



Date: January 26, 2010

Topic: The Proposed Phase-out and Eventual Closure of The School for Community Research and Learning and Co-location of a New School, 08X432, with Existing Schools in X450

Date of Panel Vote: January 26, 2010

Summary of Proposal

Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, The School for Community Research and Learning (08X540, hereinafter referred to as “SCRL”), an existing school serving students in grades 9-12 in Community School District 8 (“District 8”), will be phased out of operation. SCRL is housed in school building X450, located at 1980 Lafayette Avenue, Bronx in District 8.

In the 2010-2011 school year, SCRL will begin phasing out one grade level per year. Grade 9 will be eliminated in 2010-2011, grade 10 will be eliminated in 2011-2012, and grade 11 will be eliminated in 2012-2013. SCRL will close in June 2013.

The phase-out and eventual closure of SCRL will create available space in X450 to house a new school. The DOE proposes to phase in a new high school to replace SCRL as it phases-out. The new high school, 08X432, will open in 2010 with grade 9. One new grade will be added each year until it reaches its full 9-12 grade scale in 2013-2014. Approximately 385 high school seats will be eliminated by the phase-out of SCRL. However, these seats will be recovered through the phase-in of 08X432 in X450 and other new high schools throughout the City. The phase-out of SCRL and replacement with 08X432 addresses the need to provide higher quality high school options throughout the City.

The Educational Impact Statement on this proposal was posted on the Department of Education’s Web site on December 4, 2009.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at school building X450 on January 5, 2010. The meeting was open to the public, and all interested parties had the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Two hundred and three individuals attended the meeting, and 23 spoke; all were opposed to the proposal. Speakers opposed the proposal for the following reasons: (1) SCRL has many high need students, and they require extensive resources

to serve properly; (2) SCRL has made academic improvements; and (3) SCRL teachers have successfully served difficult to reach students in the past.

Summary of Issues Raised in Written and Oral Comments and Significant Alternatives Suggested

Seven written and no oral comments regarding this proposal have been received. The comments opposed the proposal on account of the school's community, the relationship between students and teachers, student success, and the students' challenges that sometimes prevent them from graduating in four years. No significant alternatives were proposed.

Some individuals and one organization, Class Size Matters ("CSM"), submitted written comments objecting to all of the phase-outs proposed by the DOE. Although the comments did not address any one phase-out in particular, but instead addressed all proposals generally, the DOE has incorporated these comments into the public comment analysis for each phase-out proposal, including SCRL. In opposing the DOE's proposal to phase-out and eventually close these schools, these commenters cited the following reasons: (1) the Educational Impact Statements for the proposals cite incomplete or inaccurate graduation rates and do not state the schools' five-year graduation rates as used by the New York State Education Department; (2) the DOE failed to follow its own accountability standards in proposing these phase-outs; (3) the schools the DOE has proposed for phase-out have significantly high numbers of high-risk students, including special education students, incoming ninth-grade students with low scores upon admission, and homeless students, who will not be accepted or accommodated at the new small schools that replace the phasing out schools; (4) the Educational Impact Statements do not address where students at the phasing out school who are behind credits will attend in the future; (5) the Educational Impact Statements fail to analyze the impact of the phase-outs on overcrowding of other schools and use figures from the DOE's Blue Book, which does not use a formula that is aligned with state-mandated class size goals; (6) the Educational Impact Statements do not address the financial impact of the placements of teachers from the phasing-out schools into the Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR) or the expense of funding the new schools; (7) the phasing-out schools are being punished for setting high academic and safety standards; (8) the phase-outs will impair recruitment of teachers into schools serving high-needs students; and (9) there is no evidence that the DOE has made an attempt to improve conditions at the schools the DOE has proposed to phase-out.

Finally, CSM calls for a moratorium on school closings until the City's Independent Budget Office can prepare a report on the effects such closings. As an alternative, CSM suggests that rather than phase-out these schools, the DOE should: (1) implement smaller class sizes at the schools; (2) restore the superintendent role and cooperation between schools; (3) provide more resources and expert help for the schools; (4) develop better curricula for at-risk students; (5) provide more support to large, comprehensive high schools; (6) launch an independent investigation of test score inflation, credit recovery and cheating, and reform the accountability system so as to not encourage these practices; and (7) implement new approaches to discipline.

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

One commenter cites the State Education Department's recent adoption of five-year graduation rates as a reason for opposition to the phase-out proposals. However, the policy cited by the commenter was only recently adopted by the Regents and the state continues to use the four-year graduation rate in their accountability standards as well. Additionally, the DOE expects schools to support students in earning a high school diploma within four years.

Some commenters have suggested that the DOE has not used a rational formula and has not followed its accountability criteria in deciding which schools should be phased out. Under the DOE's accountability framework, schools that receive an overall grade of D or F on the Progress Report are subject to school improvement measures. If no significant progress is made over time, a leadership change (subject to contractual obligations), restructuring, or closure is possible. The same is true for schools receiving a C for three years in a row and for any school that the Chancellor has determined lacks the necessary capacity to improve student performance, regardless of the school's Progress Report grades and Quality Review scores.

SCRL received a very low C grade on its 2008-09 progress report, scoring D grades on both the student progress and student performance sub-sections of the report. The school only just reached the cutoff to obtain a C grade, receiving an overall score of 44.1, compared against the minimum threshold score of 44.0 necessary to avoid receiving a D grade and is trending downward in terms of performance. The school performed in the eighth percentile out of all high schools citywide, and it is a "School in Need of Improvement" according to the New York State accountability standards. SCLR earned the lowest total score compared to other schools on the Stevenson campus on both the 2008 and 2009 Progress Reports.

It is also important to understand that the Department of Education weighs numerous factors when evaluating schools as candidates for closure. Although Progress Report grades and Quality Review scores contribute significantly to the decision-making process, they are not the only considerations. The Department of Education takes into account many other sources of information as well, including school performance trends, enrollment data, demand data, and evaluations by superintendents and school support staff who work closely with the school and can evaluate its capacity to make significant improvements within a short time span.

The Quality Review evaluates how well schools are organized to improve student learning. The Quality Review measures educator and administrator actions, which are "inputs." It does not measure results, or "outputs," and though it reflects some factors in school success, those are but one set of factors. If administrator actions improve while student progress does not, we still must try to change the outcome. Schools are rated on a four-point scale, with "Well Developed" representing the top category of performance.

But school turnaround is difficult, takes time, and does not always succeed. A score of "Well Developed" might give us confidence that the school has the capacity to rapidly make significant improvements, while a "Proficient" school may only be capable of making incremental gains insufficient to quickly reverse a longstanding history of failure.

Proficient schools possess strengths and weaknesses. In evaluating the Quality Review reports from schools considered for closure, we looked closely at the reviewer’s assessment of those strengths and weaknesses to see how they might impact the school’s capacity to achieve a dramatic turnaround. For example, at many of the schools proposed for closure, evaluators found that instruction lacked rigor or was not sufficiently differentiated to meet individual student needs—both very serious concerns.

Many of the schools we proposed for closure received “Proficient” ratings on their Quality Reviews, and that is good news for current students who will remain enrolled in the school as it phases out. We expect phase-out schools to continue supporting their students and, in fact, outcomes at phase-out schools have historically improved with each successive year. That said, the Department’s comprehensive review of the 19 schools proposed for closure found that none of those schools was equipped to make the dramatic progress needed to quickly transform into truly successful schools where all students can thrive.

Some commenters have asserted that the DOE has targeted schools with high numbers of minority students and at-risk students, including special education students, incoming ninth graders with low test scores, and homeless students. In support of this claim, commenters state that the schools subject to phase-out serve a significantly higher number of at-risk students than schools with similarly low grades that are not slated for closure. They also claim that these students will be displaced as a result of the school phase-outs because the new small replacement schools will not accept or accommodate such students. New schools that have been opened by the DOE serve all students.

The new small schools that have been created over the last six years do accept English Language Learners and Special Education students and are serving them at a higher rate than schools citywide, with better outcomes. On average the new schools have a graduation rate of 75% and are serving some of the hardest to serve students. Here are some facts:

- The vast majority of new schools have unscreened admissions policies.
- During the 2008-2009 school year, ninth-grade enrollment at new schools included 14.2 percent special education students and 13.6 percent English language learners, compared to 12.8 percent special education students and 10.3 percent English language learners citywide.
- When looking across a school’s entire population, they also serve more special education students and ELL students than the citywide average. In 2008-2009, new schools served an average of 12.3 percent special education students and 12.6 percent English language learners compared with 11.6 percent and 10.8 percent, respectively, citywide.
- Looking at Collaborative team teaching and self-contained classes—considered the highest-need special education students—new schools continue to serve a larger population than schools citywide with 8.1 percent of their students requiring those services compared to 7.4 percent citywide in 2008-2009.
- Similarly, new small schools serve a higher proportion of low-income students, black and Hispanic students, and students performing below grade-level expectations upon ninth-grade enrollment when compared against citywide averages.

Current students at the schools proposed for phase-out who are behind in credits, including current SCRL students, will not be displaced as a result of the phase-out proposals. The Department of Education is committed to supporting schools as they phase-out. All students enrolled in the phase-out schools will continue to be served, including English language learners and special education students. The DOE will assist phase-out schools in developing individual plans for each student to ensure that they can graduate within three years. Any students who are unable to graduate on that timeline will be placed in schools or programs that meet their needs. It should be noted that student outcomes at phase-out schools tend to improve with each successive year as they become smaller and are better able to provide personalized attention to their students.

The DOE does not anticipate that the phase-out of schools will result in overcrowding at other schools throughout the city. With the phase-out and eventual closure of these schools, including SCRL, the DOE has also proposed the phase-in of several new small schools. The building in which SCRL is housed will not be closed and city wide we will be replacing each seat that is lost. For next year there will be sufficient seats. To the extent CSM asserts that the DOE has not adhered to state-mandated class size goals in planning school phase-outs and new replacement schools, the DOE disagrees. Through a combination of new facilities, the adjustment of enrollment projections and the opening of new schools, we will serve all students who otherwise would have attended a school proposed for closure. The centralized High School Admissions Process allows us to do two things: (1) ensure that students have access to high quality options and (2) ensure that we plan for all schools appropriately.

It is important to be clear that the DOE values choice. Many of the overcrowded schools are zoned schools that offer additional programs for students outside of the zone. We constantly struggle to balance demand for zoned and choice programs in a school. Currently students are not choosing to attend these schools and they are not at full capacity. By phasing out these schools and putting in new options we will draw people back to the school and ultimately reduce overcrowding.

The CSM comments state that schools are being punished for setting high academic and safety standards. The DOE is not using phase-out proposals to punish schools. The schools proposed for phase-out have not exhibited evidence of helping students to achieve high standards. In fact, the schools proposed for phase-out have a long history of underperformance.

In opposing all of the DOE's phase-out proposals, one commenter argues that no school should be phased out and closed due to the potentially impaired recruitment of teachers into schools serving high needs students, the costs associated with starting new replacement schools, and the expense of placing teachers in the absent teacher reserve pool. There is, however, no evidence that school closures cause teachers to avoid working at schools that serve high needs students. In fact, over the last seven years, the DOE has raised teacher preparation to a point where 100 percent of teachers are certified, as compared to a low of 83 percent before, with the gap existing in high-poverty schools. Second, while there are costs associated with the opening of new schools and with teachers put into excess, the greater cost is that of the thousands of students who have passed through the schools proposed for closure without graduating or developing proficiency. Cost can only be considered in the context of what is earned in return. In

these cases, too few students have earned the education we owe them, and the costs are borne by not just the DOE, but those children, their families, and society at-large.

Finally, the CSM report asserted that there is no evidence that the DOE attempted to improve the conditions at any of the schools it has proposed to close and suggests steps the DOE should take to improve these schools. SCRL has worked closely with a School Support Organization and network team selected by the principal and School Leadership Team. The SSO works with the principal and other school staff members to provide support on a broad set of issues, including curriculum and instruction, human resources, professional development, budgets, and legal issues, among others. These SSOs work closely with the schools to ensure that inquiry teams are working at each school and using data to drive instruction. Network Leaders and Achievement Coaches spend time on a weekly basis in the schools. In addition the Superintendents and School Achievement Facilitators also provide support to schools and Principals. All City schools benefit from these supports and most City schools have made steady progress under this Administration.

Because there is little evidence to suggest that continued school improvement measures will result in improved outcomes for students, the DOE has chosen not to accept the alternatives proposed.

(1) SCRL students has many high need students, and they require extensive resources to serve properly.

SCRL's 2009 four-year graduation rate was 43.9 percent, putting the school in the bottom 5% citywide. SCRL's graduation rate is well below the citywide average of 60 percent and even farther below the average 75 percent graduation rate among new, small schools. Even looking on a longer time horizon, only 57 percent of the students are graduating in 6 years, which is still below the citywide average. Also, while SCRL does serve a challenging student population, there are other schools serving similar populations with better outcomes. SCRL has a substantially lower four-year graduation rate for students receiving special education services than other peer schools most similar to it in terms of special education population.

(2) SCRL has made academic improvements; and (3) SCRL teachers have successfully served difficult to reach students in the past.

In defense of SCRL, commenters cited certain positive aspects of the school, such as the school's sense of community and student-teacher relationships, and asserted that the school has made academic improvements. The school's performance, however, shows that it is not successfully serving its students and that it lacks the capacity to turn around. Furthermore, the demand for the school is low. SCRL received only 3.3 applications per seat in September 2009 compared with the 8.4 seats per application citywide. The school is also under-enrolled; it was designed to serve 432 students, but the 2008-09 audited register counted 364 students.

The DOE has chosen not to amend its proposal to phase-out SCRL. The proposal will be presented to the Panel for Educational Policy as currently posted.

A copy of the educational impact statement for this proposal can be obtained at http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/F0043783-8608-433C-855E-99228622A268/73327/08X540_EIS9.pdf.

**Prepared by
Department of Education**