



THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Bill de Blasio – PUBLIC ADVOCATE



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**PUBLIC ADVOCATE DE BLASIO AND AQE REPORT:
DOE FAILS TO EVALUATE IMPACT OF SCHOOL
CLOSINGS AND CO-LOCATIONS ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

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***Problems Found in Schools Closings also Experienced in the Co-Location
Process, Report Finds***

NEW YORK – Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) today released a report that examines how the Department of Education (DOE) makes decisions regarding major changes in school buildings utilization. The report focuses on the DOE's practice of having schools share building space, also known as co-locations and school closings procedures. If not well planned and coordinated, co-locations, along with school closings, can disrupt students' education and decrease their access to school facilities such as classrooms, gymnasiums and cafeterias.

The report comes weeks after an appellate court prevented from closing 19 schools because the DOE failed to follow the law's parental engagement requirements and adequately evaluate the impact these changes have on school services. The report findings suggest that these same problems exist in the DOE's process to co-locate schools.

"We cannot improve our education system if the DOE ends up shortchanging students while it is trying to create better schools," said Public Advocate de Blasio. "This report essentially asks Chancellor Klein not to make the same mistakes he made when he tried to close 19 schools earlier this year. The DOE must conduct a meaningful information process that explains to parents how changes in school buildings will affect their children's education and gives them an opportunity to provide feedback."

“This report demonstrates why educational impacts must be the centerpiece in making decisions about school closings and co-locations. The Chancellor’s ongoing assertion that DOE’s shortcomings in these decisions were strictly ‘procedural’ is not reality based—the DOE simply did not do the required analysis of the educational impacts,” said Billy Easton, Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Education. “The parent survey offers valuable insights into how to improve the process—answering parents’ questions in public meetings would be a good start.”

"Under our co-location the therapy rooms were lost; my daughter's physical therapist was shifted from a therapy room to a locker room. Her occupational therapy was shifted to the library where she had to receive occupational therapy next to another student who was also receive occupational therapy while at the same time the library had a class or workshop going on. She needs therapy on a one-on-one basis. The result is that the quality of the therapy is not what it needs to be. This is not something the DOE looked at when they decided to co-locate the schools. One-third of the students in my daughter's school are in special ed. These students are lost in the shuffle of the co-location process." Lydia Bellachecne, Parent Association President, PS 15, Brooklyn

“The DOE did not notify the parents. If the principal had not mentioned it to us we would not have known they were planning to close the school,” said Evette Chico, Vice President, Parent Association, Maxwell High School, Brooklyn. “Last year I was the Parent Association President and I found out about the hearings after the fact. In fact I was on the School Leadership Team and nobody from DOE talked to us about co-sponsoring the hearing. There are not a lot of vocational schools in Brooklyn; the kids who graduate from Maxwell are going to have a career. My daughter is studying cosmetology, not too many schools offer that program.”

“Given the overwhelming evidence of parental dissatisfaction & lack of transparency as proven by the surveys of the Public Advocates Office & the Alliance for Quality Education, CEJ stands firmly & urgently calls for a Temporary Moratorium on School Closings and Co-locations until there is an Independent Analysis of Impact,” said Rodrick Daley, Parent Leader at the Center for Educational Justice. The courts and the surveys by the Public Advocates office have agreed that the current Educational Impact Statements upon which decisions have been made are inadequate. Our children deserve accurate and thoughtful consideration of the impact any changes will have on their future.”

REPORT FINDINGS

The report includes an analysis of 39 Educational Impact Statement (EIS) --the official document that is supposed to provide an assessment of the impact that a proposed change will have on student’s education— including statements for 19 schools that were slated for closure this year, and covering 25 of the 66 schools that the Panel for Educational Policy approved for co-location in the 2010-2011 school year.

The analysis shows that not one EIS articulated a clear plan for the educational improvement for the affected students. Specifically on EIS for co-locations, 13 out of the 20 EIS analyzed asserts

that the proposed change will “provide high quality school options” but they failed to explain how these schools will in fact “provide high quality education” to their districts. In addition to relying heavily on boilerplate language, the EIS did not address how the proposed changes would impact other educational variables, such as art and music space, afterschool programming, early education programs, physical education space and other valuable school resources.

Furthermore, the report also finds that parents were not given enough time to ask questions and comment on the EIS, with 11 of the 25 schools examined only having between two and six days to provide and receive feedback.

This report also includes the results of a survey of 874 parents from 34 affected schools. The analysis and survey find that the DOE has not provided adequate information for members of the school community to understand and comment about how students will be affected by these decisions, and most parents surveyed said that the DOE could improve the process by making the EIS more clear, and providing more opportunities for parents to learn about and understand proposed changes in their children’s schools.

Among the main findings revealed by the survey are:

- ***Parents don’t know how the programs in their school will be impacted by a co-location:*** 42% of parents responded that the DOE did not provide specific information on how existing education programs will be affected by school changes.
- ***Parents whose children’s schools will be co-located beginning in September think this change will result in less access to gymnasiums, classrooms, cafeterias, and auditoriums.*** At least a third of parents surveyed reported that their children’s access to the following areas will suffer after the co-location: cluster rooms (44%), gymnasium (41%), cafeteria (43%), classroom space (41%), and auditorium (35%).
- ***Educational Impact Statements, which are supposed to thoroughly evaluate and explain the impact of a co-location or closure, are not widely distributed and are deeply flawed:*** 62% of parents did not know about the EIS (44%) or knew about the EIS but did not see it (18 %); and 52% of parents said the DOE did not address questions about proposed school changes.
- ***Parents overwhelmingly responded that the engagement process can be improved and have valuable suggestions, many of which the Public Advocate and AQE recommend the DOE adopt.*** 70% of parents said that process can be improved and a significant number offered a variety of suggestions including providing more specific information about changes to school programs, additional opportunities for parental comment on program changes, a more detailed EIS and informational meetings for parents at their schools before the official hearing and comment period begins.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report offers eight viable recommendations for policy improvements by the DOE and at the State level that aim to make school changes less disruptive, including the following:

1. ***Provide meaningful Educational Impact Statements.*** The EIS must be substantially improved to include a detailed and understandable analysis of potential effects of the co-location and closings, including: safety issues, such as ensuring sufficient access to fire exits; impact on students who are English language learners and students with disabilities; impact on existing educational programs; and specific plans to guarantee the provision of physical education and arts education programs.
2. ***Create school building councils.*** The DOE should require all schools slated to share space to create permanent School Building Councils comprised of school administrators, staff and parents which will evaluate space decisions for co-located schools.
3. ***Ensure greater transparency, access to information and opportunities for involvement.*** The DOE should make the EIS more widely available at schools and the process more transparent, including posting transcripts of all public hearings online, and webcasting school-based public hearings and PEP meetings.
4. ***Require school-based informational meetings.*** Schools should conduct informational meetings with parents prior to the start of the official hearing process to discuss the EIS with members of the school community and provide parents opportunities to review and discuss the proposed changes, as well as have their questions and concerns addressed.
5. ***Do not hinder school growth.*** The DOE should refrain from implementing co-locations that require schools currently not slated for closure to reduce enrollment or to scale back expansion plans that are already in progress.
6. ***Develop uniform standards for co-location and closure decisions.*** The DOE should develop, make publicly available and utilize clear and consistent standards for its decisions regarding co-locations and closures
7. ***Study the impact of closures and co-locations before proposing additional major school utilization changes.*** The DOE should delay proposing new closure and co-locations for a period of up to six months to allow sufficient time for an independent analysis of the impact on students of closures and co-locations is completed.
8. ***NYSED and State Legislature should monitor City's compliance with current law and modify the law if necessary.*** If changes to improve the process to implement school changes are not implemented, the State Legislature and the State Education Department should act to strengthen the education law's public engagement requirements to incorporate such changes.

The full report is available at www.advocate.nyc.gov and www.ageny.org

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