



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL 32

797 Bushwick Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11221 (Rm 319) Phone: 718-574-1203 E-mail: cec32@schools.nyc.gov

January 27, 2020

New York State Board of Regents
Executive Director David M. Frank
Charter School Office
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Dear Mr. Frank,

We, the members of Community Education Council 32 (“CEC32”), and allied members of our community, ask the State Education Department’s Board of Regents to oppose the charter school revision proposed by the Math, Engineering and Science Academy Charter High School (“MESA”) to increase the school’s current grade span to include Grades 6 to 8 and to increase enrollment from 500 to 800.

The CEC32 approved a resolution in April, 2019 to oppose an increase in the state charter school cap and city charter school subcap¹. In detail, this resolution proposed a five-year moratorium on issuing new Charters in New York City and asked for an evaluation of the existing impact of a dual education system, in which two systems undermine one another. Today, we, the CEC in District 32 (“D32”), double-down on that resolution. At a local level, we demand a moratorium on the expansion of charter schools in our district so as to protect the stability of enrollment at our current district schools.

Specifically, we write this letter to oppose the proposed expansion as described in MESA’s January 14th, 2020 application² to the State Education Department.

In D32, there are already eight district schools currently serving students in grades 6 through 8, enrolling a total of 2,164 students. Additionally, there are 3 charter schools serving students in grades 6 through 8. We do not need more charters. There are already middle school seats available to provide many district *and* charter school options for families in Bushwick.

The existing district schools suffer from under-enrollment, and therefore declining resources, caused by demographic change, including the displacement of families with school-aged students, and the fierce competition of charter schools. As an effect, the district schools are serving higher concentrations of high-need students. On November 22, 2019, the Washington Post published an

¹ ECC Charter Cap Resolution. Community Education Council 32. 10 April 2019. Retrieved from <https://cec32.org/resolutions>

² Frank, David M. (2019). Notice of Receipt of and Pending Action on Charter School Revision. 14 January 2020. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/psc/notices/publicnotices/2020/publicnotices2020.html>



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article³ by Valerie Strauss referencing Bushwick's MESA Charter School as a national example of a charter school that "under-serves its neighborhood's students⁴ facing the most challenges."

"While the Bushwick district (Geographic District 32) has 21 percent students designated English-language Learners, MESA enrolls 11 percent ELLs, according to the New York State Education Department website ... Similar patterns exist for students with disabilities (Bushwick: 22 percent; MESA: 15 percent), homeless students (Bushwick: 15 percent; MESA: 5 percent), and students eligible for subsidized lunch (Bushwick: 91 percent; MESA: 85 percent), the department's website says.

It was striking us to see the disparity in this data, so we checked our numbers for verification. We found that actually, the district has 23.5 percent students designated as English-language learners (not 21) and 17% homeless students (not 15). Therefore, MESA has not accomplished their original request to serve students at risk and in need.

Over the past seven years, MESA has an inconsistent record of support for our district's student population and has failed to meet its intended purpose. In MESA's original charter application in 2012, they promised to be the answer to "a district that suffers enormous student attrition between middle and high school." Contrary to their promise to keep students who would otherwise leave the district for high school, the 2018-2019 data shows that 70% of High School aged residents from D32 continue to go to schools outside of the district.

For the year 2016-2017, MESA was projected to have up to 520 students, but by the year 2020 they only have 472 students⁵. Although the school has not been able to meet its maximum projected enrollment throughout the years, it is seeking yet another expansion.

MESA uses co-located space provided by the Department of Education and is co-located with two district schools: J.H.S. 291 Roland Hayes⁶ and Bushwick Community High School⁷. Their original charter application promised "a collaborative, minimally disruptive co-location process," yet both school communities complain of a disparity of respect and a lack of responsibility for the safety of the school community.

To add insult to injury, MESA is currently co-located with J.H.S. 291 Roland Hayes, a school already

³ Strauss, Valerie. (2019, November 22). Um, that's not what Warren actually said about charter schools. The Washington Post. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/11/22/um-thats-not-what-warren-actually-said-about-charter-schools/>

⁴ Math, Eng, Sci Academy Charter High Enrollment (2017 - 18). New York State Education Department. Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2018&instid=800000076137>

⁵ Math, Eng, Sci Academy Charter High At a Glance. New York State Education Department. Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000076137>

⁶ J.H.S. 291 Roland Hayes. NYC Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/schools/K291>

⁷ Bushwick Community High School. NYC Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/schools/K564>



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serving 355 students in grades 6 through 8. This school has shown an increase of 15% enrollment since last year and its community includes 53 UFT staff members. This proposed expansion is an aggressive push not only physically but psychologically.

Fiscally, the two co-located schools, J.H.S. 291 Roland Hayes and Bushwick Community High School, are each missing \$81,3176.50⁸ of the capital improvement funds guaranteed by State Education Law Section 2853 which states that “matching capital improvements or facility upgrades shall be made in an amount equal to the expenditure of the charter school for each non-charter public school within the public school building.”⁹

As a CEC, responsible for advising on education policy and evaluating the district’s educational programs, we oppose the expansion of MESA because it is our duty to ensure that students in our district have equal access to adequate educational opportunities.

We urge that you reject the application from MESA requesting to increase its current grade span to include grades 6 through 8 from the school’s current grade 9 through grade 12 configuration; to increase its authorized enrollment from 500 students to 800 students; to change the name of the school to Math, Engineering, and Science Academy (MESA) Charter School; and to amend the mission statement to be consistent with the addition of a middle school.

We all believe in providing our children the most high-quality education possible, but that effort cannot be at the expense of the survival and existence of our public schools and our most vulnerable students. Parents overwhelmingly express that they prefer resources put into their existing neighborhood middle schools over increasing school choice.

Respectfully,

Community Education Council for District 32

CC:

New York State Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa
New York State Interim Commissioner of Education Shannon Tahoe
SUNY Charter Schools Institute Executive Director Susan Miller Carrello
New York City Charter School Center CEO James Merriman
The Honorable Governor Andrew M. Cuomo
The Honorable Mayor Bill de Blasio
New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer
Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams

⁸ Spending by NYC on Charter School Facilities: Diverted Resources, Inequities, and Anomalies. (October 2019). Class Size Matters. Retrieved from <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Charter-School-Facility-Costs-10.21.19.pdf>

⁹ New York State Education Law. *New York Consolidated Laws, Education Law - EDN § 2853. Charter school organization; oversight; facilities.* Retrieved from <https://codes.findlaw.com/ny/education-law/edn-sect-2853.html>



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New York State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
New York State Assembly Speaker Carl E. Heastie
New York State Senator and Education Committee Chair Shelley Mayer
New York State Assembly Member and Education Committee Chair Michael Benedetto
New York State Senator Julia Salazar
Member of the United States Congress Nydia Velázquez
New York State Assembly Member Maritza Dávila
New York State Assembly Member Erik M. Dilán
New York City Council District 37 Chief of Staff Lloyd Lesperance
New York City Council Member Antonio Reynoso
New York City Schools Chancellor Richard A. Carranza
New York City Council Member and Education Committee Chair Mark Treyger
New York City Department of Education Chancellor Richard A. Carranza
Interim Acting Deputy Chancellor of Community Empowerment, Partnerships, and Communications
Adrienne Austin
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Community School District 32 Superintendent Sheila Gorski
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