



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Benjamin

Statement From Senator Benjamin On The Proposed Truncation Of Wadleigh Secondary School

BRIAN BENJAMIN February 13, 2018

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Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing Arts is a beacon of hope in our community to the middle school and high school students that attend, their parents, school staff, and community members. I stand firmly with these individuals in declaring that the New York City Department of Education's (DOE) decision to pursue truncation of the middle school is not in the best interests of the students or this community. I am unequivocally against that decision.

What the DOE's decision fails to do is to consider the Harlem community and its stakeholders, namely the children. Harlem is a historic arts incubator and should and must have a public school focused on the arts that nurtures and grows the dreams of youth starting at the middle school level and climaxing at the 12th grade, or end of their high school years. The opportunity to receive exposure to a long-standing public school arts education starting at the middle school level is critical to assisting students with dreams of pursuing a career in the arts.

The stability that comes with pursuing this public school arts education at one school is advantageous to the students as well. It enables them to steadfastly grow their skills in one building and in one school community.

For reasons to truncate, the DOE points to low interest by youth and their parents to have their children attend the middle school and to the low academic performance of current students. However, parents constantly express to me that DOE representatives discourage parents and children from applying to attend Wadleigh's middle school.

At a recent community meeting on the proposed truncation, current middle school students and their parents publicly expressed how much they love Wadleigh and how it was their first choice.

Wadleigh is a Community Renewal School, meaning it received specific funds to help it with its academic performance. But the DOE is unable to provide a specific accounting of these funds, including where these dollars went and what outcomes this investment secured or failed to secure for the students. School truncations should not be taken lightly or done without clear evidence that supports the decision.

The DOE has not presented a clear case to us that truncation is in the best interests of the students, parents and community. I am calling on the DOE to drop its decision to truncate Wadleigh's Middle School. Our children deserve our best. Our best is not truncation. Our best is figuring out all that is needed to help the students and school succeed and securing the necessary resources and supports to make success a viable option for all, for both the middle and the high school.

I am committed to seeing that come to pass. With Wadleigh, failure is not an option we are willing to accept. We are not giving up, and we need for the DOE to not give up either.