



Date: January 26, 2010

Topic: Proposed Phase-out and Closure of KAPPA II

Date of Panel Vote: January 26, 2010

Summary of Proposal

This is a proposal to phase-out and eventually close KAPPA II (05M317, “KAPPA II”), an existing school serving students in grades 6-8 in Community School District 5. KAPPA II currently is located at 144-176 East 128 Street, Manhattan. Beginning in 2010-2011, KAPPA II will begin phasing out one grade per year until the school closes in June 2012. KAPPA II will not accept new grade 6 students for the 2010-2011 school year.

An Educational Impact Statement on this proposal was posted on the Department of Education’s (DOE) website on December 10, 2009. An Amended Educational Impact Statement reflecting the DOE’s plan to use the space made available by the phase-out and eventual closure of KAPPA II to house grades K-4 of an existing charter school, Harlem Success Academy 2 was posted on January 8, 2010. The proposal to site Harlem Success Academy 2 in school building M030 is the subject of a separate educational impact statement published on January 8, 2010, and expected to be voted on by the Panel for Educational Policy at its February 24 meeting.

Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at school building M030 on January 11, 2010, and all interested parties had an opportunity to provide input on the proposal. Four individuals signed up to speak but only three made comments at the hearing. All three speakers were in opposition to the proposal. The reasons cited for opposition were: KAPPA II was not given appropriate resources to serve special needs students; parents selected the school because of the environment and good energy of teachers; the belief that the phase-out proposal is a result of racism and paternalism; and an assertion that the school belongs to the students and community, not the DOE.

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

No written or oral comments have been received. However, 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 KAPPA II.¹ In opposing the DOE’s proposal to phase-out and eventually close these schools, these commenters cited the following reasons: (1) the DOE did not use a rational formula and failed to follow its own accountability standards in proposing these phase-outs; (2) 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; (3) the Educational Impact Statements do not address where students at the phasing out school who are behind in credits will attend in the future; (4) 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; (5) 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; (6) the phasing out schools are being punished for setting high academic and safety standards; (7) the phase-outs will impair recruitment of teachers into schools serving high-needs students; and (8) 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, the CSM comments call 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

The DOE is proposing to phase-out and close KAPPA II because the school has persistently failed to help students make progress. In 2008-09, a year when large gains were recorded at most schools citywide, KAPPA II made negative progress on annual State math exams. Student performance at the school remains below the District 5 average. In fact, only 53.5 percent of students are proficient in math, compared with 72.0 percent district-wide. Only

¹ Some of the general comments raise issues that are relevant only to the proposed phase-out of high schools. These comments are only addressed in the public comment analysis for each high school phase-out proposal.

43.6% of students are proficient in ELA, compared with 59.1% district-wide. Furthermore, demand for the school is low. In 2008-09, 232 students were enrolled at KAPPA II. This year, 138 students are enrolled, with only 25 6th graders.

The school's Progress Report grade has declined over each of the three past years, earning a B in 2006-07, a C in 2007-08, and a D in 2008-09. The school's environment was cited as a positive factor by a commenter at the joint public hearing; however, this year, the school earned an F on the "Environment" sub-section of the Progress Report, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction expressed by all constituents on the school's learning environment survey. The school earned a D on the same section in 2007-2008. Finally, the school was found to be "Underdeveloped with Proficient Features" on the 2008-2009 Quality Review. These grades reflect widespread dissatisfaction among parents, teachers, and students.

Some commenters have suggested that the DOE has not used a rational formula in proposing school phase-outs 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 schools that the Chancellor has determined lack the necessary capacity to improve student performance, regardless of the school's Progress Report grades and Quality review scores.

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.

Comments further suggest 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, the report asserts 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. The report also claims 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 opened by the DOE serve all 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 KAPPA II, the DOE has also proposed the phase-in of several new small schools. The building in which KAPPA II is housed will not be closed and citywide we will be replacing each seat that is lost. For next year there will be sufficient seats. To the extent one commenter 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.

Some commenters have stated 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. KAPPA II 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. KAPPA II's network team has provided consistent instructional support to the school, including: weekly meetings with teachers to engage in in-depth conversations about student work and provide strategies to raise academic rigor; devoting a half day each week to support new teachers with planning and instructional practice; counseling the principal on staffing and time allotment for students with special needs; and holding Differentiation Institutes and Summer Institutes for principals and staff.

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 it is currently posted.

A copy of the amended educational impact statement for this proposal can be obtained at http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/F0043783-8608-433C-855E-99228622A268/75269/05M317KAPPAIL_AmendedEIS_Final_1810.pdf.