DISTRICT OFFICE
165 PARK ROW, SUITE 11
NEW YORK, NY 10038
(212) 587-3159
FAX: (212) 587-3138

CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, SUITE 1738
NEW YORK, NY 10007
(212) 788-7259
mchin@council.nyc.gov

THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

MARGARET S. CHIN

COUNCIL MEMBER, 1ST DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

CHAIR
LOWER MANHATTAN REDEVELOPMENT

COMMITTEES
PUBLIC HOUSING
EDUCATION
SMALL BUSINESS
CIVIL RIGHTS
WOMEN'S ISSUES
AGING

October 26, 2012

Mr. Dennis Walcott, Schools Chancellor
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Walcott:

I am writing with regards to three schools in my district which were designated as priority schools by the Department of Education for the 2012-2013 school year: Henry Street School, University Neighborhood Middle School, and Marta Valle Secondary School.

In March 2012, my colleagues and I wrote to you about our concerns over the potential phase-out of one of the schools already housed at the Corlears Complex due to the co-location of Manhattan Charter School II (MCSII) at this site. Now, our fears have been confirmed.

The Henry Street School and Neighborhood University Middle School, which are both housed at the Corlears Complex, were listed at priority schools by the DOE this year. As stated at the school briefing for Manhattan by the Division of Portfolio Planning on September 19th, this means these schools could be phased out in the near future. MCSII has co-located at the Corlears Complex at the expense – and potential closure – of two of our neighborhood's public schools.

I want to know from DOE why these three schools were listed at priority schools. University Neighborhood Middle School received an Overall Score of B on its 2011-12 Progress Report; and Henry Street School received an Overall Score of C on its 2011-12 Progress Report. Henry Street School did receive a lower score of a D on student performance, but as you know, 65 percent of the students at Henry Street are ELL or IEP. Shouldn't this factor in heavily to the DOE's calculation of priority schools? Henry Street School also has a new Principal, Christine Loughlin, who started in 2012.

There is an urgent need for higher quality middle school options in CEC District 1. My constituents tell me that they want more gifted and talented programs in our middle schools. This is a perfect opportunity to invest in the Henry Street School and University Neighborhood Middle School and to attract a new group of students to these schools.

Progress reports for high schools have not yet been released, however last year, Marta Valle received an Overall Score of C on its 2011 Progress Report, with a higher score of B in student performance. Marta Valle also has a relatively new principal, Mimi Fortunato, who has brought innovative programs, like anti-truancy initiatives, to the school. I know that Principal Fortunato is committed to turning this school around.

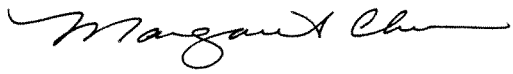
I ask the DOE to elaborate on the materials provided at the Manhattan schools briefing. I want to know what criteria was used to determine what schools were deemed "priority schools" and what information about each individual school, specifically, in addition to the Progress Report, does DOE consider when making this determination. I also request to be notified of what assistance these three schools are receiving from the DOE as this process moves forward.

I feel strongly that the DOE should invest in our schools, not phase out schools with that are struggling. In my district, I urge our principals to reach out and form relationships with local community and social service organizations. These are important resources that can help principals recruit local students, especially to high schools like Marta Valle. In the end, it is the DOE's responsibility to make sure our schools are fully enrolled. It is not fair to punish schools for being under enrolled when DOE ultimately controls the enrollment process.

I urge the DOE to reinvest in Henry Street School, University Neighborhood Middle School, and Marta Valle Secondary School, and to specifically enlist the surrounding community in the revitalization of these schools. I am happy to assist in any way to help boost enrollment at these schools, or in any other capacity. The bottom line is I will not sit idly by while the DOE looks to phase out these three schools.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. If you wish to discuss this further, please contact Kelly Magee, Director of Communications, at (212) 788-7259.

Sincerely,



Margaret S. Chin
Council Member
District-1, lower Manhattan

CC:
First Deputy Mayor Patricia Harris
Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez
Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney
Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver
State Senator Daniel Squadron
Borough President Scott Stringer
Council Member Rosie Mendez