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OF

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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April 4, 2023

David Banks
Chancellor, Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Banks:

I write to support keeping the Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School at 140 West 102 Street where it has been for decades educating a wide variety of transfer and other students. Please pull this item off of the PEP calendar.

One graduate is Dr. Daniel Messinger, the Hon. Ruth Messinger's son, who is a tenured professor at the University of Miami. Ed Reynold's was the beloved principal who died expectantly while shoveling snow at his home. I knew him well. I could tell you about many of the great teachers and administrators who have supported the students for years; and its programs are so unique and excellent that Michelle Obama visited to support the students participating in the wellness/fitness effort when she was First Lady.

Today, most of the students live in Washington Hts. and the 10025 zip code. They are young people who need the support that West Side High is famous for, and they take the Number 1 train directly to the school or walk across the street to achieve their goals. For these students, an easy commute is a principal attraction of West Side High; in terms of the challenges these students are overcoming it makes no educational sense to remove them from this site and force them to make a much longer and more difficult commute to East Harlem.

One could argue that students travel all over NYC successfully but I would say that when you are working with youth who are short on credits and need support, the Department of Education must make getting to school as easy as possible.

There are so many other reasons not to move West Side High to East Harlem. As the former Manhattan Borough President, I am familiar with all of the great neighborhoods in Manhattan.

One reason to keep this transfer school where it is on West 102 Street is that it educates many youth who live in the Frederick Douglass Houses, a NYCHA development. Some youth come to the school from across town as well as the Washington Heights area and the Bronx because they feel safe at West Side High School. There are no gang issues. If youth from Douglass are moved across town, and youth from Johnson, Wagner or other NYCHA developments in East Harlem attend West Side High, gang issues are likely to arise. Douglass is a large development and the young people who live there need the education and support that their neighborhood high school provides.

I do not use the word equity often but if there was ever an example of the need for equity, this is it. I am a big supporter of The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem (TYWLS). As Borough President, I allocated \$200,000 in capital funds to the school. The principal, teachers, administrators and the Board educate the students extremely well. They need more space and we should help them to do that. I am very willing to make that effort.

West Side High School students, on the other hand, are transfer students – many of whom do very well in college and careers – but they need the facilities that their building offers. I was instrumental in securing this building for West Side High, with Ed Reynolds. The building has a childcare center – the LYFE program - as well as the spin room/fitness center, a large gym and a student kitchen. The long-term health center is operated by the Ryan Health Center, a well-respected community based center named after Congressman Bill Ryan, who knew Ed Reynolds. There is a large playing field next to the school, available to the school and the community. I was able to secure the funding for this field many years ago.

To repeat, this building is a gem and needs to be filled with students who need the resources it offers. There are Black, Brown, Asian and White youth in both schools, but the students at West Side High desperately need the day care center, the gym, the fitness area and the field. It is inequitable to take away the LYFE Center, the wellness and health center, the large gym and field, and the kitchen; the supporters and school community at West Side High have created these assets for their students over decades. The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem lacks all of these facilities. To arbitrarily take them away from the students of West Side HS cannot be good educational policy (West Side High students attending school at a different site would not return to 102nd Street for health and LYFE services). If the TYWLS building is not adequate to meet the needs of its current student population, then it cannot be adequate for the students now at West Side High School.

West Side High also works with the Center for Court Innovation, mentoring organizations, paid internships with Learning to Work, and other non-profit agencies. West Side High was selected by a national organization as one of the 5 or 6 best schools in the country based on its best practices in school climate and discipline.

I hope that I have made a good case for maintaining the location of the Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School at 140 West 102nd Street, where more transfer and other students can thrive, while recognizing the space limitations at The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem and working to find them another school site that, like West Side High School, meets their educational needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gale A. Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "G".

Gale A. Brewer, Council Member, 6th