

COALITION OF EAST SIDE ELECTED OFFICIALS

211 EAST 43RD STREET, SUITE 2004
NEW YORK, NY 10017

Via Facsimile and U.S. Mail

May 13, 2009

Hon. Joel Klein
Chancellor
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Klein:

We write to you with an urgent appeal to address the backlog of zoned students who are waitlisted for kindergarten at their neighborhood schools on the Upper East Side.

The end of the 2008-2009 school year is now less than eight weeks away, and it is imperative that parents of rising kindergarteners know for sure by June 26 — if not before— what school their children will attend in September.

We are in receipt of your letter of May 5, 2009. We appreciate your updating us regarding the number of children waitlisted at the neighborhood schools in our area, as well as your assurance that you will accommodate our students this year. We do not currently share your optimism, particularly since you have not sufficiently addressed a number of questions (which are listed below), even after many meetings on the subject. We believe that you need to address them as you formulate your action plan to seat the waitlisted children.

Current Status

- How many children are on waitlists at each of the Upper East Side elementary schools? (We note that the attachment to your letter indicates a waitlist at P.S. 158, but not at P.S. 59, which, according to numbers we have received from the school, is not correct.)
- Currently, how many zoned-student applications have been received by each of the neighborhood schools not maintaining a waitlist (i.e. P.S. 198 and, if applicable, P.S. 158)?

- How many kindergarten seats are currently available at each of the schools that is not maintaining a wait list?
- Our offices have received a distinctly different number of zoned applicants at P.S. 198 than was reported by your office at the April 15 “war room” meeting (81 vs. 43, respectively). Can you reconcile these different figures?

Gifted & Talented

- How many zoned applicants from waitlist schools qualified for a Gifted & Talented (G&T) placement? (We note, again, that the attachment to your letter put this figure at 179, but listed P.S. 158 and not P.S. 59.)
- Has your office finalized the list of locations at which G&T programs will be offered?
- According to documents on the Department of Education website, the number of G&T-eligible students in District 2 rose by 198 students over last year, to 586. Additionally, your letter indicates that your plan for eliminating the wait lists is predicated largely on students accepting G&T offers. However, knowing that some schools with G&T programs are located in buildings that are already over capacity (including the Lower Lab School/P.S. 77, which shares space with P.S. 198), can your office demonstrate that there is capacity in the system — particularly in G&T schools on the East Side of District 2 — to handle the growth?

Pre-Kindergarten

- Your letter indicates that relocating pre-kindergarten classes to nearby schools is an option under consideration to create more space for zoned children at neighborhood schools. Because retaining access to pre-k in our area is a priority for us, please inform us what pre-k classes are under consideration for relocation and what, if any, steps you have already taken to pursue this option.

Creating More Space

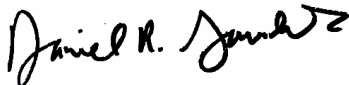
- What progress has been made at each of the schools in analyzing whether they can accommodate more students than the number of kindergarten seats which they projected to have available in 2009-2010?
- Where principals are maintaining kindergarten class sizes below 25, will you require that they increase those class sizes in order to seat waitlisted students?
- If there is not sufficient capacity at the neighborhood schools to accommodate all of the zoned students from the area, what specific school locations are under consideration for housing the remaining waitlisted students?

Anticipating Future Questions

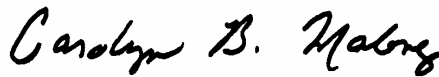
- If a limited number of seats at neighborhood schools become available to children from the various waitlists (e.g. P.S. 6, P.S. 290), how will your office determine who gets the first choice of available seats?
- How many children do you anticipate will register for the first time in August or September, and how will the system accommodate them?
- Will students who are assigned to a school other than their zoned school be granted an automatic “right of return” to their zoned school in first grade? If not, how will a waitlist be determined?

We thank you for your attention to this matter. You know how critical this issue is to us and to the parents in our area. We hope that the DOE is able to resolve these issues without further delay. We look forward to your response at or before the next “war room” meeting this month. Should your office have any questions or need to follow up, please contact Dan Pasquini in the Office of Council Member Garodnick at (212) 788-7393.

Sincerely yours,



Daniel R. Garodnick
City Council Member



Carolyn B. Maloney
Congress Member



Scott Stringer
Borough President



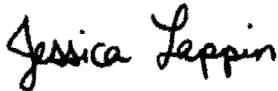
Liz Krueger
State Senator



Micah Z. Kellner
Assembly Member



Jonathan L. Bing
Assembly Member



Jessica Lappin
Council Member