



Date: January 25, 2010

Topic: Proposed Phase-out and Eventual Closure of Beach Channel High School and Co-location of a New School, 27Q324 in Q410

Date of Panel Vote: January 26, 2010

Summary of Proposal

The DOE has proposed to phase-out and close Beach Channel High School (27Q410, “Beach Channel”), an existing school serving students in grades 9-12. Beach Channel currently is located at 100-00 Beach Channel Drive, Queens in Community School District 27 (“District 27”). In the 2010-2011 school year, Beach Channel will begin phasing out one grade 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. Beach Channel will close in June 2013.

The phase-out and eventual closure of Beach Channel will create available space in Q410 to house 27Q324, a new school. The DOE proposes to phase-in a new high school as Beach Channel phases-out. 27Q324 will open in 2010-2011 with grade 9 and will serve grades 9-12 at scale.

An Educational Impact Statement regarding this proposal was posted on the Department of Education’s Web site on December 7, 2009.

Comments Received at the Joint Public Hearing

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at school building Q410 on January 6, 2010. The hearing was open to the public and afforded interested parties the opportunity to comment on the proposal. One hundred and ninety individuals attended the hearing and 40 spoke, all opposed to the proposal. Speakers cited the following reasons for their opposition to the proposal: (1) budget reductions eliminated programs, thereby reducing student engagement and performance, (2) exceeded the most talented teachers and increased class size, (3) the DOE has not adequately supported the school, (4) the school should be given more time to improve, and (5) the DOE graduation rate statistics are inaccurate.

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

Six e-mails regarding this proposal were received. No oral comments regarding this proposal have been received. Two comments discussed the oceanographic facilities of the school and requested that one of the new schools to replace Beach Channel be dedicated to oceanography and green science. Others addressed the loss of a neighborhood school, the impact of community problems on the school, the loss of advanced programs due to reduced enrollments, the absence of DOE officials at the initial parent meeting announcing the phase-out, and the DOE policy on PTA membership.

In addition to the above comments, 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 Beach Channel.^[1] 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, 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)

^[1] General comments that raise issues relevant only to the proposed phase-out of high schools are only addressed in the public comment analysis for each high school phase-out proposal.

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

Based on a combination of consistently poor performance, lack of evidence of capacity to turnaround, and very low demand, the DOE proposes to begin phasing out Beach Channel in September 2010. New school 27Q324 will serve all students and provide a better option for meeting students' needs.

Demand is low, indicating that families have already decided that Beach Channel does not represent a high quality educational option. Safety and discipline are also a concern at Beach Channel, with only 56 percent of students indicating that they feel safe at school. Demand for the school is low and declining, with the school receiving 2.1 applications per seat for the current school year compared with 8.4 applications per seat citywide. Five years ago, Beach Channel enrolled nearly 2,600 students. In 2008-09, the school enrolled only 1,522 students; based on preliminary, unaudited register data, this year's enrollment dipped further to 1,345 students—half the number of students who attended Beach Channel five years ago.

Graduation rates at Beach Channel have stagnated at very low levels for years. In 2005, the four-year graduation rate was 47 percent. It rose to 53 percent the following year, then dipped back to 47 percent again. In 2008, the graduation rate was 46.1 percent, and in 2009 it was 46.9 percent. These outcomes are particularly low, especially when compared to the City's average graduation rate, which rose from 47 percent to 61 percent during that same period. Beach Channel students tend to fall behind early compared to comparable schools. In 2007-08, only 52.1 percent of first-year students accumulated ten or more credits; in 2008-09, that figure fell to 50.8 percent. 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.

With respect to the comment asserting that budget reductions are to blame for the school's low performance, it is incorrect to say that funding is a cause of student performance. Beach Channel's budget is determined according to the same per pupil formula as all other public schools in New York City. Supplemental funds are allocated to students who are considered high-need, such as English language learners, special education students, and students who have struggled academically. As with the base per-pupil funding, those supplemental allocations are fixed at identical levels, regardless of where a student attends school. Beach Channel has received additional funding relative to other schools on a per pupil basis in the form of a Small Learning Grant from the federal government.

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.

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.” Although it reflects some factors that contribute to school success, those are hardly comprehensive. If administrator actions improve while student progress does not, we still must take action.

But school turnaround is difficult, takes time, and does not always succeed. Schools are rated on a four-point scale, with “Well Developed” representing the top category of performance. 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 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 percent 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, new schools also serve more special education students and English language learners 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 to serve 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 Beach Channel 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 homeless students, 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 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. Alongside the phase-out and eventual closure of these schools, including Beach Channel, the DOE has also proposed the phase-in of several new small schools. The building in which Beach Channel is housed will not be closed and we will be replacing each seat that is lost on a citywide basis. There will be sufficient seats for next year. 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 City's 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 the schools proposed for closure and they generally are not operating at full capacity. By phasing out these underperforming and low-demand schools and putting in new, high-quality 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 further from their homes. The DOE is opening a new school on the campus to provide options to students to attend Beach Channel campus 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. In addition to the option of new school on the Beach Channel campus there other non screening high schools in District 27 for students 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 AP 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.

Members of the public commenting on this proposal 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. In fact, the DOE took several key steps over the past few years to try to turn Beach Channel High School around without resorting to closure, including the creation of Small Learning Communities (SLC) and

ongoing support from the SLC team. The SLC was supported by a federal grant as well as instructional support from the DOE's Office of Post Secondary Pathways and Planning. Beach Channel was also provided with a UFT Teacher Center representative who worked closely with the principals, assistant principals, and staff to provide professional development based on the needs of teachers. Finally, the School Support Organization provided professional development on rigor in the content areas on a weekly basis through meetings, UFTTC Representative, Lead Teachers, and additional support was provided to the school by the support organization on setting student and teacher goals, analyzing data, and interdisciplinary curriculum.

Finally, one commenter expressed concern that no DOE official attended the parent meeting that was held at Beach Channel High School to discuss the proposed phase-out. DOE officials did, in fact, attend the parent meeting. In addition, answers to the questions raised at that meeting were provided in writing on January 8th, 2010 to the Citywide Council on High Schools.

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-99228622A268/73431/27Q410_BeachChannel_EIS1207099.pdf.

**Prepared by
Department of Education**