



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING – EDUCATION CAPITAL
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Re: Essex Crossing New Pre-K – 8 Dual District School

Community Board 3 Manhattan (CB 3) is advocating for a new school at the Seward Park Mixed Use Development Project site, now called Essex Crossing, along with local elected officials and community partners. CB 3 plans to release a detailed position paper in late Spring 2014 for the school, which it is developing with its Community Education Council 1 (CEC 1) partner. Although the school would reside in Community School District 2 (CSD 2), CB 3 proposes that it serve both CSD 1 and CSD 2 students as a dual district PreK-8th grade school and reiterates the need for its inclusion in the Mayor's FY 2015 Preliminary Capital Budget for the Department of Education (DOE) and the School Construction Authority (SCA).

Background

The Essex Crossing plan includes a potential 1,000 housing units. Of this total, at least 50 percent will be affordable housing. The entire development can be expected to attract families who will send their children to a local public school for reasons of both affordability and quality. Even before adding the 1,000 planned units, an examination of data from the DOE 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 "Blue Books" shows that public school enrollment is growing faster in Community School District 1 (CSD 1) than in any other district in the entire city--by far--at 4.1 percent per year. The enrollment increases are already contributing to rising class sizes, with 52 percent of CSD 1 General Education, Gifted and Talented, and CTT Kindergarten classes exceeding the benchmark of 19.9 students in K-3 in the City's Contract for Excellence Plan (established by law to settle the Campaign Fiscal Equity lawsuit in 2007) with 20.1 students in the 2011-2012 school year. Furthermore, based on DOE's current utilization rates, SCA enrollment projections for 2009-2018 estimated that all elementary schools south of Houston Street will be over capacity by the project's completion date in 2022 – this includes three currently overcrowded CSD 2 public schools (P.S. 42, P.S. 124 and I.S. 131) within CB 3's boundaries.

The new schools being built to remedy CSD 2's extreme overcrowding are not expected to satisfy the population increase in CSD 2 based on housing start projections. If residential growth in CB 3 continues without any planning for a new school, the schools in CSD 1 and CSD 2 are likely to not have space for seats that are expected to be funded by Pre-K programs and class sizes will continue to increase in size to far above optimal levels.

Need

For the reasons cited above as well as based on data gleaned by multiple governmental and industry reports, the need for a dual CSD 1 and CSD 2 Pre-K to 8th grade school at Essex Crossing is critical. A dual district school would provide flexibility and consistency with the Department of City Planning's own recommendations for responsible planning around new residential developments. Recommendations for how enrollment for each of the school district's children should be structured will be included in the forthcoming position paper. This school would preferably serve CB 3 children primarily within an approximate ½ mile radius of the school site with a 50/50 mix of CSD 1 and CSD 2 children as the first priority for acceptance. CB 3 and the City would work with the State legislature to amend the current boundaries to allow for this dual district system.