



Community Education Council for District 4
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February 21, 2006

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

Re: Request for Restoration of P. S. 109

Dear Chancellor Klein:

Within the confines of District 4 lies an abandoned, sealed school building formerly known as P. S. 109. The building has been sealed for the better part of 10 years. It is approximately 119 years old and has been labeled a State and Federal landmark. It is strategically located next to a New York City public housing complex that is a hub of community activity.

ArtSpace (the organization in competition for the structure) proposes the building be turned into market rate apartments for the arts. By way of this communication, Community Education Council for District 4 (CEC4) wishes to formally request that P. S. 109 be restored to its original use, a school building.

District 4 finds itself in a unique situation. The landscape of East Harlem is changing rapidly. The revitalization brought about by gentrification is infusing new life into the community which is putting a squeeze on space that is already at a premium, and causing unprecedented increases in the cost of commercial and residential lease space. At the same time District 4 schools are not reflected as being overcrowded in the School Utilization Profile (Blue Book). This is a key indicator for it precludes the assignment of new school construction. While the data is accurate for the majority of our elementary schools it is not accurate in absolute terms nor does it accurately reflect the status of our middle schools. For example, Isaac Newton Junior High School has classrooms with as many as 38 students. The lack of middle school seats is a major and growing problem, which is exacerbated by the school truncation taking place in our district. Past attempts at alleviating the overcrowding of our middle schools has been met with the repeated challenge of lack of available space and the unavailability of funds allocated for new lease space. For example, The Heritage High School and The Young Women's Leadership School, which would like to add grades, face these very same problems. Their expansion would open up much needed middle school seats. The cafeteria at The Heritage High School doubles as the gym. The library and science lab (under construction) were carved out of space formerly used as classrooms, the only available

space. The school occupies space leased by the DOE on the third and fourth floors of the Julia de Burgos Cultural Center. The first and second floors are occupied by an art gallery and artists/cultural/community spaces.

The building housing The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem (TYWLS EH) has available space for leasing. However, the DOE has not committed to the additional leased space. As previously mentioned, commercial and residential leasing space in District 4 is becoming more and more expensive. TYWLS EH currently occupies five floors of an office building at 105 East 106th Street. Every classroom is used almost every class period. The teachers have no teacher workroom; there is no parent room or gathering space for students to meet or to have PSAL sports like volleyball or basketball.

Once again, I find it necessary to reiterate that the restoration of P. S. 109 would provide additional middle school seats; accommodate the expansion of The Heritage High School and The Young Women's Leadership School while simultaneously eliminating the need for additional leased space.

As a point of interest, Mr. Raymond Plumey--an architect and planner with over 30 years of professional experience who is licensed to practice architecture in the State of New York, a certificate holder of the National Council of Architectural Registration Board, a member of the American Institute of Architects and an adjunct assistant professor at the New York University School of Continuing & Professional Studies, where he lectures on historic preservation, and who actually happens to live in the community--was called upon to head a preliminary, architectural feasibility study to determine the practicality of preservation, rehabilitation, restoration and adaptive use of P. S. 109.

¹Parts of his findings are as follows:

"Although vacated in 1995 and deteriorated, the interior retains much of its original plan and materials. The layout of the classrooms and halls are intact. The interior finishes are simple and durable."

The structure has five (5) workable floors, not including a cellar, which would account for mechanical space and allow for six (6) usable floors. At present, the building is large enough to hold 1,150 students, approximately 20 administrative staff members and 40 teachers.

Interestingly, his knowledge of building restoration has lead him to the following finding:

P. S. 109 consists of approximately 12,500 sq. ft. per floor times six (6) floors (including the cellar), for an approximate total gross square footage of **75,000** sq. ft. According to the latest figures of the *Moreland Commission*, the average cost for building a new school in New York City is 2002 (the time the city decided to turn it into something other

¹ All information used with permission of author.

than a school) was \$432 per sq. ft., compared to \$146 per sq. ft. nationally. According to studies by the *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, the rehabilitation and preservation of existing structures is at least 25% less expensive to rehabilitate than to build brand new construction. Therefore, if the City of New York were to build a brand new 75,000 square foot school building at this site, it would cost approximately \$32,400,000 (at \$432/sq.ft), excluding demolition costs, which could be another \$4,000,000 approximately (at \$53/sq. ft.) To renovate the existing structure would cost at least 25% less or \$24,300,00 (at \$324/sq. ft.).

Notably, these figures reflect the cost in 2002 when the study was done. Four years later the cost would undoubtedly be higher. With this being said, it would still be more cost effective to renovate when compared to the cost of new construction.

Mr. Plumey's in depth study and his impressive credentials make it quite clear that he was well qualified to write this report. In his report Mr. Plumey further points out the economic boost the restoration project of P. S. 109 would infuse into our community's economy through the creation of approximately, "40 teaching positions, 20 staff positions, a core group of custodian jobs, and a slew of skilled laborers." Additionally, reopening the school would provide space to accommodate future charter schools.

The restoration of P. S. 109 would serve as a living testament of the Department of Education's commitment to the children of District 4 as well as solidify in our minds its sincere adherence to the philosophy of placing children first.

It is my sincerest wish that you would give this request the serious deliberation it deserves. I am eager to hear your response on this most important issue. Thank you in advance for your consideration. I remain,

Sincerely,

Mr. Hector R. Nazario, President
Community Education Council for District 4

cc: Manhattan Borough Pres. Honorable Scott Stringer
Council Member, 8th District, Honorable Melissa Mark Viverito
Mr. L. Rios
Mr. P. Heaney
Mr. M. Guzman
Dr. J. Izquierdo
Mr. R. Wilson
Ms. K. Grimm
Mr. R. Goldstein
Ms. G. Goodwin
Mr. R. Plumey
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