

Public Comment Analysis

Date: November 24, 2014

Topic: The Proposed Grade Expansion of P.S. 305 Learners and Leaders (24Q305) from a K-3 to a K-5 School, and the Partial Re-Siting of P.S. 305 Learners and Leaders to Building Q320, Beginning in the 2015-2016 School Year

Date of Panel Vote: November 25, 2014

Summary of Proposal

On October 8, 2014, the New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) issued an Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) describing a proposal to expand P.S 305 Learners and Leaders (24Q305, “Learners and Leaders”) and partially re-site a portion of Learners and Leaders, beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. Learners and Leaders currently serves students in kindergarten through third grade. This requires students to attend another school for fourth and fifth grades before beginning middle school in sixth grade. Under this proposal, Learners and Leaders will expand to serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade, a portion of who will be served in new building Q320. Students who transition to another school in fourth grade will remain in their new school for only two years before moving on to middle school, leaving them with very little time to adjust to a new school environment and new academic expectations before facing another transition and adjustment. This community-initiated proposal is intended to create a more stable environment for students by reducing the number of transitions students must make in their formative years. Additionally, this proposal creates additional elementary school capacity in District 24, a historically over-crowded district.

Learners and Leaders is an existing zoned Early Childhood Center (“ECC”) currently located in building Q245 (“Q245”) at 378 Seneca Avenue, Queens, New York 11385, in Community School District 24 (“District 24”). Learners and Leaders currently enrolls students in kindergarten through third grade and shares a zone with P.S. 81 Jean Paul Richter (24Q081, “P.S. 81”), a zoned elementary school serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

The School Construction Authority (“SCA”) is constructing building Q320 (“Q320”) located approximately 150 feet from Q245 at 360 Seneca Avenue, Queens, New York 11385. Q320 has been designed to serve students in elementary school grades and is expected to be ready for occupancy by the 2015-2016 school year. A “re-siting” means that students will attend classes in a different building than the one in which they attended classes the previous year. If this proposal is approved, a portion of Learners and Leaders will be re-sited to Q320 and the school will grow to utilize both Q245 and Q320 beginning in the 2015-2016 school year.

This is a proposal to implement a “grade expansion” and a partial re-siting whereby a portion of Learners and Leaders will be re-sited from Q245 to Q320 prior to the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year. At Q245 and Q320, Learners and Leaders will gradually grow to serve students in kindergarten through fifth grade beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. If this proposal is approved by the Panel for Educational Policy (“PEP”), Learners and Leaders will enroll its first fourth grade cohort in September 2015 during the school’s first year in building Q320.

The proposal to expand Learners and Leaders was initiated by the school community. In Fall 2013, Learners and Leaders’ leadership team submitted an application for a grade expansion. The application included the principal’s rationale for expansion, which cited evidence of Learners and Leaders’ academic success, and a letter of support from Learners and Leaders’ network leader. That application was further supported by parents, the broader school community, the Community Educational Council of District 24 (“CEC”), and multiple elected officials. This

suggests a high level of satisfaction within the school, its parent body and the broader community, and the expectation that an expanded Learners and Leaders will meet the needs of children. Based on the school's record of academic success, additional capacity created by the new Q320 building, and vast community support, the DOE approved Learners and Leaders' grade expansion request, pending approval of this proposal by the PEP.

The DOE strives to increase quality options for students. As part of the provisional approval process, the DOE evaluates each school's instructional capacity to serve the expanded school level by working in close collaboration with the superintendent to develop clear benchmarks focused in multiple areas, including curriculum, instructional leadership, and staff and family engagement to demonstrate the school's capacity to expand.

If the expansion is not implemented, the DOE may propose an alternate use of space in Q320 that involves a significant change in school utilization, which would be the subject of a future Educational Impact Statement ("EIS") in accordance with Chancellor's Regulation A-190. For the purposes of this proposal, it is assumed that Learners and Leaders will be able to expand its grade levels from K-3 to K-5. This proposed partial re-siting will provide Learners and Leaders with facilities that are fully functionally accessible.

On October 22, 2013, the CEC approved a plan to rezone the elementary school zone Learners and Leaders shares with P.S. 81. If this proposal to expand and re-site a portion of Learners and Leaders is approved, Learners and Leaders will enroll larger cohorts of incoming kindergarten students beginning in September 2015. This proposal will create much-needed additional elementary school capacity for students in District 24.

If this proposal is approved, Learners and Leaders will begin serving students in fourth grade in the 2015-2016 school year and will serve students across buildings Q245 and Q320. Learners and Leaders will expand gradually, adding one grade level each year over a two-year period. The school will reach its full grade span in the 2016-2017 school year with 631– 691 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Since Learners and Leaders will begin enrolling larger cohorts of incoming kindergarten students in the 2015-2016 school year, the school will reach stable enrollment in 2020-2021 with 756 – 816 students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Buildings Q245 and Q320 have a combined target capacity of 782 students. If this proposal is approved, in the 2020-2021 school year, when Learners and Leaders reaches full scale and stable enrollment across the two buildings, Learners and Leaders will enroll 756 – 816 students, yielding a combined projected building utilization rate of approximately 97% – 104%.

Thus, the DOE believes that there is sufficient space to accommodate Learners and Leaders' kindergarten through fifth grade in buildings Q245 and Q320, if this proposal is approved.

Building Q245 also houses a community-based organization ("CBO"), YMCA Ridgewood, which provides services to the Learners and Leaders community. This proposal is not expected to impact the continued siting of this program in Q245.

The details of this proposal have been released in an EIS which can be accessed here:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2014-2015/November2014SchoolProposals>.

Copies of the EIS are also available in Learners and Leaders' main office.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at the Q305 building on November 10, 2014. Approximately 150 members of the public attended the hearing and 92 people spoke. Present at the meeting were District 24 Community Superintendent Madelene Chan; Community Education Council 24 ("CEC 24") member Carl Chiamonte; CEC 24 Administrative Assistant Patricia Safina; Principal of P.S. 305 Learners and Leaders Lynn Botfeld; P.S. 305 Learners and Leaders School Leadership Team ("SLT") representatives Marlene Feliciano,

Deborah Sherlock, Geovanna Jerez, Nicholas Bologna, Paul Verdesoto, Jomayra Rodriguez, and Michelle Lopez; Katie Jedrlinic representing Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan; Kevin Worthington representing Councilmember Antonio Reynoso; and Bridget Mercier and Annabelle Eliashiv from the DOE.

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

1. Katie Jedrlinic, a representative from Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan's office, shared that Assemblywoman Nolan supports this proposal.
2. Kevin Worthington, a representative from Councilmember Antonio Reynoso's office, shared that Councilmember Reynoso strongly supports the expansion of Learners and Leaders.
3. Employees from Ridgewood YMCA expressed support of this proposal for the following reasons:
 - a. Ridgewood YMCA has a collaborative relationship with Principal Botfeld;
 - b. The staff at Learners and Leaders are supportive of Ridgewood YMCA; and
 - c. This proposal will allow Ridgewood YMCA to extend their relationships with the students at Learners and Leaders.
4. Multiple students expressed support for the expansion and the opportunity to stay in Learners and Leaders with their teachers and friends.
5. Multiple commenters expressed support for the expansion of Learners and Leaders.
6. Multiple commenters expressed satisfaction with the caliber of teaching at Learners and Leaders.
7. Multiple commenters expressed satisfaction with the school culture at Learners and Leaders.
8. Multiple commenters supported growing into new building Q320.
9. Multiple commenters expressed support for this proposal because they believe their zoned school for fourth and fifth grades, P.S. 81, is overcrowded.
10. Multiple commenters expressed support for this proposal because it allows their children to stay close to home throughout elementary school instead of going to P.S. 81 for fourth and fifth grades.
11. Multiple commenters expressed support for this proposal because of the school's excellence in communicating with parents and caregivers.
12. Multiple commenters expressed support for this proposal because it minimizes the number of transitions students must go through in elementary school.
13. Multiple commenters expressed support for this proposal because it will allow special education instructors to continue providing services for their students.
14. Multiple commenters expressed support for this proposal because of the arts, music and drama programming Learners and Leaders offers.
15. Multiple commenters mentioned the widespread community support for this proposal.
16. Multiple commenters support this proposal because of Learners and Leaders' dedication to providing services for English Language Learners.

17. Multiple commenters supported this proposal because it will allow siblings to study in the same building for longer periods of time.
18. Multiple commenters support this proposal because of the sense of safety created at Learners and Leaders.
19. Multiple commenters support this proposal because of the quality of instruction Learners and Leaders offers students with special needs.

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

One comment was received via voicemail:

20. A commenter supported the proposal to expand and partially re-site Learners and Leaders.

Analysis of Issues Raised and Significant Alternatives Proposed

Comments 1, 2, 3(c), 5, 8, 15, 17, and 20 are in support of the proposal and thus do not require a response.

Comments 3(a, b), 4, and 11 are related to satisfaction with the staff at Learners and Leaders. The DOE commends the school staff for their hard work and dedication to the students and families of Learners and Leaders.

Comments 6, 13, 14, 16, and 19 pertain to the high quality of instruction and programming at Learners and Leaders. The DOE commends Learners and Leaders for their commitment to education.

Comments 7 and 18 relate to the positive school culture and sense of safety at Learners and Leaders. The DOE applauds Learners and Leaders for creating a safe learning environment for students.

Comments 9, 10, and 12 refer to students attending P.S. 81 for fourth and fifth grades.

The DOE works to provide students and families with a variety of educational options. Currently, P.S. 81 and Learners and Leaders share an elementary school zone, meaning families can pick between P.S. 81 and Learners and Leaders. This proposal is intended to give families another option and create a more stable environment for students by allowing students to remain at Learners and Leaders, thus reducing the number of transitions students must make in their formative years.

Comment 9 refers to over-crowding at P.S. 81. While P.S. 81 has approximately twice as many students as Learners and Leaders, P.S. 81's buildings can accommodate more students than Learners and Leaders' current building, Q245. Per the Citywide Instructional Footprint, which is used to allocate space to all schools based on the number of class sections they program and grade levels of the school, P.S. 81 has sufficient space to accommodate its student population. Furthermore, as a result of the additional capacity secured by new building Q320, the re-zoning approved by the CEC, and the proposal to expand Learners and Leaders, P.S. 81's enrollment is anticipated to decrease over time. The decreased enrollment will reduce P.S. 81's building utilization rate.

Changes Made to the Proposal

No changes were made to the proposal.