Department of Education
Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

Public Comment Analysis

Date: June 18, 2013

Topic: The Proposed Opening and Co-location of a New District Middle School (02M177) with Existing School P.S. 158 Bayard Taylor (02M158) in Building M158 Beginning in the 2014-2015 School Year

Date of Panel Vote: June 19, 2013

Summary of Proposal

The New York City Department of Education ("DOE") is proposing to co-locate a new district middle school (02M177, "New Middle School") in building M158 ("M158") located at 1458 York Avenue, Manhattan, NY 10075, in Community School District 2 ("District 2"). If this proposal is approved, New Middle School will be co-located in building M158 with P.S. 158 Bayard Taylor (02M158, "P.S. 158"), an existing zoned elementary school that currently serves kindergarten through fifth-grade students. P.S. 158 also offers two sections of a full-day pre-kindergarten program.

P.S. 158 is the only school organization currently in building M158.

If this proposal is approved, New Middle School will open in M158 in September 2014 and will admit students through the District 2 Middle School Choice Process. Fifty percent of the available seats at New Middle School will be filled through a screened admissions method and 50% of the seats will be filled through a limited unscreened admissions method. New Middle School will begin enrolling sixth-grade students in 2014-2015 and will add one grade per year until it has reached full scale and serves students in grades six through eight in 2016-2017.

According to the 2011-2012 Enrollment, Capacity, Utilization Report ("Blue Book"), building M158 has a target capacity to serve 957 students. In 2012-2013 the building is serving only 775 students, yielding a building utilization rate of 81%.

In 2016-2017, once New Middle School has reached full scale, it is projected that there will be approximately 1,081-1,171 students served in M158, thereby yielding an estimated building utilization rate of approximately 113%-122%.

The DOE, in collaboration with community members, supports the co-location of New Middle School in M158. This proposal is intended to increase the number of middle school options in District 2.

Summary of Comments Received

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A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at building M158 on June 4, 2013. At that hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 82 members of the public attended the hearing, and 33 people spoke. Present at the meeting were Elaine Gorman, facilitator; Mariano Guzman, superintendent of District 2; Simon Miller, Elizabeth Weiss, Beth Cirone, and Eric Goldberg of the Community Education Council of District 2 ("CEC 2"); Todd Helmrich, School Leadership Team ("SLT") member of P.S. 158; and Jennifer Peng, of the Office of Portfolio Management. Below is a summary of the comments received:

1. Simon Miller, CEC 2 member, asserted the following:
    a. Co-location is always a tricky process. There is an advantage to this co-location, since there was a middle school in this building in past years.
    b. Additional middle school seats are a positive thing for District 2.
    c. The CEC 2 was present at the hearing to discuss is the admissions criteria for New Middle School.
2. Elizabeth Weiss, CEC 2 member, stated that CEC 2 does not have a cohesive agenda or perspective on how to move forward.
3. Beth Cirone, CEC 2 member, stated that the purpose of the hearing is to allow people to comment on the proposal. She also noted that a good school comes from a good leader and people willing to work together.
4. Todd Helmrich, SLT member of P.S. 158, asserted the following:
    a. Long-term success of a school is indicated by demand - having three schools on the Upper East Side that kids are lined up to get into suggests that there is a large demand for middle schools on the Upper East Side.
    b. He does not believe that the 50% screened and 50% limited unscreened method will create a school in which students will pick this school as their first choice on a District 2 middle school choice application.
    c. Choosing 02M177 on the middle school application will penalize students who choose it as their first choice. A student has the choice #1 to attend through a screened seat. Choice #2 would want to come here through an limited unscreened seat. Helmrich asserted that the chances of a student getting in to New Middle School are very small because there are only 85 sixth grade seats per year. The Upper East Side schools that students want to go to do not accept those students who have picked it as a third choice. Therefore, this new middle school will penalize students.
5. A representative from Assembly Member Micah Kellner's office stated that Assembly Member Kellner was in support of a 100% screened middle school.
6. Multiple public commenters asserted that the school should be fully limited unscreened. They gave the following reasons:
    a. Middle school is too early an age to begin screening for test scores.
    b. The majority of the Upper East Side middle schools are already screened.
    c. Some parents have already gone through the screening processes for nursery school and middle school, and do not want to have another screened option.
    d. A screen is meant to screen students out of a school.

7. Multiple public commenters asserted that:
    a. The admissions model in which 50% of students are admitted through a screened process and 50% of students are admitted through a limited unscreened process is untested and sets the school up for a lack of unity and a lack of vision.
    b. Screening does not have to be about test scores.
    c. All families have expressed that they want schools to be screened.
    d. The logistics of two admissions methods will place an additional burden on the principal.
    e. Without a screen (i.e. using only a lottery system), there is no ability to control what kind of kids will enroll in New Middle School. Half of the students will get in purely on luck, and these students will impede the success of the school.
    f. Unless this school is screened, there will be too few screened seats to serve the demand of the Upper East Side.
    g. East Side Middle School was co-located with P.S. 158 and is a screened school, as it was during its co-location with P.S. 158. History shows that this type of positive co-location should be repeated.
    h. A diverse community is desired and five commenters asserted that they do not think that a lottery can provide that.
    i. A rigorous application process is the reality of school on the Upper East Side. A sign-up sheet should not be used for 50% of the seats at the new middle school.
    j. A lottery does nothing to indicate that the student is interested in the school. The proposed admissions process in which 50% of students are admitted through a screened process and 50% of students are admitted through a limited unscreened process is not an educational solution. Parents may not understand how to apply to the school. A 100% screened school seems like a safer way to ensure an overall positive building and to have the school be a neighborhood school.
    k. Parents have not seen convincing data on the success of hybrid admissions methods such as the one proposed for the new middle school.
8. One commenter asserted the following:
    a. The proposed admissions model is sound, as any screening, even if not based on test scores, is very subjective.
    b. Parents have been told that there would be safety concerns at P.S. 158 if the new middle school were to be a limited unscreened school, though the commenter did not believe that to be true.
    c. The 50/50 model will allow for some element of fairness and transparency while still allowing the principal to have some control over the makeup of the school. The commenter appreciated this.
    d. The key to a successful school is a great principal, great teachers and great curriculum.

The DOE received 511 comments through its feedback email address.

9. 498 comments asserted that community demand is for a 100% screened school and not for a limited unscreened or 50% screened and 50% limited unscreened method.
10. Six comments asserted that families need a 100% limited unscreened school.

11. Five comments expressed support for the proposal.
12. Two comments suggested a different seat ratio for the limited unscreened to screened admissions methods.

The DOE received two comments through its feedback phone number.

13. Two comments expressed support for the proposal and noted that a strong leader and good curriculum will ensure the success of the school.

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

Comments 8a-d, 11, and 13 are in support of this proposal and do not require a response.

Comments 1a-c, 2, and 3 refer to the CEC 2's hope for a constructive hearing and do not require a response.

Comments 4a-b, 5, 6a-d, 9, 10, and 12 concern the proposed admissions method for the new middle school.

The DOE expects and anticipates that the school communities of P.S. 158, the new middle school, and the community schools nearby will work collaboratively throughout the opening and phase-in of the new middle school. Although much public feedback has been collected demanding that New Middle School be 100% screened, many families also expressed a wish for the school to be 100% limited unscreened, as evidenced by comments 6a-d, 8a-d, 11, and 13.

New Middle School's proposed admissions method of 50% screened and 50% limited unscreened would allow all parents to apply to New Middle School through the admission method that they think best for their child.

Comment 4c concerns the proposed admissions process as it pertains to the logistics of parents applying to the school.

Families should rank New Middle School on the District 2 middle school choice application in the order in which they would like to attend that school as compared to their other options.

Comments 7e and 8b concern the proposed admissions process as it pertains to safety and positive culture in a school.

The DOE does not see a correlation between admissions methods for schools and the level of safety or positivity that exists within a school. With respect to safety, pursuant to Chancellor's Regulation A-414, every school/campus is mandated to form a School Safety Committee ("the Committee"), which is responsible for developing a comprehensive School Safety Plan that defines the normal operations of the site and what procedures are in place in the event of an emergency. The School Safety Plan is updated annually by the Committee to meet changing

security needs, changes in organization and building conditions, and any other relevant factors. Updates to the School Safety Plan could also be made at any other time when it is necessary to address security concerns. The Committee will also address safety matters on an ongoing basis and make appropriate recommendations to the principal(s) when it identifies the need for additional security measures. The leadership and staff of schools City-wide work to achieve positive school environments in which students can learn and thrive; admissions methods neither assist nor prevent schools from doing so. Due to space limitations, it is not unusual for varying grade levels to be co-located together. There are many successful examples of K-8, and K-12 buildings or campuses in New York City.

Comments 7a-d, f-k assert that the proposed admissions method will negatively impact the vision, operations, and ultimate success of the school.

Strong leadership, a dedicated support team and staff, a robust curriculum, solid instruction, and a collaborative and supportive parent body are paramount to a successful school. The DOE is confident New Middle School's principal will be able to create a successful school that is neither defined nor limited by its admission method.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes have been made to this proposal.