



June 27, 2013

Dennis Walcott
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Jennifer Maldonado
Executive Director
New York City Educational Construction Fund
30-30 Thompson Avenue, 4th Floor
Long Island City, NY 11101

Lorraine Grillo
President & Chief Executive Officer
New York City School Construction Authority
30-30 Thompson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dear Chancellor Walcott, Ms. Maldonado and Ms. Grillo:

We write to express our deep concern about a proposal currently under review by the Department of Education (DOE), the Educational Construction Fund (ECF) and the School Construction Authority (SCA), to redevelop the parcel of city-owned land occupied by the School of Cooperative Technical Education (SCTE) at 321 East 96th Street. We urge you to immediately halt this proposal, until such time as the DOE can constructively engage in a comprehensive conversation with the local impacted community about impending redevelopment plans.

As you know, the School of Cooperative Technical Education is a District 79 school that has spent more than a decade addressing the academic needs of over-age, under-credited youth from across the five boroughs. The DOE and ECF's redevelopment plans for the SCTE site, which include demolition of the building, will very likely cause serious disruption in the academic lives of some 2,000 students from across the five boroughs, including those with autism and other special needs. Relocating SCTE's students puts these youth at significant risk of discontinuing and/or dropping out of school – a near-guarantee for poor long-term outcomes. How the DOE intends to address these concerns is a matter of utmost importance.

The reality is that —whatever the pros and cons of this project may be – no one has been provided the information necessary to make an informed judgment about the project, because the DOE and ECF's process of engaging the local community has been thoroughly inadequate and lacking in transparency. As a result, students, families and teachers have been left largely in the dark about the potential impact of any redevelopment proposal on their school and community.

As the school year comes rapidly to a close, little information about the process or next steps is forthcoming from the DOE and ECF to assuage their understandable anxiety about what the future holds.

Further, we believe that before turning public land over to private developers, the city must balance city-wide goals with the needs of local communities. It remains unclear if redevelopment of the SCTE site will include any affordable housing or address other community needs. We are concerned that such large scale development – potentially over 950,000 zoning square feet – will contribute to congestion and traffic in the area. Further, while the program proposes to reconstruct the existing school, the additional residential density will increase strain on the ever-growing demand for school seats, while doing little to address existing demand.

Finally, the new development has the potential to greatly contribute to impacts already being felt due to the Second Avenue subway construction in the neighborhood. A project of this magnitude is almost certain to add additional impacts on the neighborhood, or add up to three years of additional noise, dust and other impacts if the projects are staggered.

Given the lack of information provided to date, as well as the serious nature and range of community concerns related to the DOE and ECF's redevelopment proposal, we ask that you provide our offices with details on the following:

- The DOE and ECF's rationale for selecting the SCTE site for redevelopment, particularly given the City's recent investment of \$8 million city taxpayer dollars into the building for capital improvements;
- Efforts that the DOE and ECF have made, to date, to engage the SCTE and surrounding El Barrio/East Harlem community regarding the proposed redevelopment of the SCTE site;
- Steps that the DOE and ECF plan to take, moving forward, to engage these communities;
- Names of all developers who responded to the DOE and ECF's RFEI;
- The anticipated timeline for each step of the re-development process, beginning with the release of the RFP and continuing through the reopening of the school;
- Specific opportunities that students, parents, teachers and the surrounding community will have to shape the Request for Proposals (RFP) for this site and select the developer, including whether the redevelopment process will include a Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) to ensure the public has a formal opportunity to comment on the proposal;
- If the project is subject to ULURP, the specific anticipated actions that will be sought by this project, including specific zoning districts that are anticipated to be sought if a rezoning is necessary;
- Specific opportunities the public will have to ensure the proposed new development will include other public benefits beyond a reconstructed school and whether any public benefits have been explored including but not limited to whether the project will include:
 - Community or not-for-profit space,
 - Affordable Housing, and

- Additional school seats;
- A list of alternate locations that the DOE is currently considering and/or has already identified for relocation of SCTE during the redevelopment process;
- Specific steps the DOE will take to ensure that demolition and redevelopment plans will not disrupt the educational lives and well-being of SCTE students, including those with special needs, in the building;
- Information pertaining to any assessments that the DOE and ECF have conducted or plan to conduct, regarding the impact of demolition and reconstruction on:
 - The Life Sciences Secondary School, located at 320 East 96th Street, which serves some 700 students;
 - The Marx Brother Park at 97th Street (between First and Second Avenues) where “Simply Sports” offers programming for neighborhood children;
 - The Metropolitan Hospital Center, located at 1901 First Avenue (between East 97th and East 99th Streets);
 - Local businesses; and
 - The FDR/East River Drive.

Finally, we respectfully request that you provide written assurance that, upon completion of any redevelopment process, SCTE will be returned to its current home site.

We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
Manhattan Borough President



Charles B. Rangel
Member of Congress, 13th District



Jose M. Serrano
Senator, 29th District



Robert J. Rodriguez
Assemblymember, 68th District



Melissa Mark-Viverito
Council Member, District 8