



Date: January 26, 2010

Topic: Proposed Phase-out and Eventual Closure of Monroe Academy for Business and Law

Date of Panel Vote: January 26, 2010

Summary of Proposal

This is a proposal to phase-out and eventually close Monroe Academy for Business and Law (12X690, “Monroe Academy for Business”), an existing school serving students in grades 9-12. Monroe Academy for Business currently is housed in school building X420, located at 1300 Boynton Avenue in the Bronx, in Community District 12. Beginning in 2010-2011, Monroe Academy for Business will begin phasing out one grade per year until the school closes in June 2013. No plans regarding the space made available in school building X420 by Monroe Academy for Business’s closure have been made at this time.

The Educational Impact Statement regarding this proposal was published on the Department of Education’s (“DOE”) Web site on December 10, 2009.

Summary of Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at school building X420 on January 19, 2010. Two hundred and seven individuals attended the hearing and 33 people spoke, all opposed to the proposal. Speakers mainly cited the following reasons for opposition: (1) Monroe Academy for Business students are the most difficult to graduate population; (2) the DOE changed the criteria for closure; and (3) the teachers and staff support students.

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

The DOE has received neither written nor oral comment on this proposal.

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 proposal 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 Monroe Academy for Business. 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 did not use a rational formula and 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 minority and 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 in 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) closing large, zoned high schools will force many students to travel further from their homes; (7) large high schools provide more choices in electives for students and can address a broader range of students; (8) 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; (9) the phasing out schools are being punished for setting high academic and safety standards; (10) the phase-outs will impair recruitment of teachers into schools serving high-needs students; and (11) 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, the CSM comments suggest 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

Monroe Academy for Business shows little capacity to improve its supports for students. Monroe Academy for Business earned a D grade on its 2008-09 Progress Report, including a D grade on the student progress and environment subsections of the report. This represented a decline from the C grades the school earned during each of the two preceding years. Monroe Academy for Business was designated "Underdeveloped" on its 2009 Quality Review, further suggesting that the school is ill-positioned to transform the culture of low performance and low expectations that has taken root at the school. Meanwhile, the other two schools sharing a facility with Monroe Academy for Business earned an A and B grade on their 2008-09 Progress Reports. One of those schools—World Cultures High School—serves 92 percent English Language Learners ("ELL") and earned an A grade on its Progress Report.

In 2007-08, the four-year graduation rate at Monroe Academy for Business was only 48.4 percent; in 2008-09, that figure increased slightly to 52.1 percent, but still remained well below the citywide average of 60 percent. The six-year graduation rate at Monroe Academy for Business is 55.2 percent; while this is slightly better than the four-year rate of 52.1 percent, it is still below the citywide four-year graduation rate. One commenter cites the New York 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.

Further evidence that the school is unlikely to turnaround is found in an analysis of credit accumulation rates at the school. Students at Monroe Academy for Business fall behind early, and the school has a poor record of helping those students get back on track toward graduation.

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 that receive 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.

Some commenters also stated that the DOE changed its criteria for closure. Monroe Academy for Business received a D on the 2008-09 Progress Report and a Quality Review score of "Underdeveloped." Following the release of the 2007-08 Progress Report, the DOE raised the cutoff scores necessary to receive each Progress Report grade. The higher cut scores were announced in November 2008 for the Progress Report released in the fall of 2009. The goal of raising cutoff scores is to continue to push schools toward higher and higher growth, particularly schools with the lowest grades because the need to improve is the most urgent.

It is important to understand that the DOE 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 DOE 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.

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 DOE’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 these students will be displaced as a result of the school phase-out 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, in fact, accept ELL 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 ELL students, compared to 12.8 percent special education students and 10.3 percent ELL students 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 ELL students 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 Monroe Academy for Business students, will not be displaced as a result of the phase-out proposals. The DOE is committed to supporting schools as they phase-out. The DOE will assist phase-out schools in developing individual plans for each student to ensure that they continue to accumulate credits and will be able to graduate before or at the point the school is slated for complete phase-out. Any students who are unable to accumulate the requisite number of credits within the three year timeline will be placed in other schools or programs that meet their needs and where they will continue to work towards earning a diploma.

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 Monroe Academy for Business, the DOE has also proposed the phase-in of several new small schools. In the case of Monroe Academy for Business, two of the schools in the building were scheduled to expand this year. Citywide, we will be replacing each seat that is lost. For next year there will be sufficient seats. To the extent CSM has asserted 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 underperforming and low demand schools and putting in new options, we will draw students back to the campus and ultimately reduce overcrowding in other areas.

Commenters have further stated that closing large, zoned high schools will force many students to travel farther from their homes. At many of the campuses with schools that will be phasing out, the DOE is opening new schools to provide options to students in September 2010. In addition, the High School Application Process allows students to rank up to 12 high school choices. Given the over 400 high school options available to students, they will only have to travel further from their homes if there is a high school option that they wish to attend.

Additionally, some commenters have stated that large high schools provide more choices in electives for students and can address a broader range of students than the small schools that will replace them. Small schools currently offer Advanced Placement and College Now Courses in addition to other electives depending on the particular school and student demand. Schools on

a campus can also collaborate to offer electives to students across the various schools on the campus.

Some commenters also 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 born by not just the DOE, but those children, their families, and society at-large.

Finally, some commenters have 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. Monroe Academy for Business has worked closely with a School Support Organization (SSO) 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. The professional development plan for Monroe Academy for Business has included study groups, inter-visitation, modeling and looking at student work to improve instruction; looking at data; understanding the Quality Review rubric; and engaging staff in inquiry process. A series of workshops was also provided on Differentiated Instruction, special education instructional strategies, and writing effective Individualized Education Plans. Further, 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. 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-99228622A268/73709/12X690Monroe_EIS2.pdf.

**Prepared by
Department of Education**