



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

SCOTT M. STRINGER  
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

January 20, 2010

Joel I. Klein  
Chancellor  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chancellor Klein:

I am writing to request that you postpone the vote on school closures by the Panel on Educational Policy (the "PEP" or "Panel") now scheduled for January 26, 2010.

I have reviewed the information provided by the Department of Education to the PEP and concluded that it does not provide an adequate basis for the Panel to make informed decisions about closures that will affect thousands of public school students and their families.

As you know, the January 26 meeting will be the first PEP meeting on school closures mandated by the new Department of Education authorizing legislation enacted last year. So while I am deeply concerned about pending decisions regarding specific schools, I am equally concerned that we establish a precedent for the school closure process that produces positive outcomes, earns the trust of the city's public school families, and adheres to the new law.

At a minimum, therefore, the Panel must have before it a standard set of comprehensive data for each school slated for closure. The information should allow for (a) a meaningful comparison of schools within the group being considered for closure; and (b) a comparison between the schools presently facing closure and other schools deemed to be succeeding.

Clearly, nothing approaching that kind of information is available to the PEP at this point.

- More than half of the 20 schools facing closure appear not to have received the failing grades that DOE indicated would drive the decision to close a school, and no alternative justification has been offered.
- Twelve of the 20 schools facing closure have received a quality review rating of "proficient," and no explanation has been offered for the inadequacy of this performance.

- No rationale has been provided for considering the closure of schools only recently put under the leadership of new principals. For example, Mr. Phillip Martin was installed as the new principal of Manhattan's Norman Thomas High School at the beginning of the current school year and has by all accounts made quick and substantial progress in reforming the school. Nonetheless, in December, just four months into his tenure, the decision was made to put Norman Thomas High School on the school closure list.
- Despite repeated requests my PEP appointee, Patrick Sullivan, has made for data, including student discharge codes that would allow for a better understanding of where Special Education, ELL and other students end up when their schools close, the DOE has not been forthcoming with this information in a timely manner.

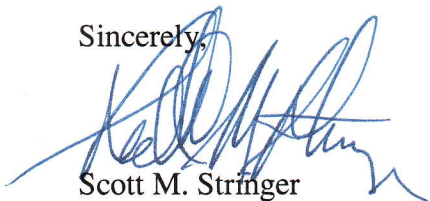
I'm certain you know that there is a rising tide of anger and fear among parents regarding school closings. Some believe that the Department of Education is using school closures as a first, not a last resort in its efforts to reform public education in New York City. This begs the question, what progress would be achieved at struggling schools by mentoring teachers, adding after-school programs, providing more tutoring, and reducing class size?

Others worry that English Language Learners and special education students, the most vulnerable populations in our public schools, will bear the brunt of school closings, and that their well-being may be sacrificed to advance the Department's reforms. Still others are concerned that if DOE turns its back on certain schools, it is only a short step to an approach that abandons certain students and the bedrock public school principle that every child can learn and every child must be taught.

We now have the opportunity to disabuse parents of these worries and put the school closure process on solid footing. But to make that happen, the PEP's first consideration of school closures must be conducted in a manner that is fully transparent and provides Panel members with all the necessary information to reach proper decisions about which of our schools to close.

Please postpone next week's PEP vote on school closures.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer  
Manhattan Borough President