



Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor

Public Comment Analysis

Date: June 18, 2013

Topic: **The Proposed Grade Truncation of P.S. 360 (10X360) to a K-5 School in 2014-2015**

Date of Panel Vote: June 19, 2013

Summary of Proposal

P.S. 360 (10X360, “P.S. 360”) is an existing zoned elementary school located in building X360, at 2880 Kingsbridge Terrace, Bronx, NY 10463, in Community School District 10 (“District 10”). It currently serves students in kindergarten through sixth grades and offers a full-day pre-kindergarten program. P.S. 360 is currently the only school located in building X360.

On May 2, 2013, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) issued an Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) describing a proposal to implement a “grade truncation” at P.S. 360, meaning that the school will no longer enroll sixth-graders at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year. If that proposal is approved, at the close of the 2013-2014 school year, all fifth- and sixth-grade students who meet promotional standards will graduate from P.S. 360. During the 2013-2014 school year, P.S. 360 fifth- and sixth-grade students will participate in the District 9 and 10 Middle School Choice Process. In September 2014, P.S. 360’s fifth- and sixth-grade students will enter middle school elsewhere as sixth- and seventh-graders, respectively. Beginning in September 2014, P.S. 360 will only serve students in kindergarten through fifth grades and will continue to offer a pre-kindergarten program (subject to continued funding and demand).

Middle schools typically enroll students beginning in sixth grade, and P.S. 360 students already have the option to apply to middle school during their fifth-grade year. However, P.S. 360 students who wait until sixth grade to apply to middle school are limited to those schools that still have available seventh-grade seats. There are several middle schools in Districts 9 and 10 that rarely have seventh-grade seats open because those seats become available only if sixth-grade students leave the school. As a result, students who remain at P.S. 360 through sixth grade have fewer options than their peers who start middle school a year earlier.

Moreover, P.S. 360 students who start middle school in seventh grade may face transitional challenges related to entering middle school a year later than most of their classmates. They remain in their new middle school for only two years before moving on to high school, leaving them with less time to adjust to a new school environment and new academic expectations before facing another transition and adjustment. Multiple transitions in such close succession can have the effect of depersonalizing the school experience at a time when adolescents tend to need the most personal and supportive environments. Having students start middle school through multiple entry grades (sixth and seventh) is also challenging for middle school teachers from an instructional perspective and for the middle schools as a whole.

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) strives to ensure that all students in New York City have access to high-quality schools at every stage of their education. Having elementary schools that end in different grades (i.e., K-5 versus K-6) creates unequal levels of access to middle school for students based simply on the year they exit elementary school, as well as unnecessary administrative challenges for both the K-6 elementary schools and the middle schools that receive their students through multiple entry grades. P.S. 360 is one of three schools in District 10 that serve students in kindergarten through sixth grades. In a separate Educational Impact Statement that can be found at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2012-2013/June2013Proposals.htm>, the DOE, in collaboration with the school administration, is also proposing to truncate the sixth grade of one of the other two schools, P.S. 340 (10X340, “P.S. 340”), for the start of the 2014-2015 school year. Collectively, these proposed grade truncations will help standardize the middle school application and entry grades in District 10, giving all P.S. 360 and P.S. 340 students access to the same range of middle school options as their peers throughout the District. This proposal is being initiated at the request of P.S. 360 leadership.

Changing P.S. 360’s grade span from K-6 to K-5 will reduce the school’s enrollment by approximately 65-75 sixth grade students, freeing up additional space that P.S. 360 could use to accommodate additional lower-grade students or to meet other needs (e.g., art room, resource center, etc.). This will be particularly useful for P.S. 360, since it has seen an increase in its kindergarten enrollment in each year since the 2007-2008 school year.

The EIS for this proposal can be accessed here:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2012-2013/June2013Proposals.htm>.

Copies of the EIS are also available in the main office of P.S. 360.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at the X360 building on June 4, 2013. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 19 members of the public attended the hearing, and 4 people spoke. Present at the meeting were P.S. 360 Principal Nancy Rodriguez-Lewis; P.S. 360 School Leadership Team (“SLT”) representatives Chairperson Denise Scarano, Renee Padmore (who is also the Parent Association President), Digeda Perez, Iris Aldea-Pollack, Elizabeth Dejean, Clara Kaplan, Minerva Rojas Polite, Risi Bisono, Laure Sambolia, and Nancy Soria; District 10 Interim Acting Community Superintendent Melodie Mashel; Community Education Council (“CEC”) 10 President Marvin Shelton; Community Liaison for Drew Gabriel, from Councilman G. Oliver Koppell’s Office; along with Henry Bluestone Smith and Jean-Pierre Jacquet from the DOE’s Division of Portfolio Planning.

The following questions, comments, and remarks were made at the Joint Public Hearing

- 1) Principal Nancy Rodriguez-Lewis voiced her support for the proposal. In recent years she has seen a decrease in seventh-grade middle school seat options for sixth-grade graduates of P.S. 360. The truncation will allow graduates of P.S. 360 equal access to middle school opportunities as other District 10 students.
- 2) Denise Scarano, the Chairperson of P.S. 360’s SLT, supports the proposed truncation because:
 - a) Transitioning into middle school at the same time as their peers will support the healthy social emotional development of P.S. 360 graduates.
 - b) Several former P.S. 360 graduates, who entered middle school in seventh-grade, had complained to her that they felt like outsiders and were less likely to participate in co-curricular activities during their middle school years.

- 3) Renee Padmore, a member of P.S. 360’s SLT and Parent Association President expressed her belief that students will be better prepared for their transition to high school if they have a three-year middle school experience.
- 4) Marvin Shelton, CEC 10 President, expressed his concerns about the availability of middle school seats since:
 - a) Next year P.S. 360 is expecting 59 sixth-grade students and P.S. 340 is expecting 14 sixth-graders.
 - b) The DOE is seeking to expand the size of P721X@X368, an existing District 75 (“D75”) program which is co-located with In-Tech Academy (10X368, “In-Tech”). In-Tech is the zoned middle school for some of the students at P.S. 360.
 - c) In-Tech is at 116% capacity, and Leadership and Journalism are at 100% capacity.
 - d) A number of District 10 middle school seats do not offer unscreened seats.

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

The DOE received one written comment and no messages via voicemail concerning this proposal.

- 5) Council Member G. Oliver Koppell submitted the following statements.
 - a) He affirmed his understanding of the advantages of allowing students to graduate in the fifth rather than the sixth grade.
 - b) He expressed concern that local middle schools such as In-Tech Academy, PS 95 Sheila Mencher (10X095, “P.S. 95”), and Leadership and Journalism will not have room to support an influx of sixth and seventh graders in September 2014.
 - c) He sought more information about the DOE’s plans to handle the potential overflow of students at area middle schools.

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

Comments 1, 2(a), 2(b), and 3 express support for the truncation proposal and do not require a response.

Comments 4(a)-4(d) and 5(a)-5(b) express concern about the availability of middle school seats in District 10, and specifically suggest that In-Tech Academy, PS 95, and Leadership and Journalism may be negatively impacted by this proposal because they do not have the space to serve an influx of sixth- and seventh-grade students in September 2014 who had previously attended P.S. 360.

District 10 currently shares a Middle School Choice Process with District 9, which means that District 9 and District 10 students have preference for choice schools and programs in both districts, although District 9 students retain priority over District 9 seats and District 10 students retain priority over District 10 seats. Fifth-grade students who meet promotional standards and live within either district are eligible to apply to any District 9 or 10 choice middle school. Students rank their preferences from among the District 9 and District 10 choice middle schools and programs, as well as their zoned option. These options include:

- Choice middle schools or programs with a screened application process (admission is based on criteria designated by the school);
- Choice middle schools or programs with an unscreened or limited unscreened application process (limited unscreened schools admit students on the same basis as unscreened schools, except that they give preference to students who have attended a school information session);

- Zoned middle schools and campus choice middle schools (multiple schools in one campus collectively serving a zone);
- K-8 schools with an unscreened application process that have available seats for middle school students;
- 6-12 schools with an unscreened, limited unscreened, or screened application process for middle school students.

Students may also choose to apply to a number of schools that manage their own admissions process. In this way, the DOE is able to offer individual students the widest breadth of options across a large number of schools.

The DOE believes that while some students and families will choose to attend their zoned middle school for sixth grade, as they currently do for seventh grade, many will exercise choice given the greater number of middle school program options available to graduating fifth-grade students in District 10. It is therefore unlikely that In-Tech Academy, PS 95 or Leadership and Journalism, will experience a significant increase in middle school applicants, as the number of additional students will be spread across many schools. Moreover, as stated in the EIS, District 10 has a projected excess capacity of 239 sixth-grade seats during the 2014-2015 school year.¹ Total sixth-grade seat capacity excludes sixth-grade seats at schools that have been approved or proposed for closure. Total sixth-grade seat capacity includes sixth-grade seats at approved or proposed new schools, as well as sixth-grade seats at schools expanding to serve middle school grades beginning in 2014-2015. Note this total sixth-grade seat capacity excludes sixth-grade seats at K-6 schools because historical trends indicate that fifth-graders that attended a truncated K-6 school would not articulate into another K-6 school for sixth grade, so those seats generally do not represent real options for sixth grade.

Currently In-Tech Academy operates in a building with a utilization rate of 109%, PS 95's building has a utilization rate of 98%, and Leadership and Journalism's building has a utilization rate of 104%. Although a utilization rate in excess of 100% may suggest that a building will be over-utilized or over-crowded in a given year, this rate does not account for the fact that rooms may be programmed for more efficient or different uses than the standard assumptions in the utilization calculation to accommodate more students. Decisions on how to program classes are left to the discretion of the principal.

Moreover, it is important to note that only portions of students living in the P.S. 360 zone are zoned to In-Tech Academy, PS 95, or Leadership and Journalism for middle school. In-Tech Academy, PS 95 and Leadership and Journalism currently enroll many students who do not reside in the zone. If additional zoned students choose to enroll as a result of this proposal, they would be prioritized ahead of students who do not reside in its zone, according to Chancellor's Regulation A-101, which can be found at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/ChancellorsRegulations/default.htm>.

In specific response to comment 5(c), schools may submit a request to cap zoned enrollment if all classes on a grade level reach the maximum class size as set forth in the United Federation of Teachers contract and the school does not have sufficient space to program an additional class section in that grade. This proposal will not impact the In-Tech Academy, PS 95, or Leadership and Journalism respective administrations' ability to request a cap.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to the proposal.

¹ Total sixth-grade seat capacity excludes sixth-grade seats at schools that have been approved or proposed for closure. Total sixth-grade seat capacity includes sixth-grade seats at approved or proposed new schools, as well as sixth-grade seats at schools expanding to serve middle school grades beginning in 2014-2015.