



Public Comment Analysis

Date: June 18, 2013

Topic: The Proposed Grade Truncation of P.S. 229 Emanuel Kaplan School (24Q229) to a K-5 School in 2014-2015

Date of Panel Vote: June 19, 2013

Summary of Proposal

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to implement a “grade truncation” of the sixth grade of P.S. 229 Emanuel Kaplan (24Q229, “P.S. 229”). P.S. 229 is an existing zoned elementary school located in building Q229, at 67-25 51 Road, Queens, NY 11377, in Community School District 24. It currently serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade and a pre-kindergarten program. P.S. 229 is the only school located in building Q229.

If this proposal is approved, P.S. 229 would no longer offer the option to enroll sixth grade students after the 2013-2014 school year. Beginning in September 2014, P.S. 229 would only serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade and a pre-kindergarten program, subject to funding and demand. If this proposal is approved, at the close of the 2013-2014 school year, all fifth grade students who meet promotional standards from P.S. 229 would enter middle school as sixth grade students.

Middle schools typically enroll students beginning in sixth grade, and P.S. 229 students already have had the option to apply to middle school as fifth grade students. However, if P.S. 229 continues to offer the option of remaining for sixth grade, the students who wait until sixth grade to apply to middle school are limited to those schools that still have available seventh grade seats. In particular, there are several choice middle schools in District 24, Queens, and city-wide that rarely have open seventh grade seats because seats become available only if sixth-grade students leave the school. As a result, students who would remain at P.S. 229 through sixth grade, if this proposal is not implemented, would have fewer opportunities to enter those choice middle schools than their peers who start middle school a year earlier.

The 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.

This proposed grade truncation will help standardize the middle school application and entry grades in District 24, giving all P.S. 229 students access to the same range of middle school options as their peers throughout the District. Additionally, having students start middle school through multiple entry grades (sixth and seventh) creates challenges for students and the school as a whole.

P.S. 229 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 enter in multiple years is also challenging for middle school teachers and leadership from an instructional perspective. Further, by entering middle school in sixth grade rather than in seventh grade, students at P.S. 229 will have more opportunities to take advantage of the enriching, high-school preparatory experiences offered at middle schools.

Finally, truncating P.S. 229's grade span from K-6 to K-5 would reduce the school's sixth grade enrollment by approximately 175-185 seats, freeing up additional space that P.S. 229 could use to accommodate additional lower-grade students or to meet other instructional and programming needs. P.S. 229 is also overcrowded, and truncating P.S. 229's sixth grade will reduce the building's utilization rate and alleviate overcrowding.

The details of this proposal have been released in an Educational Impact Statement ("EIS"), which 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. 229.

Summary of Comments Received

A joint public hearing regarding the proposal was held at P.S. 229 on June 3, 2013. At the hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 40 members of the public attended the hearing and 1 person spoke. Present at that meeting were District 24 Community Superintendent Madelene Chan; District 24 Community Education Council ("CEC 24") representative Connie Partinico; Sibylle Ajwani, Principal of P.S. 229; Evelyn Vera, Yvonne English, Loretta Tumbarello, Sarah Lee, Debbie Scaturico, Sinead Kiernan, Maegan Garvey, and Maria Centeno representing the P.S. 229 School Leadership Team; and Jillian Roland from the Office of Portfolio Management.

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

1. One commenter expressed thoughts about the proposal:
 - a. The commenter expressed that, although she supports the proposal because P.S. 229 is overcrowded and because District 24 has good middle schools, she likes the K-6 model and the DOE does not have any research about the best grade configuration.
 - b. The commenter asked why truncation is rushed at this school and why nearby K-6 schools P.S. 58 and P.S. 153 are not truncating.
 - c. The commenter expressed concern that P.S. 229 would admit out-of-zone students from nearby K-6 schools to its pre-kindergarten program, and that additional pre-kindergarten seats at P.S. 229 are not guaranteed.

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

2. The DOE received one call expressing opposition to the truncation.

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

- Comment 1(a) expresses support for the proposal but expresses concerns about the rationale for truncation.

As mentioned in the EIS, the 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.

This proposed grade truncation will help standardize the middle school application and entry grades in District 24, giving all P.S. 229 students access to the same range of middle school options as their peers throughout the District. Additionally, P.S. 229 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 enter in multiple years is also challenging for middle school teachers and leadership from an instructional perspective. Further, by entering middle school in sixth grade rather than in seventh grade, students at P.S. 229 will have more opportunities to take advantage of the enriching, high-school preparatory experiences offered at middle schools.

As acknowledged by the commenter, P.S. 229's enrollment has increased over the past five years and truncating P.S. 229's sixth grade will reduce the building's utilization rate and help alleviate overcrowding. In 2013-2014, P.S. 229 is projected

to serve a total of 1,503-1,573 students, yielding a building utilization rate of 125%-131%. If this proposal is approved and fifth grade students are no longer given the option of staying for sixth grade at P.S. 229 in 2014-2015, P.S. 229 would serve approximately 1,333-1,393 students in kindergarten through fifth grade and a pre-kindergarten program (subject to funding and demand) which would yield an estimated building utilization rate of 111%-116%. Truncating P.S. 229's grade span from K-6 to K-5 would reduce the school's enrollment by approximately 175-185 seats, freeing up additional space that P.S. 229 could use to accommodate additional lower-grade students or to meet other instructional and programming needs.

- Comment 1(b) concerns the timeline for the proposal and asks why nearby elementary schools are not truncating.

Throughout the Spring of 2013, the DOE has engaged with the PS 229 community among other K-6 communities throughout the city regarding the possibility of truncation for 2014. Based on initial conversations, the DOE has moved forward with some proposals, and not with others. Ultimately, the decision to move forward is a collaborative decision made with the DOE and school leadership. The DOE is open to continuing conversations with the P.S. 58 and P.S. 153 communities regarding the possibility of truncation at a future date.

During the joint public hearing, District 24 Community Superintendent Madelene Chan stated that the decision to move forward with the P.S. 229 truncation proposal was a community decision, and that P.S. 153 and P.S. 58 continue to discuss this possibility.

- Comment 1(c) concerns P.S. 229's pre-kindergarten program and whether P.S. 229 would admit out-of-zone students from nearby K-6 schools to its pre-kindergarten program.

In the fall of 2012, P.S. 229 requested to move two pre-kindergarten sections to another school for 2013 due to space constraints. While the DOE has noted that there may be space at P.S. 229 in the future for pre-kindergarten sections, this is dependent on availability of funding and demand. Schools applied in the fall of 2012-2013 for new pre-kindergarten seats, and new pre-kindergarten sites were identified based on a number of factors including space availability, quality of the proposal, and community need.

Even if schools take overflow from other schools, this would never be at the expense of their own zoned students. Students residing within the P.S. 229 zone continue to have priority over non-zoned students to the school.

- Comment 2 expresses opposition to the truncation.

Ultimately, the decision to move forward with a truncation proposal is a collaborative decision made with the DOE and school leadership. As mentioned at the P.S. 229 hearing, P.S. 229 has seen increasing kindergarten enrollment and building

utilization, and given this as well as the other reasons regarding the educational benefits of truncation described above, the P.S. 229 School Leadership Team agreed that truncation is the best decision for the P.S. 229 community.

The approval of this proposal is subject to a Panel for Educational Policy vote on June 19, 2013.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to this proposal.