

Community Education Council District 2
333 Seventh Avenue
New York, New York 10001
Tel (212) 356-3915 Fax (212) 356-7506
www.cecd2.net

Matthew Levey, President
John Scott, 1st Vice President
Michael D. Markowitz, 2nd Vice President
Anne Daniel, Treasurer
Loren Chodosh Harkin, Recording Secretary
Nadia Schreiber, Student Member

Rebecca Daniels
Paul Gong
Yanhong Lui
Jody Seki
Mary D. Silver
Shirley H. Smith, Ph.D.

May 8, 2008

Dear Chancellor Klein:

We write to inform you of our opposition to the proposal to place grades 6-8 of the Ross charter school in the building at 55 East 25th Street, in District 2 – one of the most crowded districts in the schools system. As you know well, many nearby elementary and middle schools are currently over 100% of their stated capacity, some kindergarten classes have 28 students, and many elementary and middle schools have classes of as many as 35 students.

The CEC believes District 2 facilities should be used for District 2 students. While the CEC was briefly informed of this decision at our Feb 26th meeting, formal consultation with the larger community did not occur until the hearing on April 16th. We have repeatedly asked for information concerning the “home districts” of the Ross student body, so that we can better understand which District might be the logical best choice for a permanent facility. We have been told the Office of Charter Schools and OPD do not have this data, which ought to be easily obtained from ATS.

Furthermore, the DOE has stated that its lease with M.D. Carlisle for the 25th street building only runs through 2010, and will not be renewed. We have asked for information from the SCA as to the nature of the renewal negotiations. In the event that the lease truly cannot be renewed on reasonable terms, it raises questions about the future of Ross, as well as SCA’s decision to put millions of dollars into leasehold improvements for a building we did not own. It strikes us that over the next 26 months, economic conditions may lead the landlord to change its position on the renewal; they might also change their view on renewal were the school population changed to k-8, rather than high school as is currently the case. Were the landlord to change his/her mind and renew the lease once Ross was established on 25th Street as a “fact on the ground,” the CEC would be truly upset to have lost this opportunity to serve D2 children more completely.

Local elected officials have stated they were never informed of this relocation decision in advance and only learned about this proposed move from us and other parents in the district subsequent to April 9. This lack of community notification to elected leaders, parents and community members, is contrary to acceptable common practice and the repeatedly-stated intention of the DOE to solicit and respect the input of parents in decisions affecting their children.

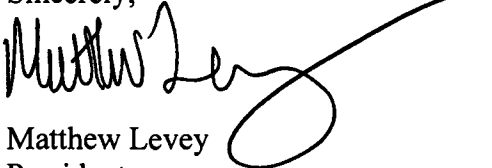
Given the extreme overcrowding in our district, and the need for more elementary and middle school space for District 2 students, which parents at nearby schools have repeatedly tried to impress on DOE officials for at least the last five years this proposed move is even less logical. This need for more space is particularly critical in the Murray Hill/Gramercy Park area, where numerous high-rises are being constructed; PS 116 believes 2008 – 2009 enrollments is likely to be 25% above this year's total based on registrations to date.

New York State law requires charter schools to give "preference" to the children in the district in which they are located. If, as has been rumored, the majority of the students at Ross are from District 1, we believe there are numerous empty or underutilized public school and parochial school buildings in the Lower East Side that could serve as temporary or permanent spaces for this school,. We understand that prior efforts to place Ross into a permanent home in D1 were difficult. But if the students in fact come from this district, it would seem most convenient, and consistent with larger DOE policy to find them a school building closer to their homes. Alternately, if the majority of the Ross children are from D2, we would like to understand what measures are in place to ensure the required preference in the admissions lottery.

We also note that on Monday April 14, the District 2 PTA/PA Presidents Council passed a resolution regarding the proposed move of the Ross Academy that echos many of the points we have made in this letter. And, on Wednesday April 16, parents from the District 2 community made clear their concerns at the above-mentioned meeting, held at the School for the Physical City, 55 East 25th Street.

For the above stated reasons, we believe the Department should delay placing the Ross charter school at 55 East 25th Street until the "home zones" of its student body, alternate potential locations for Ross, and alternate uses for the SPC facility are better understood.

Sincerely,



Matthew Levey
President