



**Public Comment Analysis**

Date: April 27, 2011

Topic: The Proposed Phase-out of Bronx Academy High School (08X560)

Date of Panel Vote: April 28, 2011

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**Summary of Proposal**

The New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) is proposing to phase out and eventually close Bronx Academy High School (08X560, “Bronx Academy”), an existing transfer school, based on its poor performance and the DOE’s assessment that the school lacks the capacity to turn around quickly to better support student needs. Bronx Academy currently enrolls students who are 16 years of age and older in grades ten through twelve based on their credit accumulation. It has a rolling admissions policy, accepting students throughout the year. Bronx Academy is currently co-located with The Felisa Rincón de Gautier Institute of Law and Public Policy (08X519, “Felisa Rincón”), an existing 9-12 school, in school building X972 (“X972”) located at 1440 Story Avenue, Bronx, NY 10473, within the geographical confines of Community School District 8 (“District 8”). A “co-location” means that two or more school organizations are located in the same building and may share common spaces like auditoriums, libraries, gymnasiums, and cafeterias.

If this proposal is approved, Bronx Academy would no longer admit new students after the end of the current school year. Bronx Academy would complete phasing out in June 2013. Current students would be supported as they progress towards graduation while remaining enrolled at Bronx Academy. In cases where students do not complete graduation requirements by June 2013, the DOE will help students and families identify alternative programs, such as a Young Adult Borough Center (“YABC”) or another transfer school or program that meet students’ needs so that they may continue their education after Bronx Academy completes its phase-out.

In a separate Educational Impact Statement (“EIS”) posted on March 3, 2011, the DOE has also proposed to co-locate a new DOE transfer school, Bronx Arena High School (08X537, “Bronx Arena”), in building X972 as a replacement option for Bronx Academy. The details of that proposal are available on the DOE’s website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/April2011PEP.htm>. If that proposal is approved, Bronx Arena would open in building X972 in September 2011. Bronx Arena would serve 100-125 students in grades 9-12 during the first year of implementation. Bronx Arena would reach full scale two years later, in 2013-2014, when its enrollment would increase to 175-210 students in grades 9-12. Bronx Arena would be co-located with Felisa Rincón and Bronx Academy during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years as Bronx

Academy phases out. Following the completion of Bronx Academy's phase-out, Bronx Arena would be co-located with Felisa Rincón in building X972. In the event that the phase-out of Bronx Academy is not approved, the DOE would re-examine the availability of space in building X972 and may, as appropriate, revise its proposal to co-locate Bronx Arena in the building. Such a proposal would be described in a revised EIS.

For more information about the phase-out proposal, please visit the DOE's website at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/Apr282011Proposals.htm>. Copies of the EIS are also available in the main offices of Bronx Academy and Felisa Rincón.

### **Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing**

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at X972 on April 6, 2011. At the hearing, interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Approximately 150 members of the public attended the hearing and 76 people spoke. Present at the meeting were: Deputy Chancellor Marc Sternberg; Bronx High Schools Superintendent Elena Papaliberios; Cluster Leader Debra Maldonado; Network Leader Margaret Struk; President of Community Education Council ("CEC") 8 Bob Franklin; CEC 8 representative Elisabeth Bikoko; Principal of Bronx Academy Gary Eisinger; Bronx Academy School Leadership Team ("SLT") representatives Jascinth Findlay, Linda Butkowski, and Lilian Castillo; Felisa Rincón SLT representative Jeffrey Rodriguez; Denise Sullivan from the Citywide Council on High Schools ("CCHS"); Jenny Sobelman from the DOE Office of Public Affairs; and Helen Reyes from the Office of State Senator Ruben Díaz.

The proposal to co-locate Bronx Arena was also addressed at this hearing. The analysis of comments concerning the co-location proposal can be found at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2010-2011/Apr282011Proposals.htm>.

#### **The following comments and remarks were made at the Joint Public Hearing:**

1. Bronx Academy SLT representative Jascinth Findlay delivered a PowerPoint presentation. The data presented are summarized below:
  - a. More students are earning credits.
    - i. Students with 0-11 credits who are currently active earned an average of 2.70 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to an average of 1.60 credits last year. This represents a 69% increase.
    - ii. Students with 11-22 credits who are currently active earned an average of 3.35 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to 1.96 credits last year. This represents a 71% increase.
    - iii. Students with 0-11 credits admitted from September 2010 to the present earned an average of 3.00 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to 1.60 credits last year. This represents an 87.5% increase.

- iv. Students with 11-22 credits admitted from September 2010 to the present earned an average of 3.92 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to 1.96 credits last year. This represents a 100% increase.
  - v. Students with 0-11 credits working with Good Shepherd earned an average of 2.80 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to 1.60 credits last year. This represents a 78% increase.
  - vi. Students with 11-22 credits working with Good Shepherd earned an average of 4.67 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to 1.96 credits last year. This represents a 138% increase.
  - vii. English Language Learners (“ELLs”) with 0-11 credits earned an average of 4.00 credits during the first term of the current school year compared to 1.60 credits last year. This represents a 150% increase.
  - viii. ELLs with 11-22 credits earned an average of 4.06 credits during the first term of the current academic year compared to 1.96 credits last year. This represents an increase of 107%.
  - ix. Special education students who began the current school year with 11-22 credits earned an average of 3.33 credits in the first term compared to 1.96 credits last year. This represents an increase of 75%.
- b. More students are passing the Regents.
    - i. There is a 12% increase from September 2010 to September 2011 in the number of students who passed the Living Environment Regents exam with a score of 65 or higher.
    - ii. There is a 14% increase from September 2010 to September 2011 in the number of students who passed the English Language Arts Regents exam with a score of 65 or higher.
    - iii. There is a 65% increase from September 2010 to September 2011 in the number of students who passed the Global History Regents exam with a score of 65 or higher.
    - iv. Overall, there is a 25% increase from September 2010 to September 2011 in the number of students who passed all of their Regents exams.
  - c. More students are coming to school.
    - i. In January 2011, attendance at Bronx Academy was 4.14% higher than at other Bronx transfer schools. The school’s year-to-date attendance is 73% according to ATS Report R4DS compared to 65% last year.
  - d. Suspensions are down.
    - i. Superintendent suspensions have decreased from 16 to 4 this year. This represents a 75% reduction.
  - e. The school has built a safer environment.
    - i. There is a 27% increase from last year’s Environment Survey in the number of students who strongly agree with the following statement: “My school helps me to develop challenging academic goals.”
    - ii. There is a 34% increase, from 61% to 95%, in the number of students who think their teachers inspire them to learn.
    - iii. There is a 35% increase in the number of students who feel comfortable talking to teachers or other adults at the school about something that is bothering them.

- iv. There is a 22% increase, from 70% to 92%, in the number of students who strongly agree with the following statement: “Teachers in my school treat students with respect.”
2. A commenter stated that transfer schools are necessary for students who can’t succeed in large school settings. Parents who send their children to big high schools tend to feel discouraged when they discover those schools are dysfunctional. Parents need small schools like Bronx Academy to motivate students.
3. Multiple commenters stated that the school has dramatically improved since Mr. Eisinger was appointed principal of Bronx Academy and that the new principal should be given the opportunity to continue improving the school.
4. Multiple commenters stated that student attendance is up and suspensions are down.
5. Multiple commenters stated that Bronx Academy has helped a lot of students get back on track to graduation and credit recovery.
6. Multiple commenters stated that the DOE should not base its decision to close the school on last year’s data. Commenters said the school has improved a lot this year. Therefore, the DOE should re-consider its proposal to phase out the school.
7. A commenter stated that Bronx Academy is not the worst transfer school in the City. The school only ranked 23 out of 38 among transfer schools Citywide for graduation rates.
8. A commenter stated that as a teacher at Bronx Academy he is inspired by students’ resilience and would like to continue making a difference in students’ lives.
9. Multiple commenters stated that they feel more focused, optimistic and motivated to learn because teachers at Bronx Academy are very supportive.
10. Multiple commenters stated that their grades improved considerably since attending Bronx Academy.
11. Multiple commenters stated that Bronx Academy is like a second home for students. Students are grateful for the opportunity to earn a high school diploma.
12. Multiple commenters stated that student retention and graduation rates improved as a result of Mr. Eisinger’s leadership.
13. Multiple commenters stated that if it weren’t for Bronx Academy, they would have been high school drop-outs.
14. Multiple commenters stated that Bronx Academy has a safe and positive environment.
15. Multiple commenters expressed concern about the closure of the school and the lack of options available to students as a result.
16. A commenter stated that Bronx Academy’s graduation rate is the 13<sup>th</sup> highest among its 31 peer horizon schools and asked why other lower ranking schools are not on the DOE’s closure list.
17. Multiple commenters stated that their impression of Bronx Academy completely changed as a result of the new changes taking place in the school.
18. A commenter stated that student and school progress do not take place overnight. Therefore, the DOE should give the new principal more time to turn the school around.
19. Multiple commenters stated that Bronx Academy has undoubtedly struggled in the past. Last year, the school’s Progress Report grade declined from a C to an F. But that was under the old administration.
20. Multiple commenters stated that Good Shepherd has had a tremendous positive impact on school culture and student attendance.
21. A commenter stated that the DOE’s data is inaccurate and outdated.

22. Multiple commenters stated that suspensions have gone down since last year.
23. Commenters stated that Bronx Academy is being punished for serving the most struggling students. These students have been pushed out of other schools so as not to negatively impact their data.
24. A commenter stated that the DOE has not offered any meaningful support to the school over the past six years.
25. A commenter stated that Bronx Academy should be considered for transformation, not phase-out.
26. A commenter asked about Bronx Academy's Quality Review score and Progress Report grade for the current school year.
27. A commenter asked about the State's Joint Intervention Team ("JIT") review and recommendations.
28. Multiple commenters stated that Bronx Academy's Advocacy Program has been successful in helping them meet their academic goals.
29. A commenter stated that 80% of students at Bronx Academy feel confident in their ability to earn a high score on their Regents exams. In addition, 91% agree they spend more time on tasks in the classroom, 70% agree they spend more time at home doing homework assignments, 89% agree they can connect historical events to the world around them, and more students feel confident in participating in class.
30. A commenter stated that students are respectful and do not walk around in the hallways.
31. A commenter stated that Bronx Academy is located in the poorest Congressional District in the City of New York. The correlation between poverty and student success is very high. Many things happen to students outside school that impact their academic performance.
32. A commenter stated that this year's data show the school has the motivation and capacity to improve.
33. A commenter stated that under the new administration the school implemented far more positive changes in seven months than ever since it opened in 2003.
34. Multiple commenters expressed their thanks to Bronx Academy staff and principal for their help and support.

The DOE received comments at the Joint Public Hearing that did not directly relate to the proposal and therefore will not be addressed.

35. A commenter stated that schools are closing because the City wants to build more condos and luxury apartments.
36. A commenter stated that closing schools will lead to the creation of more prisons.

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

The DOE received nine written comments via e-mail, seven written comments via mail, as well as a newsletter published by Bronx Academy that was distributed at the Joint Public Hearing. One of the e-mails received included 20 letters written by students at Bronx Academy.

37. CEC 8 President Bob Franklin reflected on the joint public hearing held at the school and commented that students and parents feel that the new school leadership has turned

around the school and that now it is a place where students feel supported. He urged the Panel for Educational Policy (“PEP”) to not phase out Bronx Academy and to allow the principal more time to turn around the school.

38. CEC 8 President Bob Franklin attached testimonies from two students in his original e-mail to the DOE. The testimonies state the following:
  - a. Bronx Academy should be kept open because of the way they have progressed since coming to the school.
  - b. Bronx Academy school leadership, staff, and fellow students have supported and advocated for them. The school is small enough that everyone receives personal attention to help them succeed.
  - c. While other factors have affected them and previous schools made them feel that they would not graduate on time, Bronx Academy has proven that they can graduate on time.
39. CEC 8 representative Elisabeth Bikoko urged the PEP to not phase out Bronx Academy. She cited comments from the hearing that demonstrated that the new principal is putting the school in the right direction.
40. Multiple commenters stated their support for the school and its positive learning environment. Commenters said the teachers and staff of Bronx Academy care about them and help support their learning, students are friendly to one another, and the school atmosphere is safe, warm and welcoming.
41. Multiple commenters stated that Bronx Academy should stay open because it enrolls students that have had trouble in their previous school and supports them.
42. Multiple commenters cited the support they received at Bronx Academy in comparison to the support they received at their previous high schools. The commenters also cited the progress they have made at Bronx Academy.
43. Multiple commenters stated that poor performance at Bronx Academy could be related to poverty, past experiences and other challenges.
44. Multiple commenters stated it is unfair to include performance scores of students who miss class at Bronx Academy because they undermine overall progress the school has made.
45. Multiple commenters cited statistics about the community and regarding occupational segregation to demonstrate how economic and social factors can affect students academically.
46. A commenter cited public health related problems prevalent in the community such as asthma, obesity, and hearing/vision problems that may cause students to do worse in school.
47. Multiple commenters reflected on a previous community meeting at the school and cited teachers, staff and parents that were in favor of keeping the school open.
48. Multiple commenters compared their negative experiences in the school under the previous school leadership with the positive experiences they have had this school year.
49. A commenter stated that Good Shepherd Services has supported him academically.
50. A commenter cited an instance in which the Bronx Academy assistant principal helped the commenter speak openly about his personal issues and helped support him.
51. A commenter asked the DOE to allow the new school leadership to finish what they began this year.

52. Multiple commenters cited improvements such as higher credit accumulation, fewer fights, after-school programs, a new Advocacy Program, programs by Good Shepherd Services, the creation of a café in the Atrium, high-tech computers, and Cookie Fridays.
53. Multiple commenters said the new trimester system has led to a better learning environment and helps students gain more credits in order to graduate on time.
54. Multiple commenters stated their determination to go to college as a result of their work and experiences at Bronx Academy.
55. Multiple commenters stated that the DOE should look at data from this school year, since the new principal began moving the school in the right direction.
56. Multiple commenters questioned whether the data used by the DOE to make its decision was “up-to-date” and accurate.
57. Multiple commenters stated that it is unfair for the DOE to base its decision on school performance data from a previous administration.
58. A commenter questioned why new data from last semester was not taken into consideration.
59. A commenter stated that the DOE’s data only counts students who fail or drop out when in fact it should give more weight to students who succeed.
60. Multiple commenters stated that students at Bronx Academy must deal with serious challenges outside of school and cited personal stories that illustrated some of these challenges, such as the death of a loved one or a fire at their home.
61. Multiple commenters stated that when students come to the guidance office for advice about possible transfer high schools, Bronx Academy is a recommend choice. The commenters stated that closing the school would be a loss for students who need a second chance to graduate from high school.
62. A commenter questioned why the DOE would close an existing school and open a new school instead of working with the existing school to make it better.
63. A commenter stated the proposal is making students feel “put down and out.” As a result, some students may drop out of school.
64. A commenter stated that the DOE needs to evaluate transfer schools differently than other schools, given the unique purpose and structure of transfer schools.
65. A commenter submitted the link to the Website for Bronx Academy for consideration (<http://www.bronxbash.com>). The Website contains, among other things, a description of the new initiatives being undertaken in an effort to improve school climate, credit accumulation, attendance, graduation rate, and the Regents accumulation rate.

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

- With regard to comments 1(a) and 52 which relate to credit accumulation rates: The statistical analysis of credit accumulation presented by the Bronx Academy SLT cannot be fairly compared to the Progress Report data. The data presented by the SLT compares the average credits earned in a single term as opposed to the average credits earned per semester. Furthermore, the school’s calculations do not account for students who drop out during the school year while the Progress Report does.

Comparing average credit accumulation rates from term 1 last year to term 1 this year provides a more accurate picture of student progress. Using that methodology, the average credit accumulation rate last year (2009-2010) in term 1 was 3.05 credits per student. This year (2010-2011) the credit accumulation rate in term 1 was 3.36 credits per student. This difference is not significant. Therefore, it is not fully accurate to state that students are earning more credits.

Furthermore, the data presented by the SLT inaccurately compares credit accumulation rates across population types. For example, the credit accumulation rate for English Language Learners (“ELLs”) should be compared to how ELLs did last year, not to all students in the school. The SLT did not properly disaggregate and analyze credit accumulation data by population types.

Bronx Academy has switched to a trimester system. The average credit accumulation rate in term 2, which became available recently, was 3.04 credits per student (including students who took courses in term 1). This is almost identical to the term 1 credit accumulation rate last year. Again, this number should not be compared to Progress Report numbers from last year due to student accountability rules and the difference in methodology.

Putting aside these methodological differences, the data presented by the SLT would still be weak. For instance, an average of 2.70 credits earned per term among students with 0-11 credits would still be well into the bottom third of transfer schools based on last year’s Progress Report results. Similarly, an average of 3.35 credits earned per term among students with 11-22 credits would still be well into the bottom quartile of transfer schools based on last year’s Progress Report results.

In addition, there is no evidence that suggests that Bronx Academy has enrolled more challenging populations recently. The number of students who start the year with 0-11 credits has fallen over the last three years from 43 to 27 to 26 based on the 2009-2010 Progress Report. The number of students who start the year with 11-22 credits has also fallen over the last three years from 224 to 201 to 156 based on the 2009-2010 Progress Report. According to last year’s Progress Report, only 52.9% of the student body was over-age and under-credited. Although one would expect higher credit accumulation amongst such a population, Bronx Academy has one of the lowest levels of credit accumulation in the transfer school portfolio.

- With regard to comment 1(b) which relates to Regents pass rates: Reporting overall Regents pass rates based on the total number of students who passed divided by the total number of students scheduled to take the exam puts these numbers into better perspective. In 2009-2010, the overall Regents pass rate at Bronx Academy was 20.9% compared to 26.7% in 2010-2011. While the Regents pass rate increased by 5.8 percentage points from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011, this number is still not very strong.

Last year, Bronx Academy scheduled a total of 837 Regents to be taken in January. So far this year, only 510 Regents were scheduled to be taken. Therefore, the number of

students who have passed a Regents exam by this point in the school year has actually fallen from 154 last year to 136 this year. This decrease in the number of students taking and passing Regents exams is troubling given the school's shift to a trimester system. The fact that students are taking more classes this year has not translated into more students passing a Regents exam compared to last year.

Furthermore, the Regents pass rates by subject as reported by the SLT are highly deceptive. The differences in terms of the number of students passing a Regents exam are not as large as the reporting percentage changes may suggest. Bronx Academy actually had fewer students pass several Regents exams, including U.S. History and Algebra. For example, last year 11 students passed the Living Environment Regents compared to 12 students this year. This was reported as a 12% change. Furthermore, when looking at average scores of students who actually sat for the exams as opposed to pass rates of those scheduled for the exams, the results show that average scores on Regents have remained unchanged even in those courses the school highlights. The average English Language Arts Regents score was 57.1 in January 2010 and 57.8 in January 2009. The average Global History Regents score was 55.6 in January 2010 and 55.9 in January 2009.

- With regard to comments 1(c) and 4 which suggest that student attendance is up: The school's year-to-date average attendance as of April 23, 2011 is 66.6% according to the ATS report. This means that on average only two-thirds of students on the school register attend on a regular basis.

The average student attendance at Bronx Academy over the past two years is 9% lower than his or her high school the year prior to entering Bronx Academy. This is one of the worst changes in attendance rates in each of the past two years in the transfer school portfolio and the very worst among transfer schools last year.

While it is unclear which other Bronx transfer schools the SLT is referring to, it is evident that Bronx Academy has done a poor job in the past to encourage students to attend school regularly (or even as regularly as they had prior to enrollment at Bronx Academy) and has struggles with improving attendance again this year.

- With regard to comments 1(d), 4 and 22 which suggest that the number of suspensions has decreased: The DOE notes that the number of suspensions has certainly fallen from last year thus far. However, the number reported by the school is misleading because it only includes suspensions that have occurred during a fraction of the current school year as opposed to the whole year.
- With regard to comments 1(e) and 29 which cite Community/Environment Survey results for Bronx Academy: The DOE notes that it is unclear where this information is coming from given that school surveys are still being collected and no information has yet been released for the current school year. As of April 6, 2011, Bronx Academy's survey response rate is only 24% for students. This is not a significant sample to make any preliminary conclusions about the changing environment.

- With respect to the portion of comment 2 which states that small schools are better options for students and comment 62 in connection with the DOE’s strategy to close low performing schools: The DOE believes that replacing large failing schools with new small schools is the most effective way to quickly turn around student achievement. Since 2003, the DOE has replaced 91 of the lowest-performing schools with 474 new small schools. Of the 474 new schools, 365 are traditional public schools (including 25 transfer schools) and 109 are public charter schools. In the Bronx, for instance, the new schools on the Evander Childs Campus had a graduation rate of 80.3% in 2009-2010—nearly 50 percentage points higher than the former Evander Childs High School’s graduation rate of only 30.7% in 2002.
- With regard to comments 2, 15 and 61 which concern the availability of options for future students in the Bronx Academy community: There is a high need to provide better options for students and families in the Bronx Academy community. Under this proposal, the X972 building will remain open, but will have space to offer a new transfer high school option (Bronx Arena) that will better support the learning needs of future students in the Bronx. The new transfer school will provide additional seats to high school students who are over-age and under-credited and who wish to attend a transfer school in the borough. In addition, there are 44 transfer high schools Citywide—excluding Pacific High School in Brooklyn and Bronx Academy High School in the Bronx, both of which have been proposed for phase-out next year—that will continue to serve as options for over-age and under-credited students. Seven of these transfer schools are located in the Bronx. A list of other transfer schools Citywide is attached to the EIS as Appendix A.
- Comments 3, 12, 16, 17, 19, 33, 37, 39, 47, 48, 50, 51 and 65 discuss the successful leadership of the principal, inquire the rationale behind the decision to phase out Bronx Academy, and ask the DOE to reconsider its proposal to phase out the school: This proposal is not a reflection of the current principal’s efforts to improve the school. The DOE takes into consideration multiple factors when it proposes a school for phase-out. Every year the DOE identifies which schools are having the most trouble serving their students. The Department compiles a preliminary set of schools that could possibly be considered for intensive support or intervention by looking at all schools that receive a grade of D, F, or a third consecutive C or lower on the Progress Report, and schools that receive a rating below Proficient on their most recent Quality Review. The Department also takes into account how the State assesses school performance, by including schools identified as Persistently Lowest Achieving (“PLA”) in this first group. The criteria by which the State designates schools as PLA are published on the following website: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/accountability/LowAchieve/2009/Methodology-IdentifyingPersistentlyLowestAchieveSchools.html>. In the case of transfer schools, the DOE considered additional data including enrollment trends and improvement strategies already in place and their outcomes. With this smaller set of schools, the Department has in-depth conversations with school communities and networks to get an even better sense of what is happening at the school, and whether more significant action is needed. The Department continues to consider performance data, school culture, and demand information.

Bronx Academy received an overall F grade on its 2009-2010 Progress Report, with a C grade on Student Performance, an F grade on Student Progress, and an F grade on School Environment.<sup>1</sup> This is a continuation of a pattern of poor performance. In 2008-2009, Bronx Academy earned an overall F grade and in 2007-2008 an overall C grade. Bronx Academy was rated “Under-developed” on its most recent Quality Review in 2009-2010. In addition, the State identified Bronx Academy as a PLA school in December 2010.

After a careful analysis of data and community feedback, the DOE has determined that Bronx Academy is ill-equipped to significantly improve student outcomes within the current structure. Though the efforts of the new administration are commendable, the DOE believes that phasing out Bronx Academy and creating higher quality educational options in its place is the best thing for future students and the broader community.

- With regard to comments 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 28, 30, 34, 38(a), 38(b), 38(c), 40, 41, 42, 50 and 54 related to the school’s positive environment, support and student achievement: The DOE commends Bronx Academy teachers for supporting individual students and creating a positive and nurturing school culture. The DOE also notes that individual students who have graduated from the school have gone on to achieve success and commends them for their achievements.

The DOE is committed to ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education and, unfortunately, Bronx Academy’s performance data indicates that many students are struggling academically and falling behind. The DOE believes that phasing out Bronx Academy and creating a higher quality educational option in its place is the right thing to do for future students in the community and throughout New York City. The DOE also believes that if the proposal to phase in Bronx Arena in the building is approved for next year, Bronx Arena would develop ties in the community and offer a welcoming environment for future students as well.

- With regard to comments 6, 18, 21, 32, 55, 56, 57 and 58 which contend that the DOE’s decision to phase out Bronx Academy is based upon inaccurate and out of date data: In October 2010, during the verification period regarding Progress Report data, Bronx Academy had the opportunity to correct inaccurate data or appeal the classification of individual students as graduates or non-graduates. Bronx Academy made no objections during the review period. In addition, as addressed in the responses to comments 1(a-d), 4, 22, 29, and 52 above, a closer analysis of the data presented by the Bronx Academy SLT at the Joint Public Hearing on April 6, 2011, indicates no significant improvement in school and student performance. Therefore, the DOE believes that phasing out the school and allowing for higher quality education options in its place is the best thing for future students and the community.

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<sup>1</sup> The DOE notes that in response to a question during the April 6, 2011 Joint Public Hearing at Bronx Academy, Deputy Chancellor Marc Sternberg incorrectly stated that Bronx Academy has struggled for the past *seven* years. Deputy Chancellor Marc Sternberg meant to state that Bronx Academy has struggled for *several* years.

- In response to comments 7 and 16 related to graduation rates: Bronx Academy’s 6-year graduation rate was 49% in 2009-2010. Bronx Academy ranks 17<sup>th</sup> lowest out of the 39 transfer schools with 6-year graduation rates last year. Furthermore, Bronx Academy was not successful with its students who entered with the fewest credits. The 6-year graduation rate for students who entered the school with fewer than 11 credits was 21% and for students who entered with 11 to 22 credits was 36% (both ranking in the bottom 10 among the 25 and 29 transfer schools with 6-year graduation rates for these populations, respectively).
- With regard to comments 20 and 49 related to services offered by Good Shepherd to students: The DOE commends Good Shepherd for providing meaningful academic and socio-emotional supports to students in the Bronx Academy community. The DOE notes that Bronx Academy’s partnerships, including Good Shepherd, will continue to support current students though it is possible that the nature and scope of those partnerships would change based on shifting need and resource availability as the school moves toward closure. The DOE will work closely with Bronx Academy staff to enhance existing partnerships or develop new partnerships as the school phases out if specific, new student needs emerge during the phase-out period. As appropriate, the DOE will work with Bronx Arena staff to introduce or enhance partnerships with the community organizations that currently support Bronx Academy students.
- In response to comments 23, 31, 43, 44, 45, 46 and 60 suggesting that socio-economic factors cause Bronx Academy’s low student performance: Under the DOE’s accountability framework, schools are held accountable for the academic progress of their students. Transfer schools—regardless of their admissions policies—serve over-age and under-credited (“OA-UC”) students. Students designated as OA-UC are considered to be two or more years behind his or her expected age and credit accumulation at the time of entry into a transfer school. The 2009-2010 Transfer School Progress Report uses the following distinctions for OA-UC students:

Age	Credits
16	Less than 11 credits
17	Less than 22 credits
18	Less than 33 credits
19-21	Less than 44 credits

Bronx Academy’s enrollment was comprised of just over 50% of students who were OA-UC at the time of admission. This is among the smallest OA-UC populations in the transfer school portfolio (ranked 36 out of 43 schools). This means that Bronx Academy serves a relatively small proportion of the students who are furthest behind. Yet the outcomes of those students do not compare well to demographically and academically similar students at other transfer schools. Of the 199 students in Bronx Academy’s 2009-2010 6-year graduating cohort, only 19 (less than 10%) entered the school with fewer than 11 credits (11<sup>th</sup> lowest among the 39 transfer schools with students in that graduating cohort). The 6-year graduation rate for those students was 21%, 8<sup>th</sup> lowest among the 25 transfer schools with graduation rates for that population.

- Comment 24 suggests that the DOE has not provided adequate support to Bronx Academy: The DOE notes that all schools receive support and assistance from their superintendent and Children First Network team, a group of educators who work directly with schools. This team helps schools identify best practices, target strategies for specific students in need of extra help, and prioritize competing demands on resources and time. Each school community chooses the network whose support best meets its needs, and each network works to improve student achievement in all of its schools.

The EIS describing the proposal to phase out Bronx Academy outlines a range of instructional, operational, and leadership supports offered to the school. In addition, a number of resources were offered to support students' social, emotional and academic needs, particularly for struggling students. In particular, the DOE offered the following supports:

### **Leadership Support**

- Connecting administrators with other schools to learn effective practices that could be replicated at Bronx Academy via monthly principals' conferences.
- Professional Development for assistant principal in implementing Common Core State Standards, grant writing, instructional leadership for students with diverse needs, using data to promote student achievement, the observation process, supporting low performing teachers, differentiated instruction, and the Quality Review and Progress Report rubrics.

### **Instructional Support**

- Professional development for teachers on a variety of topics including: evaluating data and student work, developing common formative and summative assessments across subject areas, rigorous and higher order thinking skills, understanding by designing and developing curriculum maps that integrate the school's mission through academics, community, and self-advocacy.
- Supporting the work of teacher teams and common planning time for the whole school four times per week to develop horizontal alignment in curriculum and facilitate walkthroughs, observations, and teacher logs to encourage interdisciplinary learning and the execution of instruction.

### **Operational Support**

- Providing support to the principal and school staff on budgeting, human resources, recruiting and retaining talented teachers, and compliance issues.
- Supporting the implementation of \$300,000 in grant funding; \$250,000 in an Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention grant to partner with Good Shepherd

Services, a community-based organization (“CBO”), for attendance improvement, and \$50,000 from a City Council grant to refurbish the multi-purpose room/gymnasium.

### **Student Support**

- Supporting the implementation of an advocacy program in which every student is assigned a staff advocate who collaborates with the student to create an individualized advocacy plan each term and provides support via weekly meetings regarding academics, community, self-advocacy, the development of goals and the steps to achieve them, credit accumulation, and Regents readiness.
- Training for guidance counselor in crisis management.
- Supporting partnerships with the Council for Unity regarding gang prevention and awareness and Lehman College Arts Initiative to create a school mural with students and professional artists.

Given Bronx Academy’s lack of success despite the above supports—whether as part of a centralized effort to support all schools or individualized plans for Bronx Academy—it is apparent that Bronx Academy has failed to develop the proper infrastructure to meet the needs of its students and families.

- With regard to comment 25, related to the DOE’s decision to propose the school for phase out instead of transformation: Bronx Academy was identified as a Persistently Lowest Achieving (“PLA”) school by the New York State Education Department in December 2010. The eleven schools currently operating under the Transformation model were all identified as PLA schools in January 2010. The appropriate intervention model for PLA schools identified in December 2010 have not all been identified. However, the DOE has proposed the phase-out of Bronx Academy given all of the facts mentioned here and in the EIS.
- With regard to comment 26 concerning the school’s Quality Review score and the Progress Report overall results for the current school year: The 2010-2011 Quality Review and Progress Report for Bronx Academy are not yet available.
- With regard to comment 27 related to the State’s Joint Intervention Team (“JIT”) report and recommendations: Schools identified by the State as PLA or Restructuring Advanced (“RA”) are subject to a review by the JIT, comprised of a senior State Education Department representative and a district representative, between January and March of this year. The JIT conducted an on-site diagnostic review of Bronx Academy during the course of several days in February 2011, which included classroom observations, interviews with school administrators, teachers and parents, and review of relevant data. The JIT report and recommendations, however, are not yet available.

As stated earlier in this document, the DOE holds schools accountable for the academic progress of their students. The Progress Report, Quality Review, and New York State Annual School Report Card are three separate accountability systems used to evaluate schools in New York City.

- With regard to comment 53 concerning the school’s trimester system and its impact on student achievement: The DOE appreciates that students could feel more motivated to learn under the new trimester system. However, and as described earlier in this document, switching from a semester to a trimester system does not necessarily result in increased student performance. For instance, the fact that students are taking more classes this year has not resulted in more students who are meeting their graduation requirements.
- In response to comment 63: The DOE notes that this proposal is not a reflection of individual students. The DOE is committed to supporting all schools—whether new or existing—in achieving success. Bronx Academy will continue to receive critical support from its Children First network team during the phase-out. In addition, current students will continue to have access to necessary classes to support them as they work to meet graduation requirements and earn their high school diplomas.
- With regard to comments 59 and 64: The Transfer School Progress Report evaluates schools that primarily serve high school students who are over-age and under-credited. As stated earlier in this document, students designated as OA-UC are considered to be two or more years behind his or her expected age and credit accumulation at the time of entry into a transfer school. For transfer schools, “student performance” measures the number of students who graduate within six years and rewards schools based on the rigor of the different diplomas students receive. “Student progress” measures how well schools are helping students improve their attendance and progress towards graduation by amassing course credits and passing Regents exams. Schools that do an exemplary job helping English Language Learners, special education students, and students who are the farthest behind academically earn additional credit. “School environment” includes the results of surveys taken by parents, students, and teachers.

Furthermore, schools are judged based on how their students’ performance compares to that of students in their respective peer group. A school’s peer group consists of other transfer schools that serve similar populations in terms of student proficiency and demographic composition.

### **Changes Made to the Proposal**

No changes have been made to this proposal as a result of the public comments received.