NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

Kavanagh Backs Parents in Expressing Concerns About Marta Valle High School Merger

BRIAN KAVANAGH April 28, 2020

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On April 28, Senator Kavanagh and his elected colleagues representing the Lower East Side wrote to the City Department of Education to share a detailed list of ways that the proposed merger between Marta Valle High School and University Neighborhood High School, could best address the needs of students, their families, and the broader community these schools serve. The text of the legislators' letter is below; the original may be viewed via the link above.

April 28, 2020

Richard A. Carranza, Chancellor
Members of the Panel for Educational Policy
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Carranza and Members of the Panel for Educational Policy:

We write regarding the proposed re-siting and merger of Marta Valle High School (MVHS, 01M509) with University Neighborhood High School (UNHS, 01M448) in Building M446. It is our understanding that this proposal will be addressed at the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP) meeting on April 29, 2020. Our offices have become aware of concerns from the MVHS Parent Teacher Association regarding this proposal and the process by which the Department of Education has conducted community outreach. We request that if you choose to approve this proposal, you do so with several stipulations that we believe would be in the best interests of our school communities.

Since the announcement of the first public hearing on March 31st, we were made aware of the Marta Valle community's reservations about the proposal process. Initially, there were concerns about the short notice given to Marta Valle parents about the date and forum change of the first public hearing. It is our understanding that the MVHS PTA was notified on Friday, March 27th about the DOE's decision to hold a virtual meeting on Tuesday, March 31st, instead of hosting two in-person meetings as initially advertised. The short notice, the challenges of navigating new technology, and the personal difficulties many families were facing during the public health crisis made some parents unable to actively participate and voice their concerns. We appreciate that after this experience the DOE scheduled another public opportunity for the community, including stakeholders at MVHS, to address the contents of the proposal. However, members of the MVHS community have expressed to our offices that they have felt largely excluded from the decision making process until the merger seemed to be a fait accompli.

The PTA has strong concerns about the extent to which MVHS students' academic needs will be met within UNHS, and the challenges students will have in making the adjustment to the new school. We understand that many current MVHS students have Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and are accustomed to a more intimate class setting; therefore, the parents believe that it will be difficult for their children to acclimate to a larger school environment

given their need for special learning accommodations.

It is with these concerns in mind that we suggest that you consider the following recommendations for the MVHS students who will transfer into University Neighborhood High School (UNHS) in the event of a merger:

● Design a virtual tour of the entire UNHS building for the MVHS families before the start of the school year;

● Convene several "new/transfer" student and parent engagement opportunities to help MVHS further integrate into UNHS;

● Ensure that at least one parent from MVHS is granted a seat on the UNHS PTA;

● Ensure the appropriate level of support is achieved for all students whether by services indicated in their IEP or by assessing mainstream students exhibiting transitional difficulties;

● Pay homage to MVHS by renaming a common space within the school building (i.e. the library) after Marta Valle;

● Ensure that Marta Valle parents are updated with students' progress in relation to the merger throughout the year; and

● Form a MVHS homeroom or cohort of students in each grade in UNHS.

Furthermore, to ensure that the space that would be vacated by MVHS in the event of a merger is used in a way that would benefit the remaining schools in the building and the community at large, we request that you consider the following additional recommendations, which are also supported by the MVHS PTA:

● Permit the School for Global Leaders and Lower East Side Preparatory High School to use the amenities at the existing MVHS site, such as the recording and dance studio, chemistry science lab, technology rooms, etc.; and

● Ensure a robust community planning process for the future use of the vacant space left behind after the merger takes place, including community stakeholders, elected officials, and

former MVHS parents.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations. If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss this matter, please feel free to contact any of us directly or via Greer Mayhew in Senator Kavanagh's office at 212-298-5565.

Sincerely,

Senator Brian Kavanagh
Councilmember Margaret Chin
Assemblymember Yuh Line Niou