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April 10, 2013

Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott
New York City Department of Education
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY, 10007

Dear Mr. Walcott,

On Monday, April 8th, 2013, I attended a hearing to discuss the co-location of a new charter school on the grounds of Public School 185/208, located at 20 West 112th Street in New York City. To date, the P.S. 185/208 school building has three schools that are co-located on its premises, including another charter school; the introduction of Harlem Success Charter School will be the fourth.

When public hearings for charter schools first began, they were brimming with parents eager to lend an ear and voice to further their children's education. However, it has become apparent to myself and to parents that these hearings are meaningless; despite parent protests, public schools, particularly in my district and other communities of color, are being overrun with co-locations, leaving parents feeling disrespected and disregarded. As a result, parents have become disillusioned with the hearing process, as noted in the dwindling turnout of parents that I have observed over the 10+ years that I've participated in these meetings. Parent involvement is a vital component in the education process, and should be encouraged. The complete lack of attendance by parents on April 8th is protest in cynicism of these hearings, echoing my assertions that the burdening of public schools with co-locations, coupled with a lack of regard for parents' sentiments, is killing parent involvement in the education process. These hearings have become a mere formality to the inevitable establishment and co-location of these charter schools.

With co-locations, school building resources are being stretched as more schools are being crammed into limited spaces, resulting in poorer educational environments for children from existing schools. Moreover, amenities and allowances are being made for charter schools, such as superior furnishings and technological equipment, which creates inequities between charter schools and the existing traditional public schools in the facility. This favoritism not only psychologically disturbs existing students who do not benefit from these amenities, and therefore are made to feel like second class citizens, but also puts a strain on the morale of parents, teachers, and school faculty.

When the April 8th hearing ended, I was reminded of the upcoming Panel for Education Policy (PEP) hearing that is to be held in Brooklyn on April 17th. Like charter schools hearings, this meeting is supposed to be a chance for parents to insert their vital input in the education process. However, the PEP meeting is currently being held during the same period as the English Language Arts (ELA) testing will

be going on (April 16-April 18). It is highly insensitive that such a critical hearing is scheduled at a time when parents should be home with their children, preparing them mentally and emotionally for such a high stakes exam. This oversight is discouraging, and not conducive to furthering parental contribution.

Furthermore, during the hearing on April 8th, there was filming conducted by non-Department of Education persons. It was suggested that this action can be seen as intimidating to parents, as some, such as victims of domestic violence and undocumented immigrants, may shy away from facial recognition, and therefore may be discouraged from speaking out. There were also children present at the hearing that were filmed, without a known intention. This filming proceeded without parental consent or any information concerning what purpose the film serves and what it would be used for, leaving parents in the dark. Again, this action is not conducive to the education process, and is just one more example of the ways in which the hearing process has purposefully disenfranchised parents from the decision-making process.

There has to be a process in place to ensure that parents are heard, that their protests culminate in tangible results. Currently, there is no real way for parents to fight co-locations, no matter the disruptive effects and negative impact on the school. The purpose of these hearings, as I understand them, are currently a legal requirement that pays lip service to communities, making parents' opinions and their children's welfare irrelevant. I, and my constituents demand that more is done to ensure the educational well being of our students. We strongly ask that you reschedule the PEP date, so as not to disrupt parents during ELA testing. We also demand that full transparency be used when filming at public hearings, such as who is conducting the filming, who is accountable for how the film will be used, and steps that parents can take to have themselves and their children removed from the film, in order to protect the children and the public. Parents have already asked me who is responsible for the filming and who will be liable should the film become public; I've referred them to you and the Department of Education.

Please contact myself or my Chief of Staff, Cordell Cleare, to set up a meeting to discuss other ways to improve the hearing process. The following is our contact information:

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Sincerely,



Senator Bill Perkins
30th Senatorial District

cc: Public School 185/208 Parent Association
District 3 CEC
Congressman Charles Rangel
Councilmember Inez Dickens
Assemblyman Robert Rodriguez
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer