



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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January 18, 2018

Chancellor Carmen Fariña  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10001

Dear Chancellor Fariña,

Closing a beloved community school, or any portion of such school in one of New York City's neighborhoods is never an easy process. It shouldn't be an easy process. In the Harlem portion of school District, where Success Academy Charter Schools and other charter schools have bought their way into their "market share" via snazzy marketing, rigidity of behavioral standards, crisp uniforms and other optical illusions, public schools are fighting hard to survive. The Wadleigh Secondary School for The Performing Visual Arts is no exception.

Like other schools in the Department of Education's renewal school program, Wadleigh has struggled academically. Yet according to the renewal school benchmark portal, Wadleigh has met most of its markers for performance. Student attendance improved to 91.8%, within the benchmark range of 91.4-92.4%. Collaborative teaching marks reached 3.03, which meets the range set at 3.0-3.3. ELA proficiencies were also met according to the portal. Of the six benchmarks listed on the portal, Wadleigh met four of them, 67%, which is the achievement level referenced by Superintendent Altschul as the required progress to remain in the renewal school program.

While the announcement to truncate its middle school and make it a competitive performing arts high school appeals to decision makers at the New York City Department of Education, the District 3 superintendent, and a handful of elected officials, this decision does not represent the best interests of the Harlem community, parents at Wadleigh, and Community Education Council District 3.

For the reasons listed below, CEC3 calls on the Department of Education to immediately suspend this proposal for consideration for at least one year so that Wadleigh can continue to work towards improving the academic standards and enrollment at the school, so that the Wadleigh community and Harlem parents can begin to heal, and so that CEC3 can work on building trust with parents and other stakeholders of our district who need the most support.

First, holding a secret meeting with a handful of chosen parents, asking them to keep the conversation to themselves, then referencing this contact point as engagement is NOT "community engagement." However, this is exactly the type of behavior that is all too common among the school communities in District 3 where segregation remains most persistent.

Everyone involved in the decision to add the Wadleigh middle school to the list of closures knows that there is no effort to work with the community ahead of these processes. In June, the District 3 superintendent met one time with the Wadleigh SLT. According to parents in the room, the District 3 superintendent noted that such a closure was "just an idea." From that meeting in June until late October, the "idea" of truncating the middle school was not mentioned to the Wadleigh community. In late October, frustrated parents, who were hearing

rumors of a truncation, took it upon themselves to set up a meeting with the District 3 renewal schools representative. It was not until November that a meeting was held. Much effort was spent trying to prevent a CEC liaison from attending this meeting and, during the meeting, all Department of Education staff professed to know nothing of the rumors of the truncation.

During multiple CEC3 meetings in the fall, the District 3 superintendent indicated that the Wadleigh middle school might be considered for truncated, but that no such significant change was imminent. On December 18, 2017, in a meeting with the Wadleigh middle school students and not their parents, the truth was revealed. The Wadleigh community has been told that the District 3 superintendent fought the decision. Clearly she did not fight very hard. [In fact, at a recent CEC3 meeting, the District 3 superintendent voiced her support for the truncation.]

Second, there is clear evidence that Wadleigh IS improving, despite the fact that the Department of Education failed to provide much needed substantive resources that would cultivate improved student outcomes. Despite the reported zero percent proficiency in math on state test, Wadleigh's Quality Snapshot states that 86% of students have passing grades in their core courses. Please see both the table of unanswered questions sent to the District 3 superintendent as well as the financial analysis of the Wadleigh school funding.

Lastly, on Friday, January 12, 2018, an additional injustice was handed to the hard-working Wadleigh community trying to galvanize around their mission to understand how this drama has unfolded and how important it is to protect their beloved school. The Department of Education has decided to delay the truncation vote of the Panel for Education Policy until the March 21 meeting of the Panel for Education Policy. This untimely delay means that the Wadleigh community will be cast into further confusion about its future. Such a decision to delay the vote, means that, among other things, the already scheduled and promoted Joint Public Hearing won't take place on February 12<sup>th</sup>, all momentum to challenge and question the truncation will have to be maintained for yet another month and parents will need to find the time and child care to attend more meetings and more rallies and will have to put in more work. In addition, yet another month will pass for the students and parents to figure out where they will be going to school next year. The process and the further delay of the vote is unacceptable, disrespectful, destructive, and abusive.

Before this course of engagement causes any more damage to the Harlem community and the trust our community has in the Department of Education, CEC3 calls upon the Department of Education to rescind the plans to truncate the Wadleigh middle school and to work closely with CEC3 and the Wadleigh community to develop a plan for Wadleigh School to succeed. Changes in leadership and programming may be needed, and we would certainly welcome the effort to bring in outside entities for assistance. However, this is NOT the time to amputate a major source of enrollment for the high school. The performing arts high school that we all want to cultivate is already underway - lets work together to make it happen.

Sincerely,

Community Education Council 3

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