

COALITION OF EAST SIDE ELECTED OFFICIALS

c/o COUNCIL MEMBER JESSICA LAPPIN
330 EAST 63RD STREET, SUITE 1K
NEW YORK, NY 10065

December 10, 2009

T. Elzora Cleveland
President
Community Education Council District 2
333 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001

Dear Ms. Cleveland and Members of the District 2 Community Education Council,

As you well know, the Upper East Side has faced a steadily worsening overcrowding crisis for the past several years. Schools have been forced to convert art rooms, libraries, and even closets into instructional space to keep pace with rising enrollments. A number of new school projects on the Upper East Side are already or will soon be coming online. These new seats should help ease the space crunch. The District 2 Community Education Council (CEC) and New York City Department of Education (DOE) rightfully understand that rezoning is needed in order to make effective use of the new school capacity that is becoming available. However, as elected representatives for this neighborhood, we do not feel that the DOE's proposal for the space at PS 158 that will become available after East Side Middle School relocates is appropriate. We respectfully ask that you vote against the plan as it currently stands.

To be sure, there are wonderful and encouraging parts of the DOE's proposal. We wholeheartedly agree with the DOE's assessment that additional elementary school capacity is needed starting in Fall 2010. However, we cannot support any plan to turn PS 158 into a mega-school with well over 1,000 students.

The bottom line is that the proposals put forth by the DOE create a school that is simply too big. On the East Side, we are fortunate enough to have supportive, nurturing schools of reasonable size. Creating a mega-school in the PS 158 building would be detrimental both to the existing PS 158 community and to the students who would be rezoned to attend the school. Research from both the Brookings Institute and the Center for Teaching and Policy found that student learning tends to diminish in schools that enroll over 800 students. In addition, it becomes significantly more difficult to build the sense of community that is the hallmark of successful schools in a school of more than 1,000 students. Given these facts, it is no wonder that PS 158 parents have spoken forcefully and with near unanimity against the DOE's plan.

The ultimate test comes when we ask whether we would want our own children to attend a school of that enormous size. The answer is no. As such we cannot support a plan that would put other children in that position.

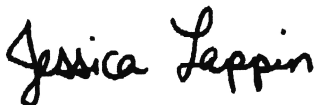
Were this the only available option, perhaps it could be made to work. However, there are other feasible – and, in fact, preferable – options available. Perhaps the most promising of those options would create an entirely new elementary school in the available PS 158 space with a zone drawn from the existing zones of the most overcrowded schools on the Upper East Side. The new school would “incubate” in the PS 158 building as a separate school with its own administration until PS 59 moves out of the MEETH facility and into its newly renovated building. The new school would then move into the MEETH building as its permanent home.

The creation of a separate new school in the PS 158 building would meet the immediate need to relieve overcrowding in the worst-hit schools without unduly burdening any one other school as a result. This would allow PS 158 to preserve its size and character while still addressing the overcrowding crisis among the Upper East Side schools.

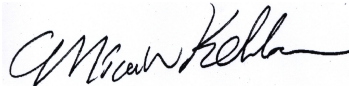
Critics of this plan may say that the drawing of the zoning lines for a new school at MEETH is more difficult or even impossible. It certainly may be more difficult than the current plan of extending the lines at PS 158, but it is possible. We have every confidence that the DOE, working with the CEC, will be able to draw appropriate zones. Critics may also say that incubating the school for the MEETH building leaves the school too dependent upon a timely completion of the PS 59 project, which is already delayed. However, the School Construction Authority continues to claim that the new PS 59 will be completed by Fall 2012, meaning that the school would only need to incubate in PS 158 for two years. Even if construction is delayed considerably beyond that, the 15 available classrooms at PS 158 would be enough to house the school for *five years*, even if the school took in 75 students each year (25 more than the DOE’s current proposals call for being added to that building). In addition, we hope that any anxiety parents may feel about their children attending a newly created school will be more than allayed by the tremendous success of PS 151 this year.

In the end, the DOE’s current proposals are flawed and we strongly urge you not to approve them. Instead, we ask that you work with the DOE to create a new elementary school that will incubate in the PS 158 space for a few years before moving permanently into the MEETH building. This solution will meet all of the short-term needs of the neighborhood’s overcrowded schools without unfairly burdening a single school for the long term. While we appreciate the thought and attention that went into the DOE’s proposals, we must oppose them and we urge you to do the same. We ask that you swiftly reject this plan so that work can begin on a proposal that will truly serve the needs of our community.

Sincerely,



JESSICA LAPPIN
Council Member
5th District – Manhattan



MICAH Z. KELLNER
Assembly Member
65th District - Manhattan



SCOTT M. STRINGER
Manhattan Borough President