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DOE Policy Panel Votes to Approve Every DOE Proposal

DOE documents raise questions about the legitimacy of stated rationale

Brooklyn, NY – On Tuesday night at Brooklyn Technical High School in Fort Greene, the DOE’s Panel for Educational Policy voted on several co-location proposals. Many of the proposals were co-locations of charter schools within traditional public schools. The meeting was attended by over a hundred parents, students and teachers from the Eva Moskowitz-led Bronx Success Academy who wore orange and blue hats and t-shirts with their school’s name on them and held signs reading “Bolder – Faster – Change.” The remainder of the room was filled by students and parents of P.S. 308 and students, parents and teachers of other traditional public schools on the agenda. Three of the proposals on the agenda pertained to schools in the 36th Council District, which consists of Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights.

One of the proposals was for the co-location of a new school – presumed to be the IBM-affiliated public 9-14 high school – and re-siting and co-location of the existing Academy for Health Careers with Paul Robeson High School. Another proposed the co-location of a new charter K-4 school – Brooklyn Success Academy, operated by the Eva Moskowitz-run Success Charter Network – inside a building with four other schools: Urban Assembly School for the Urban Environment, a District 14 middle school that serves grades 6-8; P.S. 368, a District 75 middle school that serves students with emotional disturbances or autism in grades 6-8; Foundations Academy, a high school that serves grades 9-12; and an Alternative Learning Center, a high school suspension center for student in grades 9-12. The final proposal in the 36th Council District was to site a new charter elementary school – Teaching Firms of America – inside P.S. 308, a K-8 school.

Council Member Al Vann communicated to the DOE and PEP prior to and during the meeting that he and the community were opposed to the latter two co-locations. After conducting a walk-through of P.S. 308, he did not believe there was sufficient common space in P.S. 308 for additional students, because the current students could not eat lunch comfortably, did not have adequate access to the gymnasium and lacked necessary educational resources. He opposed the co-location despite his support of the proposed charter school being located within his district. In the case of the proposed co-location of the new Brooklyn Success Academy, Councilman Vann opposed its co-location based upon his belief that it was inappropriate to place elementary school students within the same building as a high school and high school suspension site. Despite the opposition of parents, Community Education Council members, community members and Councilman Vann, the PEP approved the proposals.

“It is disappointing that the Panel for Educational Policy has once again failed to listen to the public and make objective decisions on ill-conceived DOE proposals,” **said Council Member Vann**. “What is the point of such a body and a process that is a complete charade only intended to meet the bare minimum requirements of the law? This system of disengagement from communities is unsustainable. The DOE cannot continue to shut parents out of the decisions that directly impact their children, because parental involvement is an integral component in a child’s education. Continuing down this road will impede the DOE’s efforts to improve school environments and will create a further divide between communities and the DOE.

“I also agonize over the way the DOE and some charter school operators and advocates have created a divisive climate pitting charter school parents and students against those of traditional public schools,” **continued Vann**. “It is destructive and appalling to use children of charter schools to advance a political agenda by having them shout down traditional

public school parents and children at PEP meetings. The adults responsible for this faux organizing must stop abusing our children by perpetuating a belief that their charter school is inherently better than the traditional public school. How can one consider themselves an educator while being responsible for this?"

Several of the DOE-produced documents meant to explain and justify its proposal for the co-location at P.S. 308 have raised questions about the veracity of its reasoning. In the Building Utilization Plan, the Justification of Feasibility and Equitability of Proposed Shared Space Plan table (on page 9 of the attached document) only allows four 30 minute lunch periods for the students of P.S. 308. Considering that the document indicates the cafeteria has a capacity of 122, that would only allow 488 students of P.S. 308 to eat lunch although the school currently has 649 students and is expected to have 620-665 students next year based upon DOE projections. In the DOE's Analysis of the Public Comment, there appears to be internal DOE communications mistakenly posted (at the top of page 6) that raises questions about whether a DOE employee believes this proposal is justified. These are both documents that the DOE is mandated by law to produce and raise more questions than are answered.

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The aforementioned documents are attached and below are links to them on the DOE website:

Building Utilization Plan - http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/0CE46926-8BE5-4A65-B7BA-F61655D58DD5/96267/BUP_K308_TFoA_vFINAL.pdf

Analysis of the Public Comment - http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/0CE46926-8BE5-4A65-B7BA-F61655D58DD5/99782/Analysis_of_Public_Comment_K308_TeachingFirms_vfin.pdf