

# WAGPOPS!

WILLIAMSBURG AND GREENPOINT PARENTS: OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS!

Representing the District 14 Parents and Community

[williamsburggreenpointschools@gmail.com](mailto:williamsburggreenpointschools@gmail.com)

[www.facebook.com/WilliamsburgGreenpointParents](http://www.facebook.com/WilliamsburgGreenpointParents)

SUNY Board of Trustees  
State University of New York  
State University Plaza  
353 Broadway  
Albany, New York 12246

May 21, 2012

**RE: Proposals for Citizens of the World Charter School New York 1 (CWSNY1) and Citizens of the World Charter School New York 2 (CWSNY2)**

Dear SUNY Board of Trustees,

As parents and community members of District 14, we urge the SUNY Board of Trustees to reject the two Citizens of the World Charter School proposals.

On the surface, these two proposals appear innocuous and even beneficent, creating the impression that Citizens of the World Charter Schools (CWCS) want to bring progressive, diverse schools to a district that is asking for them. However, scratching the surface, CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 are clearly poor replicas of the public schools in our district that have only just begun to attract middle class families. Because CWCS exclusively targeted our district's white middle class families, we believe that the net effect of these two proposed schools on our community will be devastating.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 offer nothing unique or different than our existing neighborhood schools, and they threaten to reverse the recent trend toward more diversity in District 14 elementary schools.

Our diverse neighborhood schools offer not just similar, but the exact same (and in some instances superior) programming and curriculum as CWCS's proposals. Our neighborhood elementary schools, including our Magnet elementary schools, are under-enrolled and have plenty of space for children. The Census data shows that the number of children in our district has declined in recent years. Creating new elementary schools, particularly new elementary schools that are marketed to middle class families, will do a profound disservice to our educational landscape.

If SUNY accepts these proposals, regardless of whether they co-locate in our district public schools, CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will siphon middle class families out of the schools that are currently servicing them well, re-segregate our only recently diverse schools, and ensure socio-economic and racial isolation in the schools that most desperately need diverse families.

All of the information and data that we've compiled for this Letter is available online or through minimal research into our local community and the New York City Department of Education. There was no need to consult with our local schools, nor did we think it necessary to waste their time. The Lead Applicant was made aware that his proposed school models were copies of our under-enrolled and desirable schools, but chose not to include or address these criticisms in either of the 724 page proposals. Rather, these proposals continue their false claim that they are offering something not offered in our neighborhood schools.

We recognize that parents with children who are not yet school-age are unfamiliar with NYC DOE schools and are easily seduced by a campaign that maligns public schools generally. These parents have been led to believe that the glossy brochures, Power-Point presentations, and expensive marketing are offering something different, new, and special. Not only are the “dream schools” these parents have been sold already open (and under-enrolled) in our district, but our local elementary schools offer even more of what parents have expressed as desirable than these proposed charter schools. CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 are poor copies of our existing neighborhood schools.

The CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals are an insult, not just to our neighborhood public schools, but to the NYC DOE that developed mandates which these two proposals pretend to be unique and proprietary to their individual schools. CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 have nothing to do with providing “high-quality public school options for families,” and everything to do with politics.

Without hearing from the real stakeholders, the families and community based organizations who are intimately involved with our local schools, you would not know how redundant, wasteful and dangerous these proposals are to our community. We believe that *Education Law § 2852(9-a)(b)* was written to ensure that communities have a check against proposed schools that they recognize as a waste of resources and hazardous to impacted communities. These two proposals put before you were written with a reckless lack of consideration for our community and reflect how little Citizens of the World knows and cares for our neighborhood, its history, and our neighborhood families.

## **NEED FOR THE PROPOSED CHARTER SCHOOLS**

### **History of Enrollment in Out-of-District Public Schools**

Much has been mentioned over the past decade about District 14 middle class parents leaving the district to pursue other elementary school options either in the East Village or at Community Roots Charter School. This “white flight” has been repeatedly cited as

evidence for the need for new schools in District 14 in order to retain those middle class families. We believe that this story is being retooled to serve a different purpose and does not reflect the reasons why families left the district, nor does this retelling mention their return.

While gentrification has been ongoing for more than two decades in Williamsburg and Greenpoint, and now Bushwick and Bed Stuy, the bulk of the earliest gentrification did not include young children, but childless artists and young urban professionals. Gentrifying parents did not begin to enroll their Kindergarten age children in local public schools until 2006, when former NYC Deputy Chancellor Carmen Fariña met with a large group of young middle class parents to find out what was necessary to get these parents to enroll in their neighborhood schools.

Up until 2006, Williamsburg middle class parents were almost exclusively sending their children to District 1's East Village schools (Children's Workshop, The Neighborhood School, East Village Community School, and The Earth School) primarily because District 14 schools were considered very traditional. These Williamsburg parents were interested in a more progressive education than what they believed was offered or possible in their neighborhood schools. Fariña encouraged parents to meet their local school principals and develop relationships with them. She pointed to the example of PS8 in Brooklyn Heights, a school with rapidly decreasing enrollment that was on the brink of closure until a new principal and a motivated community turned the school around. Middle class Williamsburg parents were inspired by the PS8 model of school turnaround and began to enroll their children in the neighborhood schools in greater numbers each year.

Middle class parents discovered that their neighborhood schools were not the bastions of traditional schooling that they had feared. There was plenty of art and music, and the school communities were interested in adopting a lot of what parents loved about the progressive schools outside of the district. The reception from neighborhood principals was tremendous. Parents wanted an open door policy and the neighborhood schools opened their doors. The process was occasionally hard-going for some schools (PS84 went through three different principals), but is now widely known to be successful. Parents no longer feel the need to leave District 14 for public schools.

It is critical to note that the promise of high test scores were never the draw for the middle class parents that left district 14 for the East Village schools or Community Roots Charter School. These schools do not get good test scores and rarely get higher than a "B" on their school report cards, often getting "C"s and even "F"s. Middle class parents in District 14 are generally less interested in test scores than in the quality of their children's school experience and the creation of "life long learners." We want more art and play in our schools, more child-centered learning, more robust assessments that rely less on testing, more meaningful curriculum, more emphasis on meaning and understanding, and less core standards.

## **History of Enrollment in Private Schools**

Over the past ten years, many of District 14's parochial schools (Saint Peter and Paul, Transfiguration, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Vincent's) have closed even as our public school enrollment declined. This reflects a general decline in our census numbers for school-age children.

Historically, if our district's wealthier parents were interested in secular private schools, there were no local options for elementary, middle or secondary school. As of 2009, this is no longer the case.

In the two proposals, CWCS neglected to mention Williamsburg Northside Elementary School in their proposal. Williamsburg Northside is a private elementary school in the heart of Williamsburg. The omission of Williamsburg Northside is odd when you consider that some of the parents involved in the early planning stages of CWCSNY actually send their children to Northside.

Why would parents of means with good public school options choose a secular private school? Williamsburg and Greenpoint parent interest in secular private schools should not be read as a denunciation of local public school choices, but as a rejection of the direction of public schools generally. We are witnessing an upsurge of homeschooling parents in District 14 for the same reason. In the current climate of high stakes testing, with more and more tests promised for younger and younger children, many parents are interested in school choices where the standardized tests are not required and where the curriculum is not designed around core standards.

## **Falsely Inflated Demand for Charter Schools**

Both CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 outline what we believe is a falsely inflated demand for charter schools in District 14.

The evidence that these two proposals put forth representing the demand for more elementary charter schools is preposterous. The proposals point to the New York Charter School Center's data of 4,000 children on waiting lists at various charter schools in District 14, using self-reported data gathered by survey from charter school operators. Additionally, the data is pooled -- without delineating the waiting list by each charter school, the grade level of the applicants, or where the applicants live, these numbers are meaningless.

District 14 houses a number of middle school and secondary school charters. Because of the way public school choice operates for NYC DOE middle schools and high schools, parents apply to every school option available to them. When applying to public middle school or public high schools, parents must list their schools in order of preference. Middle school choice is within a district, high school choice includes the entire city. Much has been written about the stress attached to assigning preference; "Will my child get their first choice? Second choice?" The charter school application process is independent of the public school process and is citywide, so a parent can

apply to as many charter schools as they want all over New York City without jeopardizing their public school preference.

It is utterly disingenuous to compare the application to charter schools with the application to public schools. The majority of charter schools now use the “Common Charter School Application,” a standardized application that allows a parent to apply to most of the NYC charter schools online with a single click of a mouse or check in a box. A single child can be on numerous wait lists at any given time. A child from the Bronx can be on all of our district 14 charter school wait lists without having any genuine interest in enrolling. Success Academy, while not yet participating in the common application, has their own standardized application that allows parents to apply to all of their schools with a single click or check on a box as well. Success Academy, with a marketing budget last reported as \$1300 per available seat, has dramatically inflated these figures citywide as each application for one child can count for 12 applications. There is no proof in any of these applications that there is even a real child enrolling, all while there is plenty of incentive on the part of the charter schools to inflate their numbers of applicants to manufacture demand for more schools.

Charter school waiting lists do not signify a genuine commitment to enroll in any individual charter school or even charter schools generally.

On the other hand, the process to apply to public elementary school is far more rigorous than any charter school application and includes the parent or guardian physically bringing their child(ren) to the individual school offices with proof of birth, proof of address, and medical records on hand. Parents must apply in person with their child at each school that they’re interested in attending. There is no standardized online application allowing a simple check mark to apply to several public school Kindergartens.

The CWSNY1 AND CWSNY2 proposals go on to allege that there is a need for a different model in District 14 that will appeal to parents who want differentiated instruction (constructivist model) and project-based learning. CWCS uses Community Roots, an out of district charter school, as the only school similar to their school proposals. “One school in particular – Community Roots Charter School – shares some similarities with us in terms of its academic model.”

According to the *2012 SUNY Charter School Request for Proposals*, charter school proposals must discuss any additional charter schools, how the proposed models differ from existing charter schools, and how the proposed models will provide “greater educational benefit to students who would attend the proposed school.” Leaving aside the false claim that CWCS is offering a unique model as compared to our neighborhood public schools, our district actually has four charter schools based on similar models: Ethical Community Charter School, Brooklyn Charter School, and both Beginning with Children Charter Schools.

## 5% District

While we appreciate that District 14 is not strictly considered a “5% district” per the provisions of § 2852(2), in that the law considers a district to be the larger district, i.e., Albany, Buffalo, Hempstead, et al, we believe that the spirit of the law is designed to ensure that charter schools do not proliferate at the expense of public schools and negatively impact enrollment in district public schools.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 wrote their proposals without including the three new elementary charter schools that will open in 2012. Below is the breakdown of our district charter schools.

	Enrollment by Fall 2012	Enrollment by Fall 2013
Achievement First Bushwick	862	920
Beginning With Children Charter School	450	450
Beginning With Children Charter School 2	100	150
Brooklyn Charter School	240	240
Ethical Community Charter	240	240
Success Academy - Bed Stuy 1	249	401
Success Academy - Bed Stuy 2	188	249
Success Academy - Williamsburg	188	249

By the Fall of 2012, District 14 will have far exceeded the 5% charter school enrollment (in a base year). We broke down the elementary school data using the New York State Report Cards.

Fall 2012 Enrollment	D14 Charter Schools	D14 Public Schools
Base year (Kindergarten)	568	1,391

By the Fall of 2012, 29% of District 14 Kindergartners will be enrolled in charter schools.

If SUNY accepts these CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, the percentage of Kindergartners enrolled in charter schools will be 46%.

## Diversity

According to the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals, our district was “selected” by CWCS (the language here is critical -- CWCS “selected” *us* and not the other way around) because our district is so diverse. “Given that diversity is a key component of our program, we seek to establish schools in districts that have a variety of races, cultures, and incomes.”

The CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals glaringly manipulate our district’s demographics by comparing the greater population of the district as a whole with the demographics of students in our public schools. Using the 55% white population in our district as a whole does not mention that the majority of our white population consists of Hassidic Jewish families who do not enroll their children in NYC DOE schools (with the exception of exceptional special education services) and childless “hipsters,” who do not have children to enroll in our NYC DOE schools. This distortion of our demographics, in the service of promoting schools that are 55% white, is unconscionable.

This gross misrepresentation of our demographics ignores the complexities of gentrification and housing segregation and does a profound disservice to all of our district schools, both the schools that have suffered from decades of socio-economic isolation (and in many instances exclusively latino isolation), and the schools that have only recently increased their diversity in the lower grades.

CWCS’s attempt to make the case that District 14 needs diversity in our public schools falls flat when we look at the actual demographics in our schools. The real data demonstrates how little they actually know or care to learn about our district, but, more importantly how dangerous these schools are to our district.

CWCS only chose one example — out of the entire district — as evidence of their claim that

<u>Tract 25902:</u>	Tract 28502:	our
50% black	50% black	
47% Hispanic	49% Hispanic	
1% white	0% white	
1% Asian	0% Asian	
1% multi-racial	1% multi-racial	

district lacks diversity. Located at the edge of D14, in Bed Stuy, PS59 William Floyd is 51% African American and 47% Hispanic. (CWCS combines these two numbers into an overall 99%, but we feel they deserve to count as distinct populations.)

PS59 is a zoned school, which means that it is structured to serve the students who live in a pre-defined zone that surrounds the school (as opposed to magnet schools, which can accept kids from all across the district). Accordingly, the PS 59 demographic profile

reflects the population that it serves. The 2010 Census figures for the immediate area surrounding PS59 show:

We can not expect our zoned schools to serve anything other than the students in their catchment area.

In contrast, the public schools in the gentrified areas of District 14 have witnessed a dramatic shift. For the first time in decades, families of every demographic are choosing to stay in Brooklyn and enroll their children in neighborhood public schools when they reach school age. In the gentrified areas of our community, our schools match the diversity of the areas where they are housed, notably in the lower grades, as more and more middle class families are sending their children to our local schools.

Either CWCS did not do their research properly or they are willfully distorting the facts. Many of our neighborhood elementary schools are so diverse that they should serve as a case study in how to successfully integrate schools.

This graph compares the public schools in the gentrified areas of our district with our four unzoned charter schools.

<b>RACIAL DIVERSITY STATISTICS</b>	<b>% Hispanics</b>	<b>% African American</b>	<b>% White</b>	<b>% Asian</b>
PS84	78%	9%	10%	3%
PS110	37%	8%	52% *	3%
PS132	51%	12%	32%	4%
PS31	49%	4%	37%	9%
PS34	21%	3%	72% *	4%
Ethical Community Charter	41%	51%	5%	1%
Achievement First Charter	41%	58%	0%	1%
Brooklyn Charter	3%	97%	0%	0%
Beginning with Children Charter	60%	36%	2%	0%
Success Academy Charter- Bed Stuy 1	No info	No info	No info	No info

Our diverse public schools that are housed in our gentrified areas sets into relief the egregious segregation in the schools that fall outside of the our gentrified areas. We do not have 8% white children in each of our schools, but many schools that have no white children at all.



Accepting the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will do a profound disservice to our educational landscape by siphoning the diversity out of our public schools, re-segregating our only recently diverse schools, and ensuring socio-economic and racial isolation in the schools that most desperately need diverse families.

CWCS’s comparison of the income levels in our district as a whole to Free and Reduced Lunch statistics in our district schools is just as meaningless. According to the statistics that these proposals use to represent the socioeconomic makeup of households in our overall community, 55% of our households earn \$40,000 or more and yet 85% of our district children eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (F/R Lunch).

CWCS does not unpack their community wide statistics of households earning more than \$40,000 by number of children in the household or even whether there are children in the household.

CWCS hoped to show that middle class families are not attending their neighborhood public schools, but their evidence proves nothing. Comparing households that earn \$40,000 or more with F/R Lunch is erroneous, incomparable, and absurd. Eligibility for F/R Lunch means that a family of two (assuming the smallest numbers of people in a family: single parent with one child) earns \$27,214/year. Each additional household member increases the income allowed by \$7,067/year. Households with four members can be in both the category of earning more than \$40,000 and also in the category of F/R Lunch (\$41,348 makes them eligible).

Regarding socio-economic diversity, our public schools serve more of our district’s poorest children.

<b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY</b>	<b>% Free Lunch</b>	<b>% Reduced Lunch</b>
PS84	84%	5%
PS110	82%	3%
PS132	87%	3%
PS31	70%	4%
PS34	100%	0%
Achievement First Bushwick	67%	18%
Ethical Community Charter School	65%	4%
Beginning with Children Charter School	59%	9%

Brooklyn Charter School	63%	12%
Success Academy - Bed Stuy 1	No info	No info

Our district charter schools represent greater socio-economic diversity with fewer numbers of families eligible for F/R Lunch. This data disturbs us greatly, as it signifies that our district charter schools are not servicing our most at-risk families in the same percentages as our district public schools.

District 14 can not support this enormous discrepancy in wealth between our district charter schools and public schools.

The CWCS flagship school, Citizens of the World Hollywood, has only 36% students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (Board minutes from October 19, 2011) in spite of their targeted enrollment of 50%, which is still significantly lower than their neighboring schools. The Board Meeting minutes show that the beginning of their second year witnessed a further decline in low-income family enrollment.

We believe that accepting CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will further the socio-economic isolation in our neighborhood schools and reverse the trend of middle class families enrolling their children in neighborhood public schools.

Richard D. Kahlenberg a senior fellow at The Century Foundation, often called the “intellectual father of the economic integration movement” in K-12 schooling, refers to Magnet schools as “a form of choice that values racial and economic integration, built on a much sounder body of research” than charter schools.

To redress the issue of continued housing segregation that has created racial and socio-economic isolation in our district public schools, District 14 was recently granted four new Magnet elementary schools. Our district wants our eight Magnet elementary schools supported as legitimate and sustainable models of racial and socio-economic diversity.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will not represent our broader community, but will isolate the white middle class community in a new form of “white flight” from public schools.

**Declining Enrollment in District 14**

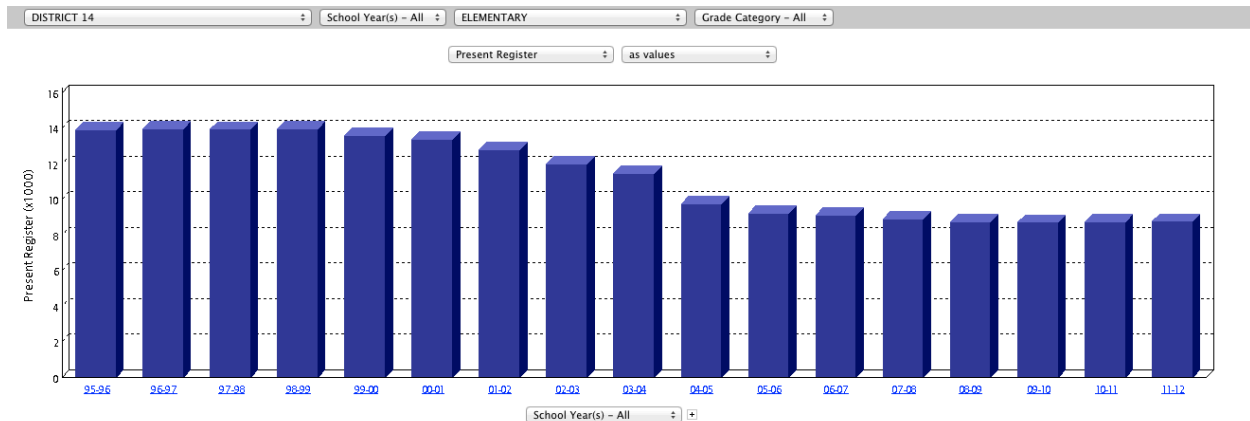
District 14 has absolutely no need for an additional elementary school, public or charter, regardless of whether the school co-locates in another school or leases their own space. Our public schools are under-enrolled and the majority of our parochial schools have closed due to under-enrollment. The decrease in public school enrollment is not due to dissatisfaction with public education or parochial education, but because of a major demographic shift in Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Bushwick, and Bed Stuy. Our district has seen the majority of its parochial schools close as well.

As recent Census data shows, we have fewer school age children than ever before. The table below shows the comparison of year 2000 and year 2010 populations of children under 5 years old in the five zip codes that cover District 14. The numbers are astounding --- in the past 10 years, we've seen a net decline of 2,719 children in our neighborhood.

ZIP code	No. of children: 2000	No. of children: 2010	Net + / -
11211	8,595	8,435	-160
11222	1,967	1,289	-678
11206	6,002	6,781	+ 779
11237	4,946	3,737	-1,209
11221	6,915	5,464	-1,451

NET DECLINE IN POPULATION UNDER 5 YEARS OLD: 2,719

This downward trend in our district demographics is evident when NYC DOE data is examined. The table below shows that the overall student population in District 14 elementary schools has declined and flattened in the past 10 years, leaving our existing schools with more seats than students to fill them.



Following the basic rules of supply and demand, we contend that opening more elementary schools in District 14 will hurt all of our schools.

## PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT OF CWSNY1 AND CWSNY2

*Education Law § 2852(2)(q)* requires Charter School applicants to “provide an assessment of the projected programmatic impact of the proposed charter school on public and non-public schools in the area of the proposed charter school so it is essential that this Request is responded to appropriately.”

Conspicuously absent from these two proposals is any mention of District 14's eight Magnet elementary schools, four of which are still receiving Magnet funds. This defect is no mere technicality, but a specific violation of a statutory mandate which SUNY must not ignore.

District 14 has a model of public school choice that has not been widely advertised and is at the beginning of attracting diversity and increasing achievement.

Here is a list of our magnet elementary schools:

PS84 Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts

PS31 Samuel F. Dupont Magnet School for the Arts and Humanities

\* PS 414 Brooklyn Arbor Magnet School of Global and Ethical Studies (formerly PS19 Roberto Clemente)

PS18 Edward Bush Magnet School for Government, History, and Leadership

PS120 Carlos Tapia Magnet School for Multicultural Education

\* PS257 John F. Hylan Magnet School of the Performing Arts

\* PS250 George H. Lindsay Magnet School for Communications and Multimedia

\* PS380 John Wayne Elementary Magnet School for Literary Arts and Integrated Technology

\* Magnet schools that are still receiving Magnet grant funds.

Our Magnet schools were specifically awarded to provide District 14 with innovative educational options and to reduce Hispanic student isolation. Our Magnet grants represent a promise between the NYC Department of Education and the federal government to increase diversity in these schools and in our district.

The *UCLA Civil Rights Project* released a policy brief in February 2012 entitled, *Reviving Magnet Schools: Strengthening a Successful Choice Option*. The research shows that while much of the recent attention and finances has been focused on proliferating charter schools in spite of the evidence showing that charter schools do not necessarily outperform regular public schools, magnet schools continue to remain a sustainable and desirable method for achieving diversity and heightened academic achievement. The research in the policy brief is clear that diversity and student achievement increased in the years after the funding cycle.

The *UCLA Civil Rights Project* 2010 report, *Choice Without Equity, Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards*, describes how latinos are egregiously underrepresented in charter schools or attend intensely segregated minority schools. We can see that, in our own district, English Language Learners are not attracted to charter schools, in spite of whatever outreach claims and promises are made for enrollment. We have had charter schools in our district for some time, and English Language Learners overwhelmingly prefer their neighborhood public schools. While our district average for ELLs in elementary schools is 15.9% (the average including middle schools and high schools is 14%), the representation of ELLs in our district charter elementary schools is significantly lower. None of our charter schools

have more than 10% ELLs, and one of our charter schools has 0% English Language Learners.

The difference in the demographics of our neighborhood public schools versus the charter schools in our district is mirrored in the 2010 *UCLA Civil Rights Project* report, “Choice Without Equity: Charter School Segregation and the Need for Civil Rights Standards.” The report recommends that the Obama administration “take immediate action to reduce the segregation in charter schools, working instead to achieve the integrative promise of charter schools.” It defies reason to address segregation in our district charter schools by opening more charter schools, as this strategy absolutely ignores the problem of segregation in our current district charter schools and would only serve to re-segregate our neighborhood schools.

The danger of creating new charter schools designed and marketed to appeal to white middle class families is presented in the same 2010 report. “Patterns in the West and in a few areas in the South, the two most racially diverse regions of the country, also suggest that charters serve as havens for white flight from public schools.” Our community must ask, for whom are these proposed Citizens of the World Charter Schools designed?

We understand that charter schools must respond to the segregation crisis that they face, but it can not be done at the expense of re-segregating our neighborhood public schools. We have Magnet public schools designed to address diversity that must be supported and we have zoned public schools that have only recently begun to enjoy diverse racial and socio-economic student populations. Our district families can choose from a variety of public schools within the Magnet school program and our under-enrolled zoned schools allow the same freedom. Creating additional choices for the sake of choice, particularly as our schools are undersubscribed, will generate white flight from our public schools and undermine our Magnet schools. This is bad public policy.

Whether CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 pursue space in the gentrified areas of our district where our public schools are diverse, or in the racially and socio-economically isolated areas of our district, the impact of their presence will serve to re-segregate our schools. Whether either CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 choose to co-locate or pursue their own spaces independently, the impact will be equally devastating to our public school demographics.

## **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

### **Constructivist Learning and Differentiated Instruction**

We believe that CWCS exploited a small cohort of parents’ lack of knowledge about constructivism in order to manufacture support for their redundant school models. Throughout their proposals, CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 repeatedly claim that there are no options in our district, public or charter, that offer a constructivist and project-based approach to learning.

“...none of the existing local schools offer a clear emphasis on project- based, constructivist learning opportunities for neighborhood children.”

As CWCS has engaged with parents and community stakeholders in CSD 14, parents have frequently cited the project-based, constructivist model proposed by CWCNY1 as a key reason for their enthusiasm for our application. For example, when discussing the academic program and the availability of a similar program in the area during the application committee meeting on January 30, 2012 (see *Response 03* for details), one parent stated, "There are no project-based schools in our community." Another expressed excitement about the program and stated, "Children need to be in a school where they don't just sit there; they need continuous engagement." Finally, another parent commented on his/her own experience in school and stated, "I never learned how to think creatively in school. CWC presents that opportunity." The overall feedback from parents was very positive and supportive.

CWCS introduced their two proposed charter schools to a small group of parents unfamiliar with theories of learning and the landscape of public education, and presented the largely uncontroversial concept of "constructivist learning theory," where "all knowledge is constructed from previous knowledge, irrespective of how one is taught – even listening to a lecture involves active attempts to construct new knowledge. (Bransford et al, 1999, p. 11)."

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals elaborate upon what this theory of learning means for teaching; "Constructivism provides the guiding principles for lessons whether they are in the format of direct instruction, project-based learning, or mathematical problem solving." The proposals continue to tell us that this theory of learning "inherently values and accommodates differentiated instruction."

PS110 The Monitor School and PS84 Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts recognize that Children learn at different rates, with different strengths and styles. Both The Monitor School and Jose de Diego practice differentiated instruction with multiple measures of assessment, including re(de)vising an interdisciplinary curriculum around core standards, individualized instruction strategies, Collaborative Team Teaching, and small group instruction. PS414 Brooklyn Arbor Magnet School of Global and Ethical Studies is developing its school with the guiding principle that they be "responsive to each child" through differentiated learning.

The Monitor School, Jose de Diego, and Brooklyn Arbor are dedicated to meeting the needs of individual students, encouraging students to reach their maximum potential, and developing their talents and abilities at their own speed, in a safe, nurturing environment that affirms their sense of worth. When children feel good about themselves, they are more confident learners. The Monitor School, Jose de Diego, and Brooklyn Arbor are committed to ensuring that their educators receive regular professional development designed to develop the art of assessment driven, individualized instruction strategies. These three schools, along with numerous others in our district including but certainly not limited to, PS18 The Edward Bush School, PS34 The Oliver H. Perry Elementary School, and PS257 The Magnet School of Performing Arts, believe in constructivist learning and practice differentiated instruction.

The Monitor School, Jose de Diego, and Brooklyn Arbor are located in the immediate areas where CWCS held meetings telling parents that these options were unavailable.

Not only do these three schools have precisely the model the small cohort of parents desire, but each of these schools is under-enrolled. It is especially important to note that each of these three schools are in buildings that the Lead Applicant for CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 has explicitly targeted for co-location.

We are focusing on these three schools because they are under-enrolled and because CWCS made it clear, in conversations with their Lead Applicant, that they want to co-locate in any two of their buildings. At the bare minimum, CWCS has been marketing to families who would otherwise consider these neighborhood schools a viable option for their children.

## **Project-Based Learning**

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 fare no better in appreciating the prevalence of project-based learning in our local neighborhood schools. The proposals define project-based learning as “a curricular and pedagogical strategy that organizes students’ mastery of state standards in the core academic disciplines around projects.” The CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals use the example of their Kindergarten unit, “Our Community and Us.” While the subject is different, and the layout and font are different, the NYC DOE uses the same structural format in their example of a unit of study for their “Instructional Expectations.” Hands-on project based learning have been at the core of our neighborhood public schools for many years.

The Monitor School, Jose de Diego, and Brooklyn Arbor all believe that elementary school should be a time of exploration, discovery and practice. Their interdisciplinary, project-based curricula encourages developing minds to forge connections, take intellectual risks, and cultivate strong habits of mind as their students build a foundation for middle school and beyond.

Many of the resources that CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 intend to use are already being used in our neighborhood schools, including the inquiry-based *FOSS (Full Option Science System)* kits. They plan on building their history / social studies / science curriculum around the New York State Core Curriculum, so they aren’t offering anything different from any other NYC DOE school in that regard.

Here’s a smattering of some of the innovative project-based learning going on at our neighborhood schools:

- Trout in the Classroom where students understand ecosystem connectivity through raising trouts from eggs to fry and then releasing them (since they are native) to a nearby watershed.
- Dedicated art teachers working with classroom teachers school-wide to integrate the arts within all content areas and all grades.
- Hydroponic gardens in indoor nature labs and beautifying the playground with hanging planters made from recyclable materials.

- After a unit on fairy tales, students writing fairy tales of their own design.
- A school wide Festival of Multicultural Education through Social Studies and the Arts where students “immigration inspectors” stamp passports and direct visitors to their port of call. All the tour guides are students that take tourists through Japan's Torii Gates replete with carp kites, hand puppets, exquisite flower arrangements, fish printing and delicate ceramics, even food like edamame and gyodon. The tour continues through a rainforest, a savanna, the Sahara, and a myriad of nations.
- Cookshop classrooms (including classes for adults).
- Third graders studying Africa exploring their learning through the arts (making masks), music and movement (African music and dance), technology (for research), reading, oral presentations, and group work.
- Collaborations with the Greenpoint Monitor Museum commemorating the 150th launching of the USS Monitor for a 5th grade unit on the Civil War with students as docents.

## **Everyday Math**

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 promise to use the *Everyday Mathematics* curriculum. “In grades K-5, *Everyday Mathematics* students have been shown to perform as well as, or better than, students at similar stages in mathematics development.”

*Everyday Mathematics* has been the mandated NYC DOE math curriculum for almost ten years. The NYC DOE has been holding out on releasing materials for this program next year because they question its efficacy. To embrace *Everyday Mathematics* when the NYC DOE and our schools is finding it wanting, defies reason. CWCS looked to the authors of *Everyday Mathematics* for data to support the use of that product. Our neighborhood schools, along with most NYC DoE schools, use a combination of daily practice and a hands-on curriculum such as TERC investigations, Contexts for Learning, and Singapore Math.

After the CEC14 Hearing, Kate Sobel, who spoke for CWCS and is on their proposed Board of Trustees for both of the proposals responded to parents who inquired about Everyday Math. Sobel claimed that the proposed charter schools will allow their teachers the latitude to use whatever curricula they choose - including Terc and Singapore Math.

This belated and cursory attempt to cure their defect is unavailing. CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 had the opportunity to get feedback from our community in advance of writing the proposal. They can not redress this lacking after the fact in order to appeal to parents who do not like their design.



## **The Arts**

Williamsburg / Greenpoint / Bushwick has been on the cutting edge of contemporary art and music for well over two decades. Long before the infamous artists moved in to the district, the Puerto Rican community developed strong social justice movements with rich connections to the arts, most memorably El Puente and Musica Against Drugs. Our neighborhood schools have built upon that commitment to social justice through art, dance, poetry, music, and theater, and are devoted to the arts to a degree not easily matched by other public school districts. PS84 Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts designed their magnet grant to bridge the Puerto Rican and Dominican community with artists who recently emigrated to the area.

Arts are threaded throughout the curriculum in our neighborhood schools. Our neighborhood schools have prioritized the arts and engage the larger school community through “Night of the Arts” events, family art programs, “Movie Night in the Park,” Parents as Art Partners, publishing parties, art shows, museum trips, Cool Culture Passes, and regular concerts and performances by students.

When the NYC DoE began instituting crippling budget cuts, our schools redoubled their efforts to increase the arts in our schools and developed partnerships with a wide variety of arts organizations: Learning through an Expanded Arts Program, Studio in a School, American Ballroom Theatre, Theatre for a New Audience, TADA! Youth Theater, UpRoar Art, Mark Morris Dance Company, Park Avenue Armory, BRIC Arts, CASA Afterschool Arts, Melody Education, PuppetWorks, Wingspan Arts, STREB, among numerous others. Many successful contemporary artists enroll their children in our local schools, and bring their creative spirit into their school culture developing after-school and weekend workshops. Recently Jose de Diego families gathered on a Saturday all-day workshop fabricating chandeliers out of recycled objects and costume jewelry to auction at a Gala raising money for a music teachers. Our schools, our families, and our community have always believed that art, for its own sake, matters.

Citizens of the World’s two proposed schools give a nod to the arts. After receiving feedback from the cohort of parents they met who mentioned that they wanted a dedicated art teacher and art room, they included those concessions in their proposals, and “will pursue a facility that provides sufficient space for arts instruction to occur in a stand-alone classroom.” What these proposals offer in the way of a commitment to the arts is the absolutely minimal expectation for our local families. Their discussion of the arts is so rudimentary, that it’s practically philistine by our neighborhood’s standards, referring to the importance of “arts instruction” as “another means with which to facilitate student mastery of core academic standards.” They do not know our district at all.

## **Balanced Literacy**

We recognize that parents who do not have children in NYC DOE schools will find the description of balanced literacy in the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 outreach materials so compelling as to want to immediately sign up their child. Who wouldn’t?

In a circle on the carpet, the teacher conducts a guided-reading lesson, modeling how expressive, fluent, oral reading promotes comprehension and

enjoyment -- or in kid language, *reading like you're talking makes the story more fun to read and easier to understand*. While on the surface the purpose may appear to be to having [sic] a good time, the teacher knows that she is driving towards the performance indicator: "Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension."

What these parents did not know, and what we hope you see through, is that their heart-warming description of a guided-reading lesson can be applied to just about every classroom in every NYC DOE school. Balanced Literacy has been the mandated NYC DOE method for teaching children to read for many years. The curriculum and pedagogical model is exactly the same as in all NYC DoE schools, Our neighborhood schools also have the leveled library, Workshop Model, and the Writing Curriculum out of Teachers College.

There is one critical difference: CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 intend to use "a subject-specific, commercially-produced curricular program that is aligned to the CCSS and/or the New York State Learning Standards [that] will provide the foundation for CWCNY1's ELA and mathematics program."

The Monitor School, Jose de Diego and Brooklyn Arbor all follow the robust and conclusive research that recommends student-selected reading whenever possible. Students understand more, read more, and are more likely to continue reading when they choose books that are of interest to them. Our local neighborhood schools and families prefer the use of authentic literature to "commercially-produced curricular programs."

### **Service Learning and Commitment to the Larger Community**

"The concept of service-learning is not new," the proposals state, but "it is experiencing resurgence with President Obama's call for the nation to engage in volunteerism and Education Secretary Arne Duncan's commitment to service-learning in schools."

CWCSNY1 and CWSNY2 describe the ways that service learning and the core standards can work in concert; learning mathematics (graphs and charts) through fundraising, learning the arts and social studies through developing murals, and learning science through creating an urban garden. They go on to list some additional suggested projects including creating recycling programs, developing a school-wide lost and found system, and leading a community beautification project.

The suggestions for service learning in the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 are primitive by our neighborhood's standards. The NYC DOE recommends that all DoE schools integrate meaningful community service with classroom curriculum. The NYC DOE even developed a team designed to assist schools in developing service-learning projects. Our local schools didn't need the nudge, because we have been giving back to our lived community for years.

In addition to already instituting each of the examples above (recycling, lost and found, small urban gardens and beautification projects), you should know about how our neighborhood schools care more deeply about our community:

- Students at The Monitor School work with students at PS34 The Oliver H. Perry Elementary School on the McGolrick Park School Alliance where families from have spearheaded a collaboration that includes nature-based workshops, contests, and special events inspired by and taking place in McGolrick Park. The McGolrick Park School Alliance is designed to build a stronger sense of ownership in the park which will lead participants to protect and maintain the park in a more active, invested manner.
- Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts parents and students are raising money to build a sophisticated green roof and greenhouse with sun classrooms to grow vegetables for our community (community members can share in growing, sowing, and enjoying the fruits of their labor). This 21st century sustainable urban farm will grow food, while learning about nutrition, water management, efficient land use, biodiversity, conservation, waste management, and sustainable development.
- The Monitor School children volunteer in soup kitchens at our local Greenpoint churches, and the majority of our schools organize canned food drives.
- PS414 Brooklyn Arbor Magnet School of Global and Ethical Studies, our district's newest public school designed around principles of good stewardship with nature, is explicitly interested in addressing campaigns for ills in their surrounding community to be rectified. They imagine a project like conducting studies of traffic and trash in concentrated areas then having the students seek community solutions.
- PS132 The Conselyea School was named the Number ONE school in New York state for community service by the League. The Conselyea's Community Art Team won the Gold Presidential Service Award for total community service hours. The school's Green Team won the Silver Presidential Service Award for their school wide recycling efforts. While the entire Pre-Kindergarten won the Bronze Presidential Service Award for their overall contributions to the community. PS 132 was also acknowledged as the top in New York State for community service hours on Earth Day.
- Schools across the district collect pennies for Penny Harvest and then create Philanthropy Roundtables where they study community problems and democratically deciding where their collected funds are best put to use.
- Throughout the year our schools open up their buildings to the entire Williamsburg/Greenpoint community with seasonal festivities and community celebrations, concerts, health fairs, and workshops.
- PS132 The Conselyea School's parents, staff and students have created a district-wide Spring institution - the PS132 Kite Festival, where many hundreds of families from across the entire district, even out of our district, gather together to build and fly kites, dance to local bands, and learn about the larger Williamsburg

community groups. The Kite Festival is one of the most well attended public school events in Brooklyn.

- Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Arts' students initiated and generated a fundraiser for Brooklyn Animal Resource Coalition (BARC) where they surveyed the needs of BARC, raised funds to purchase items for the animal shelter, and learned about the responsibilities involved in caring for animals.

Our neighborhood schools don't need a lesson in community service.

### **Community building, Character Development, and Diversity**

In their two proposals, CWCS point out how important community building within the school community is to the cohort of parents with whom they met. The "model of community building described is something that parents do not see in other schools; parents expressed excitement about this idea." While the two proposals are never clear about what they mean by "community building," we have this other sentence to go by:

CWCNY1 will seek to build community by providing character education and incorporating service-learning activities into the educational program.

CWCNY1 and CWCSNY2 offer "character education" classes that will take place 30 minutes a week and will be based on the *Responsive Classroom*, *Cool Tools*, *The Compassionate Classroom*, *The Mosaic Project*, among others.

All of the aforementioned tools are used in our schools. CWCS's recognition that peacekeeping in the classroom provides a better learning environment is not proprietary. Our district has learned the hard way that community building is vital to school success.

In the areas where gentrification has transformed neighborhoods, building community within our school communities has been and remains crucial. Our children are in class together, yet the economic disparities between families can seem an insurmountable hurdle to working together in and for a school. In 2006 and 2007, PS84 The Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts was at the forefront of precisely this dilemma where the rift between the white, middle class families and the latino population was played out inside the school walls. There was a constant police presence at PTA meetings and the school seemed doomed to fail, losing the majority of its diversity (white middle class students) the following school year. Although other schools in the gentrifying areas of Williamsburg and Greenpoint felt this rift in small ways, Jose de Diego represented the enormity of the problem and had a new and inexperienced principal who was unable to bridge the differences within the diverse school community. The school developed a citywide reputation as hostile to diversity and there was much ink in local and even national newspapers about the hazards of gentrification in urban public schools.

Under new leadership, Jose de Diego is now the model of what's possible in a neighborhood public school that invites and embraces diversity under strong leadership and with engaged parents. Principal Sereida Rodriguez turned the school around, and

diverse parents (latino and white) have returned to Jose de Diego with their younger children, including families who left the district for the progressive East Village schools. Rather than attempt to erase the differences between our families, Principal Rodriguez wisely recognizes that we need to highlight how our children are different and similar. Jose de Diego works with the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility with a curriculum that “uses high-quality children’s literature as a springboard for helping students gain skills and understanding in the areas of community-building, handling anger, listening, assertiveness, cooperation, negotiation, mediation, celebrating differences, and countering bias.” There is a Parent-Child component to the curriculum as well.

Jose de Diego will be instituting a new program in the Fall of 2012, the ASD Nest program. The ASD Nest program is an integrated Co-Teaching program for higher functioning children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). According to the NYC DOE, “Nestled within the supportive neighborhood schools, the ASD Nest program helps children learn how to function well academically, behaviorally, and socially in school and in their community.” School wide professional development will focus on embracing this kind of diversity that is new to the school.

Jose de Diego publicly addressed the pains and problems inherent in community building, but all of our local schools put a high priority on community building, respect for diversity, supporting empathy, and building social and emotional intelligence. Our schools collaborate with our students and families to build the social skills required to sustain positive relationships and encourage deep and lasting friendships within our diverse communities. PS110 The Monitor School’s motto: “Growing Hearts and Minds” is elaborated in their mission statement: “In collaboration with school, home and community, we model for our students the behaviors they need to recognize their individuality as they grow to respect the individuality of others in our rich, culturally diverse society.” The Monitor School has a Student Council to ensure that student voices are represented, and a “Buddies aren’t Bullies Campaign.” PS34 The Oliver H. Perry Elementary School has a “Character Counts” curriculum throughout their school, including the 6 pillars of a strong character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

We’re only focusing on elementary schools, but were we to add the wide variety of options that our district middle and high schools use in the service of community building (peer mediation, peer leadership, etc.), we could write a dissertation.

Our district commitment to community building within our school communities comes from hard lessons learned. As a district, we know that it is essential for the impacted community around a school to trust that the school and the school leadership understands the local community and is willing and capable of doing the courageous and difficult work of bringing people together. With real and proven trust, schools improve and students achieve.

CWCS has violated our community trust by slipping through their two school proposals with shoddy community outreach and sneaky private meetings, spreading misinformation and outright lies about our local schools to families who were unaware

that they were being used for purposes other than their stated ones, and refusing to hold public forums with those most impacted by the redistribution of public funds in the service of a new school particularly as our current schools are under-enrolled. Citizens of the World is not walking their talk. They are not behaving like good citizens. Character counts.

### English Language Learners

In a legal, but unethical misappropriation of data, CWSNY1 & CWSNY2 claim that they will make every effort to enroll 13% English Language Learners (ELLs) because our district school total for ELLs is 13%. Our district school total is actually listed as 14%, but even this total district percentage, which includes middle schools and high schools, is actually higher if you look exclusively at our elementary schools. Our elementary school percentage of ELLs is 15.9%.

It bears repeating that the Lead Applicant for the proposals made it clear in conversations with community members that while he knows that CWCS does not get a final say in where the schools will be co-located, they are very interested in Greenpoint and the south side of Williamsburg, specifically the areas near the luxury condominiums where the private meetings were held to discuss opening these two new charter schools.

According to the NYC DOE “Blue Book,” the only schools that have available space in Greenpoint and the south side of Williamsburg for co-locations are PS110 The Monitor School in Greenpoint, PS 84 Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts, and PS414 Brooklyn Arbor Magnet School of Global and Ethical Studies, both in the Southside of Williamsburg. Other schools with space available for co-location are in the less gentrified areas of our district with considerably less white, middle class families.

Regardless of where these schools will co-locate, or whether they intend to lease their own space, we believe that their authorization will create segregated schools.

Below are the most recent DoE breakdown of percentages of English Language Learners at each of these schools:

	<b>Monitor School</b>	<b>Jose de Diego</b>	<b>Brooklyn Arbor / PS19</b>
<b>% of English Language Learners</b>	15%	28%	29%

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 chose to base their percentage of English Language Learners on the minimum district wide model (including middle and high schools) rather than the percentages in the areas where they are intending to co-locate (they could have foreseen multiple co-location options as all of this information is available online). We see this as a disingenuous attempt to cap the English Language Learners served by their schools.

While the identification for ELLs is the same for CWSNY1, CWSNY2 and all NYC DOE schools, our schools carefully work with parents in their respective languages to ensure that they are making informed decisions about their children's education. Parents have the right to choose between ESL and bilingual transition classes, and the school will make every effort to provide them with the model they prefer. The majority of ELLs in our district are Spanish speakers, with the exception of high populations of Polish speaking families in Greenpoint.

Our neighborhood schools have surveyed their incoming classes noting that parents are less interested in bilingual transition classes and more interested in dual language. In the dual language programs, students not only develop new language skills and learn academic subjects in two languages, but they also practice and share language and culture with each other, making them bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. The benefit of children bridging cultures and communities through sharing language is a beautiful side effect of our dual language programs.

There has been an overwhelming positive response from both our Latino communities and the white middle class community for Jose de Diego's Spanish dual language program which is in its second year. This positive response has led Brooklyn Arbor to open their new NYC DOE school with a dual language Spanish program as well.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 describe using SDAIE and Project GLAD to work with ELLs. SDAIE is just the California brand name of "sheltered learning," a research based teaching approach for ELLs. SDAIE describes what our local public schools are already doing with research based best practices for ELLs: using visual tools including modeling and physical gestures, hands-on and project-based learning, scaffolding, ensuring access to content by tapping into their prior knowledge. SDAIE uses push-in services, with occasional pull-out services for beginning ELLs just like our neighborhood schools. ELLs get small group and one-to-one time with teachers before and after school hours.

Project GLAD is the California name for a method of applying the special challenges of ELLs to balanced literacy. Since balanced literacy is the standard, and our schools have push-in services as well as high percentages of ELLs, our schools are dedicated to ensuring that our teachers receive ongoing professional development to support our ELLs in classrooms with native speakers.

Our educators are culturally sensitive to the variety of ELLs we have in our classrooms. Classroom expectations can be culturally bound, and many of our ELLs are dealing with a new culture in the classroom in addition to a new language. ELLs may have been taught in a different style, or have little experience with cooperative learning, drawing conclusions, or giving opinions. Our professional development supports educators in navigating cultural differences with ELL instruction.

Our neighborhood schools recognize how crucial involving ELL parents in their children's schooling is to the success of ELL students and offer numerous opportunities for parents to learn about their children's progress. Of particular interest to our ELL parents is that our schools hold regular meetings to inform parents of their children's

progress, but also of opportunities for the parents to learn English in the neighborhood where they live, and, when funding allows, at the schools their children attend.

Our district has a significant percentage of ELLs who are also assessed as SIFE (Students with Interrupted Formal Education). It troubles us deeply that CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 have no plans in their proposals for these most at-risk youth who require additional interventions.

None of our district charter schools have the same enrollment numbers of ELLs as our neighborhood schools. Most recent data shows their percentages of ELLs:

	<b>Beginning with Children</b>	<b>Ethical Community Charter</b>	<b>Brooklyn Charter</b>	<b>Achievement First Charter</b>
% of ELLs	7%	8%	0%	10%

Each of these school charters and renewals have promised “good faith efforts” to recruit and retain district targets for ELLs and they have not. We can not afford to host more charter schools that renege on this promise.

### **Special Education**

There is nothing unique in the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals regarding how their schools intend to identify or educate children with IEPs.

Their targeted strategies (Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3) are no different than the regular best practices used for differentiated learning and children with IEPs. Our local schools all use dynamic and varied grouping, small group intervention, targeted re-teaching, metacognition modeling and explicit strategy instruction, and direct instruction. Their classroom modifications are standard best practices that all NYC DOE schools use. An important distinction is that our CTT (ICT) classrooms have two fully trained *certified* teachers.

What concerns our district most, regarding these two proposals’ plans to educate 15% of our districts’ children with special needs, is that the outreach plans listed in CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 to reach children with special needs is so minimal as to be virtually non-existent. It is unclear how they will reach their target of 15% children with special needs, and we remain unconvinced that this will be a priority for these two schools.

We also find two different contentious policies hidden in the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals particularly disturbing with regard to children with difficulties in school. The first contentious policy we noticed in these two proposals was that admissions for children begins with a December 1 birth date. The NYC DOE has a policy against red-shirting our children. The NYC DOE has a January 1 birthdate policy. This is an equitable standard for our public schools, and we do not support allowing some district of our district schools to set a different policy even though they are legally allowed to do so.



The second and much more disturbing policy in CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 is casual retention policy for children who perform one grade level or more behind in a minimum of two academic areas or have an equal delay in social-emotional development in grades K-3.

The NYC DOE policy for elementary school grade retention is exclusively related to English and Math scores on the standardized tests for 3rd grade and up. When children are recommended for retention in NYC DOE schools, it is a rigorous process, carefully vetted by teachers, principals, and the District Superintendent. The process is explicit and transparent and includes opportunities for students to work over the summer and re-take tests. There is no NYC DOE policy against social promotion before 3rd grade.

There is robust evidence to suggest that grade retention negatively impacts a child's socio-emotional adjustment, including peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviors, and attendance. Grade retention should be avoided whenever possible and is a last resort which must include numerous interventions to assist the student when grade retention is finally recommended.

We find it suspicious that CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 could claim that they will be more successful at educating every child than our neighborhood schools, but then have a casual policy which punishes the child when they fail to do so.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 claim that they "believe that all students can achieve when given the opportunity and are provided the high-quality instruction and attention they deserve." This hidden policy suggests otherwise.

### **Achievement Gap / Assessment**

With all due respect to Citizens of the World, their criticism of our district's achievement gap is self-serving. They do not have a record in California of addressing the achievement gap as they have only had one schools open for one academic year. We can only look at the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals. Their plan to address the achievement gap is no different than the plans in our neighborhood schools available in their public Comprehensive Educational Plans (CEPs).

Our neighborhood schools recognize that the best way to ensure that all of their students achieve at the highest levels is to assess their students both formally and informally, across subject areas and on an ongoing basis. Assessment is the key to differentiated learning. The data gleaned from assessments is shared with students and families on a consistent basis and is used to guide instruction. Keeping families apprised of student achievement strengthens the family-school bond, and encourages the necessary collaborations that can quickly address students' areas of weakness and laud each success.

Just like in the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals, our neighborhood schools consider it regular practice for their teachers to use subject-specific Progress Checklists with separate checklists for each unit of study (generally color coded by subject area), which

list in detail the goals of the unit that is aligned to the Common Core Standards. These checklists provide a concise overview of the areas students, both as a whole and individually, struggle with, are working towards, or have mastered.

The data inputted into these Progress Checklists comes from two data streams: informal and formal assessments. Informal assessments happen daily and consist of: monitoring students as they complete class work or projects, listening to partner or group discussion, monitoring how questions are answered, checking homework, viewing an oral presentation, or conferring with a child. On the spot, our teachers record each child's progress towards meeting the unit goals on the checklists, and thereby are able to quickly rectify a gap in a student's understanding before too much time passes.

Students are made aware of academic expectations through the use of tools such as rubrics and dialogues, they regularly set goals and reflect on their own progress in meeting them.

The academic interventions CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 spell out for students who require extra assistance are the same best practices that our neighborhood schools use.

Our local schools recognize that attending to the whole child - to children's physical, emotional and social growth - is as equally important as attending to academic health, particularly in our lowest-income populations. Jose de Diego pursued and received a Fitness Center and is currently raising funds for a Greenhouse Roof to grow vegetables for the school community. Jose de Diego is also working with a Mind-Up curriculum to encourage emotional well-being. The Monitor School has Cookshop Classrooms for both children and adults with hands-on exploration and cooking activities to foster enjoyment and consumption of healthy food choices. Brooklyn Arbor plans to have conflict resolution and peer mediation practices in each classroom so that children learn to support one another and count on each other and become more confident and resilient when obstacles appear in their path. Other neighborhood schools are equally sensitive to the ways in which they can redress poverty within their school walls if not the community at large, developing partnerships with community based organizations as much as possible to engage their students and families' needs.

Addressing the achievement gap between children in our district has always been a high priority. In recent years, PS31 Samuel F. Dupont Magnet School for the Arts, and Humanities, PS380 The John Wayne Elementary School, PS132 The Conselyea School, have earned the National Blue Ribbon Awards in recognition of. PS31 was the recipient of the High Achieving / Gap Closing Awards four years in a row. PS110 was a recipient of the NYS ASCD Award, "Educating the Whole Child in the 21st Century," the first NYC school to receive this award.

It is essential to note that one of the underpinnings of CWCS is that the positive learning effects of diversity in the classroom will help all children achieve across income levels and ethnicities. Our community also believes that diversity in our classrooms is not just a moral imperative, but essential to the success of our most at-risk populations. This belief is shared by the NYC DOE and by the federal government, where District 14

counts among the highest number of awarded Magnet grants in any district in the country.

Increasing diversity in our neighborhood schools beyond the preK classrooms has been a long and difficult struggle. Our district schools in our segregated areas are still struggling with solutions. Our five recently awarded magnet grants will help significantly, but they will require the support of the district and the NYC DOE. Still, the rewards are felt in the schools that have been successful, notably PS84 Jose de Diego Magnet School of Visual Arts, PS31 Samuel F. Dupont Magnet School for the Arts and Humanities, and the new PS414 Brooklyn Arbor Magnet School of Global and Ethical Studies. In the lower elementary school grades, our neighborhood schools are matching their surrounding area diversity. This is still a new development, so most of our neighborhood 3rd grade classes are relatively homogenous compared to 2nd grade. 1st grade and Kindergarten are where you start seeing the real changes. Our test scores will not reflect all of the full benefits of classroom diversity for another 2-3 years.

The UCLA Civil Rights Project showed that Magnet schools saw student achievement rise in the years following the receipt of federal funds, even in the years after the funds were spent. The most recent grantees were considerably less likely to report evidence of rising academic achievement than the previous cycle's awardees. We see this phenomenon most clearly in PS84 Jose de Diego Magnet School of the Visual Arts.

It would be irresponsible to allow CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 the opportunity to build schools that will negatively impact the hard won diversity in our neighborhood public schools. The effects that these schools, designed to attract 55% white families, will have on the diversity in our classrooms will be devastating and will throw our public schools back decades in the battle against segregation. The impact on school integration and student achievement will be unconscionable.

### **Small Classes by Design**

While it is unclear how CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will be able to afford to fulfill their promise of small classes given their financial troubles and a restrictively tight budget, our neighborhood schools maintain small classes by design as much as possible with constant budget constraints.

In spite of budget cuts, our schools continue to prioritize small classes because they recognize that small classes, particularly in the earlier grades as children are beginning to read, are absolutely essential for student success. Neighborhood school classes also constantly work in small groups.

In order to ensure even more individualized support within the classroom environment, our schools regularly work with Student Teachers (Teachers College, NYU, etc.), and Learning Leaders. There are numerous CTT classes in each of our schools.

Here's a sampling of our neighborhood elementary school class sizes:

	<b>Jose de Diego</b>	<b>The Monitor School</b>	<b>Oliver H. Perry</b>	<b>Samuel F. Dupont</b>
Average class size	20-21	22-24	22-25	20-23

## **Professional Development and Collaboration**

The proposals for CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 lay out the regular professional development that will support their teachers. Our local schools are equally committed to professional development. Our school leaders have worked hard to create an atmosphere of trust and support within their professional communities, where teachers who ask for help and guidance are celebrated, encouraged, and met with an immediate response. Support can come in many forms and may include inter-visitation, partnering with a colleague, and coaches providing a demonstration lesson. Professional development also includes action research/inquiry cycle, case discussions, class coaching using the Danielson Framework for Teaching, Critical Friends Group, data teams/assessment development, examining student work, lesson study, mentoring, portfolio reviews, and study groups. etc.,

The NYC DOE has developed an organizational structure that supports professional development on a larger level through formal school clusters and networks like the Children First Network which, in addition to providing professional development, also provides Quality Reviewers three times per year to help school leadership identify school-wide instructional improvement issues and address them, including aligning curriculum and classroom tasks with the rigor required by the Common Core State Standards, leveraging teacher teams engaged in collaborative inquiry as vehicles for this alignment, and exploring the implications of the new standards within all subject areas. Importantly, the School Leadership Team (SLT) is included in the process of selecting a network team that will best meet the needs and goals of the school.

Ultimately, our neighborhood school professional development is always tailored to meet the needs of individual staff members. Our schools survey their needs at the beginning of the year using tools like the Professional Development Needs Assessment Survey, considering Backwards Planning, using technology in the classroom, or redirecting reluctant learners. Our school leaders recognize that job-embedded approaches which incorporate professional learning activities into the daily work of teachers are more effective and sustainable than stand-alone workshops.

Formal professional development includes partnerships with Teachers College, CUNY's Math in the City Program, Metamorphosis Learning, AUSSIE, and Center for Integrated Teacher Education. Informal professional development occurs when colleagues, many of whom have worked together for years, share best practices throughout the day and the year.

Regular planning between teachers within and across grades is a high priority for our neighborhood schools. As our neighborhood schools believe in constructivist learning, where it is understood that learning is always built upon student knowledge already attained, they recognize that collaborative vertical and horizontal planning are critical in maintaining consistency and alignment for our students.

Our local school teachers have common planning periods at least twice a week and working lunches minimally several times a week. In published surveys, our neighborhood school teachers indicated that they have scheduled opportunities to meet and work with other teachers multiple times per week. Teachers regularly meet for collaborative inquiry, to review data (student work) and inform (differentiate instruction), coordinate curriculum, share best practices, form study groups, and plan for special events like writing celebrations, service learning projects, and other school-wide and community celebrations.

Collaboration is encouraged among and between our neighborhood principals at the citywide level through the Children First Network with clusters who meet regularly to share ideas and best practices. Principals regularly visit each others' schools, and schools within the District meet formally and informally to plan the implementation of new academic initiatives. Our neighborhood principals have established relationships with one another after years of serving in our community schools. Even our most recently appointed principals, Sereida Rodriguez from PS84 Jose de Diego, and Eva Irizarry from PS414 Brooklyn Arbor, have served as teachers at PS250 George H. Lindsay and PS257 John F. Hylan respectively for over a decade each. Our district is large, but the leadership knows each other and regularly share best practices.

Our Magnet schools have developed their own professional network under the guidance of the District Magnet Coordinator, and meet regularly to discuss how to best utilize their Magnet grants.

Finally, while CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 present their summer trainings as unique, PS414 Brooklyn Arbor, opening in the Fall of 2012 is planning their rigorous summer training series with a goal of team building to lead to long term collaborations and shared articulation of the school's vision.

### **Staff Leadership Selection**

While it was clear to us, as we read the proposals for CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, that these schools are proposing poor copies of schools that already exist in our district and are under-enrolled, what struck us as most inadequate was their requirements and recruitment plan for teachers and school leaders.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 are pursuing teachers with minimal experience. There is no preference for experienced teachers (beyond a "+" after 2 years), and no preference to pursue teachers with Masters degrees in education or teaching, or relevant content (content is measured by an exam, with little information beyond what that exam would entail).

	<b>Jose de Diego</b>	<b>The Monitor School</b>	<b>Oliver H. Perry</b>	<b>Samuel F. Dupont</b>
% of teachers with Masters degrees plus 30 hours or Doctorate	51%	62%	56%	68%

	<b>Jose de Diego</b>	<b>The Monitor School</b>	<b>Oliver H. Perry</b>	<b>Samuel F. Dupont</b>
% of teachers with fewer than three years of experience	8%	0%	0%	0%

Every single study related to teaching experience and student achievement shows that teaching experience matters, particularly the first five years in the classroom. The vast majority of our neighborhood schools have teachers seasoned by more than five years in the classroom. This is a priority for our neighborhood families.

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 outlines a recruitment plan that consists primarily of tapping into Teacher for America graduates and the charter school networks in NYC. Given how rare, according to their own estimation, the project-based and differentiated learning model is represented in charter schools in NYC, we consider this approach unrealistic and, at best, will not produce applicants that have the desired experience in balanced literacy and differentiated instruction.

While not as crucial as teacher experience, deep content-area knowledge is also an attribute of teachers that has a positive impact on student achievement, particularly for math teachers. As often as possible, this should be a consideration in hiring teachers.

In addition to pursuing and retaining experienced teachers with deep content knowledge, our neighborhood also make a concerted effort to ensure that diversity in our teacher body is reflective of the communities they teach. Our dual language programs consider additional language fluency a requirement, not a recommendation.

To give the benefit of doubt to CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, we thought that perhaps they considered that their recruitment of “excellent” school leadership would redress their proposed inexperienced body of teachers. We were dismayed to discover that CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will recruit principal candidates with only five years of classroom experience and no administrative experience, no leadership experience, and no experience with community building.

In contrast, each our District 14 principals have considerably more years experience in the classroom and as teacher leaders. District 14 has five Cahn Fellows amongst our

principals. The Cahn Fellows Program for Distinguished Principals at Teachers College Columbia is a prestigious program that recognizes outstanding principals and provides them with additional opportunities for professional, intellectual, and personal growth to strengthen the public school system through effective leadership. Less than 2% of public school principals (charter and public) are invited to receive a Cahn Fellowship.

A recent study, "State of the Sector" conducted by the New York City Charter Schools Center reports that a third of charter school teachers leave charter schools each year and one in five charter school principals leave their schools each year. These results have been echoed in numerous studies, including the National Center on School Choice which showed that "the odds of a charter school teacher leaving the profession versus staying in the same school are 132% greater than those of a traditional public school teacher. The odds of a charter school teacher moving schools are 76% greater." The reason for this turnover lies in "differences in the types of teachers that charter schools and traditional public schools hire."

The estimable Linda Darling-Hammond regularly refers to her study that shows that those who complete teacher education programs stay in teaching at much higher rates than teachers hired through alternative programs that offer only a few weeks of training.

CWCS does not acknowledge this teacher retention crisis in either of their proposals, nor do they include a meaningful plan to address teacher or principal retention within their proposals.

Earlier this year, the Center for Longitudinal Data in Educational Research released the results of their study on teacher turnover and student achievement. "Though there may be cases where turnover is actually helpful to student achievement, on average, it is harmful." We believe that teacher and principal turnover rates reflect the commitment to our community and our children. We can not afford for our most at-risk children to have these broad disruptions in their school lives. It is the job of our principals to ensure that their teachers are well chosen, well trained, and supported. We demand that our principals have the skills and experience to ensure low teacher turnover.

Our families and stakeholders place a high priority on ensuring that our school leaders have significant and varied classroom experience before they become school leaders.

We know from our own history what happens when our school leaders are not in touch with the needs of the larger community, particularly when issues are raised regarding diversity. Importantly, elected school parents on the School Leadership Team are a meaningful part of the process in hiring NYC DOE principals and assistant principals.

We have no confidence in CWSNY1 and CWSNY2's criteria for their teachers or for their school leadership.

### **Parents as Partners in Student Achievement**

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 promises to "pay regular attention to ensuring that all families have the opportunity to participate, as well as frequently communicate with parents

about their child's progress." The proposals express this commitment to parent/teacher communication through:

- An initial orientation to the school
- teacher-facilitated orientation to the student's classroom
- two parent / teacher conferences a year
- regular and full use of interpreters and, when hiring teachers, they will prioritize teachers fluent in other languages
- workshops to help parents develop literacy and numeracy in preschool age children age 0-5 as well as in elementary school students

Our local public schools also recognize that parents are crucial partners in every student's success. We consider CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 to be offering the minimal level of partnership with parents. Our local schools offer deeper and richer systematic partnerships with parents.

In addition to all of the above, each of our local public schools has a Parent Coordinator who works with parents regularly to assess whether the school is flexibly meeting the needs of the families (not just children) that our schools serve. The Parent Coordinator's position is to ensure a welcoming environment for all families, develop programming (in concert with parent leaders) that will be meaningful for the school community, and ensure that parents have all the information that they need to actively engage in their children's education and the school community.

Additionally, many of our public schools, in particular the three school buildings targeted by the Lead Applicant for the two proposals, PS110, PS84, and PS414, offer a much higher level of parent involvement, including open door policies, Learning Leaders to train parents to work in the classroom, Parents as Art Partners, parent libraries, English language classes, and computer classes. Each of these schools offers regularly scheduled monthly all-school open classes ("Fabulous Fridays" or "First Fridays," where parents and community members are invited to participate in school activities and share their skills, talents, and ideas with students and staff.

### **Parent Engagement and School Community**

It has long been accepted knowledge that increasing the connection between schools and parents is beneficial for student achievement. Parent involvement is often described as *doing to* parents (asking parents to read to children, show up for school events, market the school, and fundraise for projects the school deems important) and parent engagement is described as *doing with* parents (a two-way conversation or partnership where parents' input shapes policy and programming). The parent engagement model is considered preferable as it offers the opportunity for transformational change, not just for students and families, but for schools and communities.

We compared the model of parent involvement that CWCNY1 and CWCNY2 propose with the model of parent engagement existing in our local public schools.



CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 offer a limited model of parent involvement and no opportunity for parent engagement. The power embedded in their school structure model is exclusively top-down and there is a cap to parent participation within the school. The role that parents play in CWCS schools is exclusively related to:

- Fundraising (pledge drive, events, activities such as escrip or online shopping with credits to the school, etc.)
- Outreach and family support (outreach to prospective parents, translation of materials, support of non-English speaking families, family education activities, etc.)
- Communications (website maintenance, newsletter production, public relations, etc.)
- Room parents (coordinating parent volunteer activities in the classrooms and in support of individual teachers; each class will have a room parent, led by a single room parent coordinator)

CWSNY1 & CWSNY2 intend to hear parent voices through an annual survey that they will write to monitor their academic programs. According to their proposals, "We value the input of our parents and will use the results from their surveys to evaluate program effectiveness."

In contrast, our existing public schools offer sophisticated models of both parent involvement and parent engagement. Parents at our local public schools have the same opportunities as those offered by CWSNY1 & CWSNY2, but in addition to endless opportunities to volunteer in the classrooms and the school at large (with the Parent Teacher Associations), as well a variety of family-centered workshops and school/family events, our schools are shaped by genuine parent engagement offering numerous possibilities for genuine parent leadership. PTAs are voluntary, democratic, and parent-led, setting their own priorities and goals, but charged with reporting back to the school-at-large.

Participating in the PTA doesn't just coordinate volunteers and fundraise. PTA meetings give parents a meaningful voice in school policy by holding elections to the School Leadership Teams (SLT) which consist of an equal number of (elected) parents and staff members. SLTs play a significant role in shaping the path to a collaborative school culture, using a consensus-based decision-making process as their primary means of decision-making.

Here are some of the SLT's responsibilities:

- SLTs assist in the evaluation and assessment of educational programs and their effect on student achievement, including a needs assessment, written goals, and action plans.
- SLTs must ensure that the yearly school budget is aligned with the school's yearly Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP).
- SLT must be consulted prior to the appointment of a principal or assistant principal candidate to the school.

- SLTs must include a Title 1 parent committee member and address the Parent Involvement Policy (PIP) including the School-Parent Compact (SPC).
- SLTs provide to the superintendent an annual assessment of the principal's record of developing an effective shared decision-making relationship with SLT members.
- SLTs have a meaningful say in school restructuring and changes in school utilization.
- Title I requires that Title I parents be directly involved in deciding how Title I funds are used in the school. Title I Funds can be used for a wide range of activities including after-school programs, tutoring, and parent trainings.

Notably, in violation of the federal mandate, Citizens of the World Hollywood, the only CWCS open, has no Parent Involvement Plan for their Title I funds. We also note that neither of the proposals show an intent to accept Title I funds.

Our public school parents also have the opportunity to be elected to the Community Educational Council for our school district, an elected council of parents and community members who meet to discuss and recommend district wide priorities. The President of the CEC sits on the District Leadership Team along with the District Superintendent, to set annual goals and objectives for the school district.

While mayoral control has limited the power that parents hold in district or citywide decisions, on a school and local level, parents have the opportunity to shape education policies.

Over recent years, our public school parents have helped our local schools improve in leaps and bounds with this model of parent engagement. Diversity of our parents' backgrounds is respected in our democratic processes, and our local school communities have responded by enlarging their participation in both PTAs and SLTs, encouraging meaningful programming that reflexively responds to parent and family needs and interests.

The results of parent engagement in our schools have been tremendous. Our communities have developed deeper partnerships with our schools, shaping long lasting caring communities that support our school efforts to restore and increase art programming in the face of brutal budget cuts, create dual language programs, offer yoga, community service projects, build green roofs, and strengthen our relationships with businesses throughout the district.

When new parents recognize that our local schools have been transformed with genuine parent engagement, they are inspired to get their hands deep in the process of participatory transformation. Not only is the public school model of parent engagement desirable for our Williamsburg and Greenpoint parents, but it keeps our schools democratic, renewable, and sustainable models for positive social change in our communities.

Years ago, when Carmen Fariña, the Deputy Schools Chancellor of the NYC DOE, came to the packed meeting of middle class parents in Williamsburg to discuss what could be possible in our neighborhood schools if middle class parents attended them. Fariña described a true model of public school turnaround which was a combination of: strong leadership, devoted teachers, meaningful curriculum, parent engagement, and diversity in the classroom. We see this happening at P110 The Monitor School, PS84 Jose de Diego, PS132 Conselyea School, PS34 Oliver H. Perry, PS31 Samuel F. Dupont. It is our community's wish to support these neighborhood school successes, build upon them, and bring these best practices to all of our district schools.

## **FINANCIAL STABILITY**

We recently learned that on March 23, 2012, Citizens of the World Hollywood, the CWCS flagship charter school, took out a \$250,000 loan from the state of California. Their board minutes from February 16, 2012 point to the need for this loan to cover their cash flow problems and stated that they require additional fundraising by parents to sustain themselves. According to those board minutes, "90% of families having donated/pledged approximately \$163,000 which is 66% of the way to the \$245,000 annual fundraising goal.

According to the *New Student Packet* given to enrolled families at the Citizens of the World Hollywood, their school "depends on significant support from families to sustain our program of small class sizes, teachers' assistants for every class, art, music and p.e." amounting to "an average family contribution of \$1,300 a year per child." While all of our neighborhood PTAs fundraise, this reliance on fundraising and pledges to fulfill their basic promises is absolutely unsustainable, morally unconscionable, and reflects a total denial of the pain and reality of our District 14 families that live in true poverty.

None of this information was listed anywhere in the proposals for CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, nor was this information given to the small cohort of parents supporting these proposals.

The proposed budgets for CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 are based on the highest possible enrollment projections, a heavy reliance on start-up grants (also based on the highest possible enrollment projections), and a kind of cross-your-fingers and hope that funds will come from parents. What happens if they don't make their enrollment targets for both Kindergarten and 1st grade? What happens if they are unable to get the required funds from their enrolled families? Will they take back their promise to families that they will have two teachers in each classroom? Will they take away their art teacher and art room? Will they increase their class size? Will they be forced to close their doors? There is no short term, let alone long term plan for sustaining their school model. They have no major donors lined up or letters of commitment from donors.

We are deeply concerned that our children will be fodder to what appears to be a ponzi scheme on the part of their developing CMO to use our New York City funds to pay back their debts in Los Angeles, opening more schools with more start up grants based on inflated projections, and enrolling more and more children in order to stay afloat with a financially unsustainable model.

This year our district families suffered a significant blow with the scandals attached to two Believe Network Schools. Believe Southside Charter High School closed due to financial mismanagement with 400 students now seeking new high school options, and Williamsburg Charter High School whose current 900 students are in an anxiety ridden limbo awaiting word of closure. We simply can not afford to invite schools into our district that are at risk for closure due to financial mismanagement.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

We believe that CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals have demonstrated an absolute lack of regard for New York State's process for charter issuance.

The SUNY RFP Guidance Handbook clearly states:

*"...SUNY's proposal review process must generally 'consider the demand for charter schools by the community,' per Education Law § 2852(9-a)(b)."*

And:

*"Per Education Law § 2852(9-a)(b)(ii), the SUNY Trustees are not to consider any proposal that does not 'rigorously demonstrate' that the applicant has conducted public outreach 'in conformity with a thorough and meaningful public review process' designed 'to solicit community input regarding the proposed charter school and to address comments received from the impacted community concerning the educational and programmatic need of students."*

*"In order for the Institute to recommend any proposal to the SUNY Trustees for approval, the proposal must include evidence that:*

- The community was informed of the intent to develop a school proposal in a timely fashion;*
- The community had meaningful opportunities for input on that proposal; and*
- There was a thoughtful process for considering community feedback and incorporating it into the final proposal.*

*"Please note that seeking input about the proposal is distinct from seeking support for the proposed school. While applicants will also be required to show evidence of community interest in and support for the school (response to Request 16(d)), that support alone does not demonstrate that the community was given the opportunity to provide input into the design of the proposed school or how such input was carefully considered by the applicant."*

## **Seeking Input into the Proposals (Letter of Intent Stage)**

The proposals for CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 reflect an appalling lack of community input. We do not believe that these proposals should have gotten past the stage of Letter of Intent.

The Community Outreach Addendum for the Letter of Intent claims that the proposals were discussed by community blog authors. This is patently untrue. Williamsburg and Greenpoint have an internationally renowned vocal presence in the online world. It would not have been difficult to get the word out about proposals for two charter schools had that been the intention of CWCS. Rather, the online community was uncommonly

silent on this subject. There was no mention on any blogs of these two proposals, no links or announcements, and, equally as important, no mechanism for feedback. This lack of community outreach, in the era of the internet, can not be considered anything other than intentional negligence.

There was no outreach beyond an affluent cohort of parents inviting their personal friends. The only information sessions submitted in the Letter of Intent were held in Schaefer Landing and Northside Piers, two new high-rise condominium buildings populated with wealthy residents. These sessions were not publicized; the only notification was on a small, private email list.

According to the Community Outreach Addendum to the Letter of Intent for both proposals, CWCS claimed outreach to buildings offering mixed and low-income housing. Yet the evidence submitted (sign-in sheets from information sessions) does not support these claims. Both Schaefer Landing and Northside Piers are luxury condominiums that maintain affordable housing units for tax abatement purposes. The subsidized portion of these condominiums, including the 80/20 mixed-income housing, are actually housed in separate buildings with separate addresses than the location for the information sessions. In other words, the announcements for these meetings were not placed in the mixed income housing buildings, and the meetings themselves were held where mixed-income residents would not be allowed to attend.

Out of the three Community Based Organizations (CBOs) listed in the Community Outreach Addendum to their Letter of Intent: Greenpoint YMCA, Williamsburg Neighborhood Nursery School, and Padre Kennedy, only the latter is a Head Start Program.

There were no meetings held at either the Greenpoint YMCA or Williamsburg Neighborhood Nursery School. Neither the Greenpoint YMCA or Williamsburg Neighborhood Nursery School distributed information regarding CWCS.

After conversations with the Executive Director of the Greenpoint YMCA and the Director of Williamsburg Neighborhood Nursery School, we discovered that these two organizations recognized that having meetings with their customers would be considered political support for these proposed charter schools, and they refused to distribute information about the schools or host informational meetings. This refusal was not listed in the Letter of Intent or the subsequent proposals.

We also discovered that the Informational Meeting at Padre Kennedy lasted a whole of ten minutes. Padre Kennedy parents were not informed that giving their names and contact information for informational purposes would be the equivalent of signing a petition in favor of the schools or lending their political support to these schools. Padre Kennedy felt that they were being used. The parents at Padre Kennedy were not aware of equivalent programming and curriculum being offered at the neighboring PS84 Jose de Diego Magnet School for the Visual Arts.

There is a stark difference between the lengthy sessions that were afforded the affluent families who were given the time and opportunity to describe their “dream school,” and

the ten minute informational sessions at Padre Kennedy. The affluent families were afforded the pretense of having input into the two pre-written proposals, but CWCS dropped that facade with lower income latino families who were simply given a presentation and told what the schools would look like.

It is impossible for us to believe that CWCS has a true commitment to diversity, let alone experience with diversity, when their outreach reflects an absolute lack of consideration for our lower income families. Our lower income families were not asked about their “dream school” or invited to the conversation about what these two schools would offer their children.

CWCS was introduced to District 14 by a post in a private, closed listerv designed for Williamsburg and Greenpoint parents called the Brooklyn Baby Hui (BBH). BBH is not a local blog. The difference between a blog and a listerv is significant, particularly when considering community outreach. A blog is openly available with terms that are searchable through google. BBH, as a closed and private listerv, is only available to its screened members; mostly white, affluent parents with children who have not yet reached school age. BBH primarily answers questions that these parents have regarding nannies, strollers, nursery schools, and issues related to pregnancy, breastfeeding, babies and toddlers.

The Lead Applicant concealed his status as the Lead Applicant on the BBH listerv. He did not tell parents that their discussion of CWCS would be considered community outreach. Parents expressed concern that these schools would negatively impact enrollment and diversity in our undersubscribed and recently diverse schools. Parents expressed concern that there didn’t seem to be anything new or different in these proposed schools than what is already available in our neighborhood schools. Parents wondered why the Lead Applicant believed that these schools would erase the achievement gap when they didn’t appear to be doing anything different than our neighborhood schools. Parents repeatedly told the Lead Applicant that project-based learning, balanced literacy, and differentiated instruction are already widespread in our public schools. None of this was mentioned in the Letter of Intent or the subsequent proposals.

In response to questions about the breadth of community input into the proposal, the Lead Applicant responded, “CWCS came to our community via Tapestry, which has had over a dozen open meetings and talked to and surveyed over 300 parents, and felt CWCS would be a good fit.” This was posted on the listerv on January 14, 2012, in advance of the Letter of Intent. The Outreach Addendum to the Letter of Intent reveals this to be an outright lie. In advance of the Letter of Intent, there were a total of four meetings held, none of which were advertised openly, and a total of 51 people attended these meetings (with nine people that attended meetings more than once). A precious few of these attendees have school-age children. This is not a cross-section of our community by any stretch of the imagination.

There was absolutely no outreach done with any of our community based organizations or the impacted community. The much contested Success Academy at least had the courtesy of at least sending letters to our elected representatives. CWCS did not.

Parents on the BBH listserv begged the Lead Applicant to introduce the idea for CWCS to the larger community. It was requested that the Lead Applicant contact any of our elected officials and organize a Town Hall to discuss these proposals. The Lead Applicant repeatedly refused any open meetings in advance of the proposal being written, telling us that, “outreach is ongoing and the work to date will be fully laid-out in the application at the end of this month, leaving more than a year and a half to protest and challenge if there’s anything people feel is amiss.”

CWCS missed their opportunity to alter their proposal and address the concerns that we have as a community.

None of the many dozens of BBH listserv posts that expressed detailed concerns and offered meaningful feedback were even mentioned, let alone addressed, in the proposal. According to the proposals:

This opposition has not, to our knowledge, focused on any of the specifics of our academic program, or on our overall mission of diversity and academic excellence for all. The opposition has centered on the blog authors and commenters’ desire to prevent charter schools in general coming to the Williamsburg community, along with a desire to prevent CWCNY1 from co-locating at certain public schools in CSD 14.

CWCS chose not to listen to the community and their proposals reflect this willful ignorance. Their “academic program,” and “overall mission of diversity and excellence for all” were regularly questioned on the BBH listserv.

It is our belief that CWCS considered the “concept” of feedback a nominal protocol, and nothing to be taken seriously.

Concerned local parents wrote to CWCS inquiring about hearings, information sessions, or any other venue where they could give feedback on the proposals and were told that there would be no more information sessions before the application date.

Their online “feedback form” was buried way below the fold on an interior page of their website in a small cropped window that gave no indication of anything below. When finally found, the survey did not provide any opportunity for feedback, only pre-selected multiple choice questions like, “I have children enrolled in (please check all that apply)” and “I am interested in a school that offers (please check all that apply[sic])”.

There was no room for comments.

### **Community Outreach as listed in the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 Proposals**

CWCS pursued a narrow and self-serving group of community based organizations, only pursuing those community based organizations that have parents with young children. Our district has many high profile community based organizations with long standing commitments to social justice and education, including St. Nicks and El Puente.

CWCS did not reach out in any way to the Community Education Council for District 14 (CEC14) or the Community Board. None of our elected officials were made aware of these proposals. The CEC14 was not made aware of these proposals until they were asked to allow CWCS to present their proposed schools at their CEC14 meeting on April 19, 2012.

Once the Letter of Intent was submitted, CWCS went miles across the district into the border of Williamsburg and Bed-Stuy to recruit support from Sumner Children's Center and Marcy Children's Center. There is no evidence that they conducted their meetings in Spanish with either of these school populations or had Spanish interpreters present to ask or answer questions about the written materials.

When there are numerous head start programs close to the areas where they held meetings with the affluent families, why would CWCS seek support miles away at the very margins of our district?

Sumner Children's Center and Marcy Children's Center service the part of our district with significant housing segregation. The families in this area are zoned for schools that have been egregiously segregated for decades. Had CWCS visited St. Nick's Alliance, Nuestros Niños, or Small World Day Care Center, all community based organizations and day care centers that are much closer to the areas where the affluent families live, they would have been confronted by parents whose children attend diverse schools like PS110 The Monitor School, PS84 Jose de Diego, PS132 The Conselyea School, and the new PS414 Brooklyn Arbor.

Sumner Children's Center and Marcy Children's Center both wrote letters supporting the academic programs in CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, specifically citing every single aspect of these two proposals that is currently available in their own neighborhood schools, with the exception of diverse classrooms. Sumner Children's Center and Marcy Children's Center were not made aware of the nearby recently granted Magnet schools designed to redress this issue of segregation.

The second reason that we believe CWCS travelled to Sumner Children's Center and Marcy Children's Center is because these schools are frequently visited by the charter schools in our district which are within walking distance of these two childcare facilities and suffer from equally egregious segregation as our public schools. The majority of our K-5 charter schools are housed in this area. These daycare centers have been visited by three K-5 Success Academies (two opening in Fall 2012), two K-5 Beginning with Children Charter Schools (one new and opening in Fall 2012), a K-5 Ethical Community Charter School, and a K-5 Brooklyn Charter School.

Our district housed charter schools suffer just as much segregation as their surrounding public schools. While our community appreciates the need for charter schools to remedy their own segregation problems, we simply can not afford to redress charter school segregation at the expense of our neighborhood schools. Increasing the market of charter schools in our segregated community will undermine the Magnet grants that were just awarded.



## **Petitions**

CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 claim significantly more support than the evidence shows, drawing a lot of conclusions from illegible signatures and email addresses.

According to the proposals CWCS garnered 250 signatures to support the combined enrollment of 252. We have many objections to this concept of support for their proposals.

Many of the signatures do not include any further contact information, have absolutely illegible signatures with no names attached and refer to zip codes far away from District 14. Their reflection of a commitment to the proposed schools is specious. Our most generous accounting of actual signatures that include contact information and that live in the district is 183.

Of those 183 names, there is absolutely no guarantee that these people have children at all, or whether their children would qualify for Kindergarten or 1st grade by the Fall of 2013. Yet we are expected to believe that both CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 will get an even spread of Kindergartners and 1st graders from this list of names, email addresses, and zip codes.

The petition form is in English, even as CWCS claims that they did outreach within our Spanish Speaking community. There are no petition forms available in Spanish, Polish, or Hebrew, the most commonly spoken languages in our district outside of English. How many of these signatures represent awareness of the meaning of their signature if the page they are signing is not in their home language?

Finally, these signatures were gathered before many parents were made aware of the new Magnet school option: PS414 Brooklyn Arbor Magnet School of Global and Ethical Studies which was not approved until late February, 2012.

## **The Community Education Council Hearing on CWSNY1 and CWSNY2**

There continues to be no outreach to any of our elected officials or community based organizations nor any public announcements or advertisements of any sort.

Our Community Education Council for District 14 was not made aware of these proposals until they were asked to allow CWCS to present their proposals at their Hearing on April 19, 2012.

Over one hundred District 14 parents were present at the CEC14 Hearing to give their feedback on the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2. Every parent present was opposed to these two proposals. There was not a single supporter of these proposals present, with the exception of the four staff members from the CWCS who are not from our district, including Kate Sobel and Etoy Ridgnal. The Lead Applicant for these proposals was not even present at the Hearing.

In addition to the parents, here is a list of our elected representatives who spoke eloquently and on the record against approving the CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 proposals:

- US Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez
- NY State Assemblyman Joe Lentol
- Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz
- City Council Member Diana Reyna
- City Council Member Stephen Levin
- State Committee Member Lincoln Restler

Our community was given 30 minutes as our single opportunity to discuss the merits of these two proposed schools in front of the NYC Department of Education with transcriptions to be sent to the SUNY Charter School Institute. Each of the parents were holding 22 pages of “talking points” that they wanted to address in front of the NYC DOE to be transcribed to SUNY.

Because of time constraints, we elected one parent to speak to the programming and curriculum component of the two proposals. The speech was lifted from the first few pages of this letter, and she was able to cover: Constructivist Learning and Differentiated Instruction, Balanced Literacy, Everyday Math, and portions of Service Learning.

In the middle of her speech, it was noted that Kate Sobel and her cohort were not listening, but chatting amongst themselves. This was CWCS’s sole opportunity to hear from the impacted community and they chose not to listen. We believe that this spoke volumes about their respect for and commitment to our community.

After the Hearing, several parents were engaged with Kate Sobel and Etoy Ridgnal in deep conversations regarding the merit of the proposals. One parent was talking with Kate Sobel about CWCS’s plan to *Everyday Math* as their primary mathematics curriculum in spite of the direction against *Everyday Math* that our city schools are taking after ten years of proven inefficacy. Sobel told that parent that they did not intend to use *Everyday Math* as their primary resource, but rather *TERC* and *Singapore Math* as though what they have written in their proposal can be altered to suit Ms. Sobel’s audience.

We were told by SUNY that CWCS can not alter their proposals based on feedback after the proposals have been submitted. CWCS refused the opportunity to design their proposal using community feedback. They can not stretch the process to redress their utter disregard for our community’s breadth and depth of knowledge when they finally recognize that our knowledge is valuable.

Another parent was discussing community outreach with Etoy Ridgnal, who made no apologies for their lack of community outreach. Ms. Ridgnal firmly believed that posting on the BBH listserv was enough community outreach for these two proposed schools.

We must stress that according to *Education Law § 2852(9-a)(b)(ii)*, *the SUNY Trustees are not to consider any proposal that does not ‘rigorously demonstrate’ that the*

*applicant has conducted public outreach ‘in conformity with a thorough and meaningful public review process’ designed ‘to solicit community input regarding the proposed charter school and to address comments received from the impacted community concerning the educational and programmatic need of students.*

This law was put in place to protect impacted communities from precisely these abuses.

### **Continued Opposition to CWSNY1 and CWSNY2**

Since the CEC14 Hearing on CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, more District 14 community members have spoken out against these proposed schools.

The Council of Supervisors and Administrators of Community School District #14 stands opposed to CWSNY1 and CWSNY2.

In addition to the elected officials represented at the Hearing, the Community Education Council charged with approving school attendance lines, wrote a resolution demanding that “Legislature should amend the school governance laws so that all proposals to close, phase, truncate or co-locate NYC public schools must be approved by the district Community Education Council in which the school resides.”

The Community Board for District 1 passed a resolution unanimously opposing CWSNY1 and CWSNY2.

### **Community Solutions to Issues Raised by the Proposal**

It is clear that families with children who are not yet school-age are unaware of the spectrum of excellent public school choices in our district. Parents are unaware of our eight Magnet elementary schools. Parents do not know what takes place inside our neighborhood schools and have been exploited into believing that the only way to a good public school is to start a new one. The small cohort of parents that supported CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 were operating under the assumption that these two proposed school represent innovation, experimentation, genuine parent engagement, and school autonomy. They do not.

According to a 2011 Gallup poll, 50% of Americans believe that their lack of confidence in public schools is because of a lack of “familiarity / knowledge about immediate community / local schools.” The cohort of parents who supported CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 were vulnerable because they were unfamiliar with and lack information about their community schools.

While our community schools do not have anywhere near the marketing budget that charter schools have, it is essential that we raise the profile of our schools and reach out to new families to develop this deserved trust in our community schools. There is no reason for parents to support a new school, when our current (and under-enrolled) public schools already offer what they expressly desire, schools with project-based learning, differentiated instruction and belief in constructivist learning, strong arts

programming, opportunities for parent engagement, service learning, commitment to community threaded throughout the curriculum and school, and diverse student bodies.

District 14 has a public school choice model in place with our under-enrolled and excellent Magnet schools. Our terrific zoned schools also have plenty of room for out-of-zone children. No one in our district is forced to attend their zoned school, but can pick from an array of different schools.

To that end, Williamsburg and Greenpoint Parents: Our Public Schools! (WAGPOPS!) a grass-roots community group was developed in response to meet the need for our public schools. WAGPOPS! is creating a hub for public school information and school pride. Parents and community members district-wide can learn about their local school events, projects, and programming, sign up for tours, and volunteer if they desire.

Regarding the schools in our district that are not diverse, it is essential that the schools that have been recently awarded Magnet grants be further supported by the DOE in partnership with local community based organizations in a district wide or multi-district plan (in concert with community stakeholders and the DoE) to bring middle class families into our most segregated areas.

PS257 John F. Hylan Magnet School of the Performing Arts is developing a marketing office to spread the word about our Magnet schools across the district.

Finally, as a district with high populations of low income families and ELLs, we recognize that there are many factors that will serve to bridge the achievement gap in our district:

- Ensuring that our district families health and housing needs are met.
- Ensuring that early childhood education be available, particularly for our most at-risk children.
- Ensuring that all of our public schools serve diverse students.
- Ensuring small class sizes in all of our schools.
- Ensuring that our middle schools are meeting the needs of our diverse families, including the addition of dual language middle school programs.
- Ensuring that the arts and arts funding remain a priority in our public schools.
- Ensuring the availability of quality after-school and summer programs.

In recognition of the numerous studies that show that family background has a significant (up to 5 fold effect on test results) impact on academic achievement, we are interested in “cradle to college” support services for our at-risk populations. El Puente, in concert with our elected officials and Southside Williamsburg elementary and middle schools, is taking the lead on this, pursuing an educational pipeline that tracks Southside Williamsburg students children from head start programs through college.

District 14 schools are true community schools, born from experienced District 14 educators and committed District 14 families. Our newest school leaders bring creative, constructivist, interdisciplinary instruction to areas that have been mishandled by

outsiders in the past. Our school leaders are not interlopers. They did not coldly stare numbers down and piece together a model that looked like it might work on paper. We do not accept that the hard-won knowledge that comes from studying the day-in and day-out rhythms of a place, of its students and families, and working together should be trumped by crunching numbers. The numbers are not telling the real story of Williamsburg and Greenpoint schools.

Our district is large and varied. We have some of the most successful elementary schools in NYC (PS31, PS34, and PS380), we have elementary schools that are building momentum, along with elementary schools in significant need of improvement. We are struggling with how to increase diversity in the racially and socio-economically isolated areas of our district. We want our children in class together.

Accepting these two proposed schools as means to address either the achievement gap or diversity is the equivalent of blindly wielding an axe rather than skillfully maneuvering a scalpel to deal with the problem. These are sensitive issues that must be managed with significant input from the community. CWSNY1 and CWSNY2, far from being a solution to the problem, will only serve to exacerbate the problem of segregation that has for so long plagued our district.

We believe that there is a place in public education for charter schools, but Citizens of the World is bastardizing the original intent of charter schools. We have a district wide model for school choice in place. We do not have enough school-age children, particularly white middle-class school-age children, to fill our elementary schools. CWSNY1 and CWSNY2 are not proposing new or alternative school models. These two charter schools are poor copies of our neighborhood schools, designed to pull our neighborhood's newest white middle class families out of the schools that serve them well. The net effect of SUNY's acceptance of these two proposed school proposals will set our community back decades.

Our community stands united in opposition to CWSNY1 and CWSNY2.

We ask that you consider very seriously the impact of these proposed schools on our community and reject CWSNY1 and CWSNY2.

Sincerely,

Williamsburg and Greenpoint Parents: Our Public Schools!  
WAGPOPS!  
(288 members and growing!)