



Testimony of Jaclyn Leffel, NYC Collaborates

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Distinguished Committee Members:

I represent NYC Collaborates, an initiative that creates opportunities for educators to join together to share ideas and inspiration as we work together to improve public education for all New York City students. NYC Collaborates is a program born out of New York City's District-Charter Compact. The Compact is a national initiative, spearheaded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to highlight new ways that traditional public schools and public charter schools are working together to provide high-quality education for all students.

Last year alone over 500 educators from across NYC attended one of our School Study Tours, policy discussions and best practice workshops. Our District-Charter Collaboration Council, comprised of 20 educators from large district schools, small high schools, charter schools, specialized schools, charter management organizations, and networks, comes together regularly to clear up misinformation and talk about the many different topics that affect all public educators, regardless of school structure.

Of course, co-location was at the top of that list as 60% of our public schools in New York City are co-located. As at least one of these resolutions would affect co-located schools and the potential for new schools to be co-located, I would like to share with you the side of co-location that you do not hear about in the media: the positive work that happen every day, when collaboration and good-will are prioritized for the benefit of the students.

Our Council members understand that sharing a building is a "fact of life" when educating students in the largest district in the country. In fact, many of our Council members and principals citywide have used co-location to their advantage. They have chosen to work together and learn from one another; rather than tear each other down.

Here are some examples I know of first-hand:

- More than 200 students, teachers, administrators, families, friends and volunteers worked together to build a shared playground on the campus in Brooklyn that houses La Cima Elementary Charter School, M.S. 267 Math, Science and Technology and Bedford-Stuyvesant Collegiate Charter School. They turned a desolate blacktop behind the school building into a bright, new playground for all three schools to share. Now over 900 students in Bedford-Stuyvesant have a safe, fun place to play.
- At P.S. 55 in the Bronx, Principal Luis Torres had been working to create a new healthcare facility for his students for over 3 years. With a new charter school moving in, he saw an opportunity to work together to gain more resources. With the help of the facilities matching funds his school received, Principal Torres was able to not only finish his healthcare facility but he was also able to purchase new smart boards and put in a computer lab for his school. He then decided to offer the health care services to the new school. Besides these capital improvements, the principals and teachers have also begun to work together, touring each other's classrooms and sharing professional development opportunities.
- On the John F. Kennedy Campus in the Bronx, where two charters and six district schools share a campus, they have chosen to use co-location to their advantage, not disadvantage. Last year they worked together to renovate their campus's library and create a media center. This year they are all planning to chip in to hire a campus librarian who will work for all the schools on the campus. They have also worked together to fund the PSAL sports programs that both the charter and district schools students participate in. And if that wasn't enough they also continue to jointly plan events such as a campus-wide open house and student recruitment fair for the families in District 10. When principals come together and support each other, all of the students and families benefit.

A district principal on the Collaboration Council said it best; "While other schools are closing their doors to co-locating, I recognized the potential for collaboration and shared learning. We know that the other school's doors are always open to us and the same holds true for our school. I'm looking forward to a year full of sharing best practices and resources to the benefit of all of our students."

On behalf of the many educators who have pledged through NYC Collaborates - or simply through their daily positive interactions with their colleagues - to prioritize collaboration and their students, I encourage you to focus on creating policies that support and empower school leaders as they strive to make their co-locations work, rather than creating more roadblocks and perpetuating the negative stereotypes and rhetoric.

Thank you