



Date: January 25, 2010

Topic: The Proposed Phase-out and Eventual Closure of Jamaica High School and Siting of Two New Schools, 28Q325 and 28Q328, in School Building Q470

Date of Panel Vote: January 26, 2010

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### **Summary of Proposal**

Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, Jamaica High School (28Q470, “Jamaica”), an existing school serving students in grades 9-12, will be phased out of operation. Jamaica is housed in school building Q470, located at 167-01 Gothic Drive, Queens in Community School District 28 (“District 28”).

In the 2010-2011 school year, Jamaica High School 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. Jamaica High School will close in June 2013.

The phase-out and eventual closure of Jamaica High School will create available space in Q470 to house two new schools, 28Q325 and 28Q328. 28Q325 will open in 2010 with grade 9 and will add a grade each year until it reaches its full 9-12 grade scale in 2013-2014. 28Q328 will open in 2010 with grade 9 and will add a grade each year until it reaches its full 9-12 grade scale in 2013-2014. The phase-out and eventual closure of Jamaica High School and the opening of two new schools in Q470 addresses the need to provide higher quality high school options throughout the City.

The Educational Impact Statement regarding this proposal was published on the New York City Department of Education’s (hereinafter referred to as “DOE”) Web site on December 10, 2009. An amended Educational Impact Statement regarding this proposal was published on the DOE’s Web site on December 18, 2009.

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

A joint public hearing regarding this proposal was held at school building Q470 on January 7, 2010. The hearing was open to the public, and all interested parties had the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Eight hundred individuals attended the hearing, and 107 spoke; all were opposed to the proposal. Speakers opposed the proposal for the following reasons: (1) the DOE's statistics, in particular the calculation of graduation rate as the percentage of four year cohort members graduating, rather than the percentage of seniors graduating, were misleading; (2) the school has a very long and storied history; (3) the school hosts some successful programs; (4) some of the school's alumni have been very successful, and they attribute their success to their experience at Jamaica; and (5) general opposition to charter schools in New York City public school buildings.

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

Four oral comments and 103 written comments regarding this proposal have been received. All four oral comments were in opposition to the proposal, and the commenters have pointed to Jamaica's improving graduation rates and Jamaica's historical value to the community. The written comments have pointed to Jamaica's special needs and English language learner (ELL) student population and questioned the effect this phase-out and eventual closure will have on them. The written comments also allege that the DOE did not provide sufficient resources to Jamaica for it to succeed and that some of the school's programs succeed in serving students. We have received written comments from current Jamaica students, alumni, staff, faculty, and community members. Current students have also pointed to the potential negative effects that this proposed closure and phase-out will have on current Jamaica staff and faculty.

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 Jamaica. 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) 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 has proposed the phase-out and eventual closure of Jamaica because for the past several years, it has failed to make significant progress for its students. Jamaica received a C on its 2006-2007 Progress Report, a C on its 2007-2008 Progress Report, and a D on its 2008-2009 Progress Report, declining in all three categories. Students fall behind early at Jamaica, and the school has a poor track record of helping those students get back on track. Only 47 percent of first-year students accumulated ten or more credits in 2007-08, and in 2008-09, that figure declined, with only 44 percent of first-year students accumulating at least 10 credits.

While the school was deemed "Proficient" on its 2008-2009 Quality Review, the report cited a number of serious concerns, including inadequate differentiation of instruction to support individual student needs. This suggests that the school is ill-equipped to turn around quickly to better support students.

Furthermore, the graduation rate at Jamaica High School has stagnated below 50% for years. In 2008, the graduation rate was 44.5% . In 2009, the graduation rate increased slightly to 46.2%. This slight increase still leaves the school twenty points below the projected Queens average of 67%. The six-year graduation rate is only 57.8% which is still significantly below the Queens average. 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.

Jamaica's history of failure has generated low demand levels for seats at the school. Only 10 percent of students zoned for the school currently attend. Jamaica received 2.3 applications per seat for September 2009 admissions, compared with 8.4 seats per application citywide, and just 89 students out of more than 80,000 grade 8 students listed Jamaica as a first choice on their

high school admissions applications. The school is under-enrolled by several hundred students in the borough that is home to some of the most overcrowded high schools in the City.

Jamaica High School has two screened programs for which the school hand-picks students. Each program has a very high graduation rate, but each only serves a small percentage of the student body. The screened programs produce most of the school's graduates, and the DOE cannot keep a school open when it is only serving a small subset of its population effectively. In addition the school is not making progress with its ELL and special education population and the phase out and opening of new schools that have the capacity to serve those students well will create better outcomes for students. A school such as Newcomers in Queens has 92% ELL population and a 63.8% four year graduation rate.

Jamaica is not under-funded. Jamaica'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 ELL, 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. When this funding formula was implemented in fall 2007, the DOE took care to avoid destabilizing schools that had pre-existing budgets above the level they were owed according to the formula. Those schools were "held harmless" for the difference between their old budget and their formula allocation. In fact, this year Jamaica received \$282,000 in "hold harmless" funding. In other words, Jamaica had \$282,000 more in their budget than other similarly sized schools serving similar student populations.

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 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. It 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, including Jamaica, 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, in fact, accept ELLs 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 ELLs, compared to 12.8 percent special education students and 10.3 percent ELLs citywide.
- When looking across a school’s entire population, new schools 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 ELLs 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.

Seventeen percent of Jamaica's students are ELLs, and 12 percent are special education students, compared with 14 percent ELLs and 15 percent special education students served by schools on average citywide. The DOE is creating additional options in Queens to replace seat capacity at Jamaica and plans to open up two new small schools in the building in September 2010. These schools will have the capacity to serve high needs students, including special education students, ELLs, and homeless students. With respect to homeless students in particular, the CSM comments suggest that closing schools would take away the only stable environment these students have. The phase-out process, however, is a gradual one and will not displace these students. Further, 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.

Current students at the schools proposed for phase-out who are behind in credits, including current Jamaica High School 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 Jamaica, the DOE has also proposed the phase-in of several new small schools. The building in which Jamaica 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 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 the schools proposed for phase-out 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 further from their homes. The DOE is opening new schools on the campus to provide options to students to attend Jamaica 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 schools on the Jamaica campus there are seven other non screening high schools in District 28. 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.

Finally, 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. Jamaica 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. 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. Extensive supports were provided by Jamaica's SSO, including professional development and mentoring to teachers and administrators. In addition, the DOE's Office of Postsecondary Pathways and Planning worked with the SSO to support Jamaica's Small Learning Communities initiative.

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/ronlyres/F0043783-8608-433C-855E-99228622A268/74458/28Q470Jamaica\\_EIS\\_121709\\_Amended.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/F0043783-8608-433C-855E-99228622A268/74458/28Q470Jamaica_EIS_121709_Amended.pdf).