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SENATOR THOMAS K. DUANE

29th SENATORIAL DISTRICT • NEW YORK STATE SENATE



**STATEMENT BY NEW YORK STATE SENATOR THOMAS K. DUANE
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, THE DISTRICT 3
COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS
REGARDING THE PROPOSED CO-LOCATION
OF UPPER WEST SUCCESS CHARTER SCHOOL WITH EXISTING SCHOOLS
IN THE BRANDEIS EDUCATIONAL CAMPUS**

January 25, 2011

My name is Thomas K. Duane and I represent New York State's 29th Senate District, which includes the Brandeis Educational Campus (145 West 84 Street) where the New York City Department of Education (DOE) proposes to co-locate the Success Academy Charter School (SACS) with five existing schools. I thank the DOE, the Community School District 3 (D3) Community Education Council (CEC3), and the School Leadership Teams (SLT) of the schools currently sharing the building for providing this opportunity to present testimony. I join the D3 community—including the D3 Community Education Council, the D3 Presidents' Council, Manhattan Community Board 7 and the parent-teacher associations of the schools in and around Brandeis—in strongly opposing this proposal.

As you know, four of the five high schools already co-located in the Brandeis Educational Campus—The Urban Assembly School for Green Careers, The Global Learning Collaborative, Innovation Diploma Plus and Frank McCourt High School—are expected to remain there over the long-term. I believe the scarce available space at this site would best be used to either support the growth and expansion of these promising new schools or to add a fifth high school to serve local students as well as those from neighborhoods that previously fed into Brandeis High School. In letters to DOE and elected officials, D3 parents have rightly expressed concern that this proposal for an elementary school would take away urgently needed high school space.

I am also concerned that the proposed co-location of SACS could prove extremely disruptive to the building's existing schools. Clustered co-locations can result in strife, as multiple schools with different administrations and missions must share scarce facility space, including science labs, gym space, and art and music rooms. However, by all accounts, the five schools sharing this campus have an amicable and even complementary relationship. The same cannot be said about existing Success Charter Network schools and the schools with which they are co-located. For example, parents and teachers at PS 241 and PS 149, which were compelled to share their facilities with Harlem Success Academy (HSA) schools, report that HSA has aggressively annexed essential classroom and cluster room space and shown a consistent disregard for their

host schools' needs. I share the fears of existing Brandeis campus school communities that SACS would not be a good neighbor.

Furthermore, I believe that co-locating elementary school students with those in their late teens is problematic, creating unnecessary risks for young children and requiring costly retrofitting of the building to accommodate these younger students' physical and educational needs. These modifications would reduce individual schools' flexibility in moving, exchanging and sharing classrooms and cluster rooms. Additionally, many of the building's prized shared spaces are designed specifically for high school students and it would be a waste of education dollars to reconfigure them. I also share parents' concern that SACS's stated desire to grow could further threaten recent capital investments that have made the Brandeis Educational Campus one of the City's best high school facilities.

The ostensible benefit to the community provided by this proposal, as articulated in the DOE's Educational Impact Statement (EIS), is that it would provide an additional choice option for D3 families crowded out of their zoned school. This assertion is misleading. Indeed, while I and other D3 stakeholders have long been calling for a new public elementary school to mitigate the severe overcrowding that has plagued area schools for years, the proposed SACS would likely do little or nothing to achieve this goal. SACS representatives have indicated the school's enrollment policy would prioritize "at-risk" students from outside the district over students zoned for D3 schools that received higher than a D on student performance evaluations, such as the highly-regarded nearby schools that are at the heart of the overcrowding crisis. Given the demand for existing Success Academy schools, it seems unlikely that many area families would have a chance to attend SACS thus this school would not help to resolve the neighborhood's long-standing elementary school overcrowding problems. The DOE could more effectively combat this overcrowding by promoting D3's many choice schools, as well as the underutilized D3 schools that recently won magnet grants from the U.S. Department of Education, as attractive options for elementary students unable to attend their zoned schools.

For all of the above reasons, I strongly urge the New York City Panel for Educational Policy to reject the proposal to co-locate SACS in the Brandeis Educational Campus. Again, thank you for allowing me to testify today and for your consideration of my comments.