City that are co-located; some of these co-locations involve multiple DOE schools while others are DOE and public charter schools sharing space. In all cases, the allocation of classroom, resource, and administrative space is guided by the Footprint which is applied to all schools in the building. The DOE seeks to fully utilize all its building capacity to serve students. The DOE does not distinguish between students attending public charter schools and students attending district schools. In all cases, the DOE seeks to provide high quality education and allow parents/students to choose where to attend school.

The Footprint is the guide used to allocate space to all schools based on the number of class sections the school programs and the grade levels of the school. The number of class sections at each school is determined by the Principal based on enrollment, budget, and student needs; there is a standard guideline of target class size (i.e., number of students in a class section) for each grade level. At the middle school and high school levels, the Footprint assumes every classroom is programmed during every period of the school day except one lunch period. The full text of the Instructional Footprint is available at http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/78D715EA-EC50-4AD1-82D1-1CAC544F5D30/0/DOEFOOTPRINTSConsolidatedVersion2011_FINAL.pdf.

During and after all schools in the building are fully phased in or have completed phasing out, each school will receive its baseline footprint allocation which indicates that there is enough room in the building to support all four schools. There will also be excess space in the building. The Office of Space Planning will work with the Building Council to ensure an equitable allocation of the excess space. In determining an equitable allocation, the Office of Space Planning may consider factors such as the relative enrollments of the co-located schools, the instructional and programmatic needs of the co-located schools, and the physical location of the excess space within the building.

Furthermore, the utilization of building K183 is currently 70%. During the first year of the proposed phase out of Chappie James Middle School, the utilization of the building will be between 69%-80%. Once all schools in the building are fully phased in or have completed phasing out, utilization in the building will be between 75%-87%. This means that K183 has adequate capacity to all of the schools in the building and that there will be sufficient space to accommodate an increase in student enrollment if demand is above the current projections for the new school.

Comment 5 does not directly relate to the proposal and does not require a response.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes were made to the proposal.