

**Make Room for Middle School:  
The need for a new D15 6-8 School in Sunset Park**

Policy Analysis and Recommendation

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**Submitted on:** December 13, 2021

## I. Summary of Recommendations

This policy recommendation is to construct a new middle school in Sunset Park, Brooklyn because of having 13 elementary schools servicing the community, five of which will be built between 2022 and 2024 providing an additional 1,000 seats (Veiga 2021). The proposed school would have a budget allocated by the Authority (SCA) budget for FY 2025-2029 for a total of \$72 million dollars. It is projected that the new Sunset Park middle school of District 15 would receive 52% of incoming sixth graders from the neighboring 13 elementary schools based on preferred indicators.

The following are a list of recommendations being called “Build from Within” initiative to support the success of the new Sunset Park middle school:

- 1. Build a new middle school:** for students who previously attended elementary schools in Sunset Park or live in District 15. The enrollment capacity should be between 350-400 students, with a three-story building at 60,000 square feet. It will feature smaller class sizes: Low teacher to student ratios, capped at 20 students per classroom.
- 2. The Sunset Park middle school should have a fully air-conditioned, accessible, two- to- three- story building providing twenty standard classrooms.** Flexible seating and writing surfaces to encourage student and colleague collaboration. Easy-to-move furniture for adaptability. Incorporate green sustainable features such as high efficiency boiler, water source heat pumps to achieve LEED Silver rating. A reading/speech resource room, a science lab, an art classroom/gallery space, a music wing, kitchen, sewing lab, technology and media lab, business and resource library and administrative offices. The building will also include a cafeteria, staff lunchroom, gymnasium and

auditorium with extensive theatrical, lighting, and audio-visual installation. Green roof. Outdoor recreational spaces include an entry courtyard and a large schoolyard.

- 3. Locate the school from overcrowded elementary school areas in Sunset Park.** The new school should be in the heart of Sunset Park, if possible (50s, between 1-3 avenues, 7-9 avenues) or developing new areas with the community including Industry City, or Bush Terminal Piers Park. Avoid building the middle school near neighboring Park Slope or Bay Ridge.
- 4. The new Sunset Park middle school should continue with current D15 admissions policies:** The new middle school should be open to students who attend elementary school or live in District 15. There will be no interviews and test scores won't play a role in the admissions process. The new middle school's admissions policy will coincide with District 15 policy and therefore seats will be filled using a random lottery. Preference will be given to students who receive free or reduced lunch; English Language Learners (ELLs) and homeless students. (Inside Schools District 15, 2020). Priority for 52 percent of seats going to students those benchmarks.
- 5. Create and academically desirable middle school to not only retain Sunset Park's best but to also attract exemplary students from the district.** The Sunset Park middle school will offer Bilingual/Dual Language in Spanish, Chinese and French. The school will offer Special Services including Resource, ESL, and other services through a push-in model. Pull-out services offered on a limited basis.
- 6. Name the school:** The Middle School for Entrepreneurship and Social Justice. The model should be a Community School with Sunset Park Business Improvement District,

Industry City, and UPROSE as its CBO partners. Identify and create a coordinator for the CBOs.

**7. Develop a new Sunset Park middle school through a collaborative community-**

**process.** Like the D15 diversity initiative, conduct a Sunset Park-based new middle schools initiative with community members and organizations, parents and young people to develop the new school. The process begins prior to construction when the Project Director (which is later the middle school principal) begins to convene with the design team. At that point, the Project Director can create a middle school committee made up of parents, students, and community activists to provide critical input and feedback into the design, mission statement and curriculum of the school. Once the school has been built and opened, the committee model should still be utilized to strengthen community roots.

**8. Build partnerships with local and emerging Sunset Park organizations.** These growing areas of business should be incorporated in schools as both part of enrichment programs and specialized curriculum. Build social justice partnerships with Sunset Park-based UPROSE; leverage the existing relationship with Dedalus Foundation in Industry City; and build industrial partnerships with companies found in the hub of Industry City to promote culinary arts, textile arts and design, music, and media.

**9. The new school philosophy should be built around four (4) pillars of teaching:**

Flexibility, interdisciplinary design, experiential learning and student and community-centered approach. Teachers will take a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) approach. Curricula and instruction closely aligned to state academic standards.

Strong emphasis on college ready and career focus to provide students with real-world applications and experience in a variety of fields. Teachers should be Dual-certified (general and special education) and multi-lingual teachers. Emphasize early intervention and proactive intervention. Utilize assessment data several times a year to improve practice, to diagnose student needs, set goals, etc..

**Education Tracks include\*:**

- STEM
- Humanities & Liberal Arts
- Entrepreneurship (for-profit and non profit)
- Manufacturing and Retail
- Food & Culinary Arts
- Social Justice
- Media Technology & Communications
- *\*6<sup>th</sup> grade rotate 2 tracks every marketing period. Select track in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Tracks developed based on student and community interests as well as Sunset Park historic roots.*

**10. Recruit culturally responsive, dual-certified (general and special education) and multi-lingual teachers.** It is important that teachers reflect the communities they serve. Build recruiting partnerships with CUNY-based education undergraduate and graduate programs with Brooklyn College, The City College of New York, Hunter College and The CUNY Graduate Center. These schools can serve as direct pipelines for highly skilled and trained teachers and educators, think tanks and future research.

- 11. Offer morning clubs and afterschool programs.** Morning Clubs (7:15-8AM) in Math, ELA, and Science Support; basketball and volleyball; and culinary arts. **Afterschool Programs** (3-4:30PM) in STEM, Tutoring, Gay/Straight Alliance, Fitness, Culinary Arts, and other areas of interest.
- 12. Allow the ability for parents and students to track student success:** Parents like students will track grades and progress reports through PupilPath.
- 13. Offer ongoing training and support for principals and teachers:** to improve subject expertise and pedagogical skills, as well as disciplinary and community issues.
- 14. Build Collaborative Leadership Partnerships.** Bring together Sunset Park school community with successful middle schools' principals, teachers, students, and PTA presidents (M.S. 447, M.S.51, M.S. 443, MS839), to expose others to their success formula—from curriculum design to grant writing.
- 15. Encourage and Support Research on Sunset Park Schools.** D15 has taken a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach for Gowanus/Red Hook/Carroll Gardens/Cobble Hill (Community Education Council District 15 2020). Sunset Park PAR project kick offered in Fall 2020 through the work of Brooklyn College (CUNY) Professor Maddy Fox and Matt Gonzalez, founder and director of the integration and Innovative Initiative (i3) at the NYU Metro Center. (Community Education Council District 15 2020). These new approaches to improvement should be on-going and not utilized as a one-time fix.
- 16. Marketing & PR Schools Campaign.** Utilize Sunset Park celebrities and shining alums such as actors J.W. Cortes, Lemon Anderson and Dascha Polanco, to help promote Sunset Park middle schools overall in collaboration with existing Sunset Park schools.

## II. **Statement of the Problem**

District 15 is one of the most desirable school districts in Brooklyn (Inside Schools District 15 2020). It's coveted elementary and middle schools attracted Mayor Bill de Blasio, the first mayor in the city's history to send both his kids to public school— Dante and Chiara attended The Children's School P.S. 372 in Gowanus and MS 51 William Alexander middle school in Park Slope (Rubinstein 2013).

Sought-after middle school MS 51 is considered part of the “Big Three” middle schools, which, also includes MS 447 The Math & Science Exploratory School in Gowanus and MS 443 New Voices in Academic and Creative Arts in Park Slope (Wall 2016). These “good” schools are situated in the Whiter, more affluent parts of the district. <sup>1</sup>

District 15 has currently 11 middle schools: MS 51 William Alexander Middle School, MS 88 The Park Slope Education Complex, and MS 443 New Voices of Academic & Creative Arts, and MS 442-School of Innovation in Park Slope; MS 447 The Math & Science Exploratory School in Gowanus; MS 497 The Boerum Hill School for International Studies in Boerum Hill; MS 839 in Windsor Terrace; PS/MS 676-The Redhood Neighborhood School in Red Hook; and MS 136-Charles O. Dewey and MS821 Sunset Park Prep in Sunset Park, which are co-located, and PS 896 The School of Creativity and Innovation (sixth grade only starting fall 2022 (Skop 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> D15 neighborhoods include Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Fort Greene, Gowanus, Kensington, Park Slope, Sunset Park, Red Hook, Windsor Terrace, and parts of Fort Greene (Community Education Council District 15 2020). However, the district stretches from multi-million-dollar brownstones to “housing projects, artist colonies and a giant Ikea and Fairway” (Inside Schools District 15 2020).

District 15 has roughly 6,000 middle school students in grades 6-8 (D15 Diversity Plan 2018, 29). To attend a District 15 middle school, students either have attended a District 15 elementary school, live within a D15 middle school enrollment zone, or live within the D15 administrative boundary (D15 Diversity Plan 2018, 29).

District 15 uses a districtwide plan to increase diversity and equity throughout the district. All middle schools in District 15 use an open-admissions methods with an admissions priority of 525 of the seats set aside for students from low-income households (who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program), students in temporary housing, and English Language learners (ELLs) (D15 Diversity Plan 2018).

In District 15, 12% of the middle school students are Asian, 12% are black, 42% are Latinx, 32% are White, and 2% are considered “some other race” based on 2017-2018 school year results (D15 Diversity Plan 2018, 29). According to the D15 Diversity Plan, “while patterns of racial segregation and isolation are influenced by a multitude of factors, D15 middle school student residential housing data by race reflects patterns of housing segregation in D15.”

In June 2017, the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) outlined its Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools initiative to tackle the issue of segregation in NYC public schools (Community Education Council District 15, 2020). The NYCDOE solicited WXY, an urban planning and design group, to help bring together a cross-section of community stakeholders to address the issues of segregation in District 15 Middle Schools (Community Education Council District 15, 2020). The D15 Diversity Plan is the first district-wide community-

based planning process aimed at creating diverse, meaningfully integrated middle schools in New York City (WXY).

With input from the D15 Diversity Plan Working Group, various advisory groups, and the D15 community-at-large, a comprehensive list of 67 recommendations were released to the public and to the DOE on August 3, 2018. These recommendations were based on months of research and community discussions highlighting the root causes and possible solutions to some of the inequities observed in D15 middle schools. Recommendations included the end of screens at seat set asides. Then NYC Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza implemented the recommended changes in fall 2019. Among the changes included moving away from screened schools and having admissions for middle schools become a lottery.

### **D15 Admissions Policy Change: Early Signs of Success**

Close to 90 New York City schools and programs are participating in diversity pilots this year” (NYC Department of Education 2020). According to news reports and the NYCDOE, District 15 has started showing early signs of success in terms of diversity (Gould 2019). MS. 51 increased its low-income students to 56 percent from 34 percent last year, while MS 88 had 83 percent of its sixth graders come from “aforementioned priority” groups up 23 percent from the previous year (Gould 2019).<sup>2</sup> Eight of the district’s middle schools “now enroll sixth grade classes that are between 40% and 75% needy students, compared to only three schools in that range last year” (Elsen-Rooney 2019). However, Sunset Park middle schools such as Charles O Dewey IS 136 and Sunset Park Prep MS 821 have continued to stay heavily Latinx and test scores relatively the same (Gould 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> Free and reduced lunch qualification

## About Sunset Park Schools

Sunset Park is known to have one of the most overcrowded elementary schools in the city since 2014 (Fertig 2015). In the 2018-2019 school year, elementary schools were at about 123 percent capacity rate, with P.S. 172, reaching 155 percent capacity, according to the Enrollment Capacity, and Utilization Report by the Department of Education (Chen 2019). Sunset Park will be opening five new elementary schools in Sunset Park beginning Fall 2022 (Skop 2021). This will foreseeably increase the need for a new middle school in the area. In fact, there are early signs of this. According to D15 Community Superintendent Anita Skop, PS 896 The School of Creativity and Innovation (will drop pre-k in the fall 2022 to make sure for sixth grade (Skop 2021).

While currently there are two Sunset Park middle schools in District 15—Charles O. Dewey I.S. 136 (512 students) and MS 821 Sunset Park Prep (537), most recently PS 896 decided to incorporate sixth grade to its offerings (Skop 2021)<sup>3</sup>. MS 136 and MS 821 are co-located in a century-old brick building at 4004 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The school has a large schoolyard and is next to a park with basketball and handball courts (Inside Schools 2021).

According to Inside Schools, MS 136 students enter the middle school with “weak academic skills” and “state test scores remain well below the city average.” Opened in 1901, the middle school added a French Dual Language program in September 2019 (French Language k-12 2019). The school, which became one of the first junior highs schools in the country (1922), also has Spanish Dual Language since 2016 (French Language k-12 2019) (Charles O Dewey MS 136:

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<sup>3</sup> Another middle school in Sunset Park is John J. Pershing middle school with 1292 students in neighboring District 20.

Facebook 2021). Adding French Dual Language when the language is not taught in any of Sunset Park's elementary schools was a calculated move on the part of NYCDOE to move Sunset Park towards whiteness. Language was used as the bait to lure white families from the district into Sunset Park as it is their language of preference. Dual Language French is offered at P.S. 58 in Carroll Gardens, at P.S. 133 (a District 13 school with D15 students) in Park Slope and at M.S. 51 middle school (French Dual Language Programs in NYC Public Schools n.d.).<sup>4</sup> The Boerum Hill School for International Studies (grades 6-12) also has French Dual Language instruction (The Boerum Hill School for International Studies n.d.).

MS 136 has been ranked being worse than 83% of middle schools in New York and one the worst out of the district's middle schools (schooldigger.com n.d.).

MS 821 (co-located with Charles O Dewey MS 136) was formed in the 1990s to "meet the needs of the highly motivated" has been offering Dual Language Spanish since 2017 (Chancellor Farina Announces Citywide Bilingual Expansion-Bringing 68 New Programs to schools this Fall 2017). Sunset Park Prep enrolls 90% economically disadvantaged students with a female to male student population of 47 percent versus 53 percent males (U.S. News Education n.d.). At Sunset Park Prep, 39% of students score 39% at or above proficient level in math, and 40% scored at or above that in reading (U.S. News Education n.d.). The school has a 76 percent Hispanic/Latino population; 16.8 % Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander; 4.7%v White, 2.4% Black or African American and 0.2% American Indian or Alaska Native population (U.S.

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<sup>4</sup> French Dual Language serves 1,500 students with 65 teachers at 7 elementary schools and 3 middle schools according to frenchlanguagek12.org. French is not a prerequisite for Anglophone parents. Students are taught classes in both French and English. While District 15 has limited Dual Language French Programs in its schools, French is taught at middle schools including M.S. 443.

News Education n.d.) Most recently, PS 896 will be offering grade 6 starting fall 2021 (Skop 2021).

Sunset Park's middle schools' enrollment comes from the majority of its eight elementary schools (PS 516, PS 24, PS 94, PS 169, PS 1, PS 172, PS 516 and PS 896). It is important to take note that Sunset Park middle schools have a small White enrollment rate despite having a 22% white population (Gould, One Year into Brooklyn Middle School Integration, Signs of Success 2019). This may be due to several reasons, including White parents living in Sunset Park choosing to send their kids to more "prestigious/reputable" schools within the district where Whites hold most of the student seats. However, there is an influx of White newcomers to Sunset Park who have yet to start a family, and this may offset the numbers in the near immediate future.

### **Sunset Park: A Multicultural Melting Pot**

Sunset Park is currently experiencing gentrification with the development of Industry City (220 36<sup>th</sup> Street), the Brooklyn Army Terminal (Between 58<sup>th</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> Streets west of Second avenue) and Bush Terminal Piers Park (Marginal St, and 43<sup>rd</sup> Street) (Agrawal 2018). According to *Brooklyn Eagle*, Sunset Park is one of the least-insured neighborhoods in New York City (Elias 2019). The unemployment rate in Sunset Park is "16% higher than the national average" (Sunset park- NY Unemployment n.d.).

Close to a third of renter households in Sunset Park were severely rent burdened by spending more than 50% of household income on rent as documented by NYU Furman Center (New York City Data Neighborhood Profiles BK07: Sunset Park 2020). Less than one-third of the residents are homeowners, 29.9% during the same time period (New York City Data

Neighborhood Profiles BK07: Sunset Park 2020, Harrell 2019). The overcrowded housing market is directly reflected in Sunset Park's overcrowded schools. Dual Language programs are found at both Sunset Park elementary schools—PS 94, PS 169, PS 506 and Sunset Park Avenues Elementary School and its two middle schools (Chin 2016).

In District 15, diversity conjures up a variety of meanings depending on the community utilizing it or who the word is being directed to According to the NYU Furman Center, there were about 144,332 people living in Sunset Park in 2017. Of those, 39.9% identified as Latinx, 32.7% as Asian, 22.7% as white and 2.4% identified as black.<sup>5</sup> Sunset Park has high poverty rates, 22.1% of its population in 2017, compared to 17.9% citywide (New York City Data Neighborhood Profiles BK07: Sunset Park 2020). Similar to neighboring Park Slope, Sunset Park is home to rows of brownstone homes, but is largely mixed with affordable housing, section-8 Project-based rentals and HUD Assisted Housing.

### **III. Policy Recommendation and Budget**

The National Center for Education Statistics projects that between 2012 and 2024, New York will experience a statewide total enrollment increase of 51,597 students or 1.9 percent. New York should accordingly plan to spend an average of an additional \$279 million per year for new facilities to accommodate the additional students. The median cost of a middle school is \$242.96 per square foot (School Costs: Did You Know 2015). Median spending per pupil was \$43,635 and the median middle school provides 173.4 square feet per student (School Costs:

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<sup>5</sup> Sunset Park's Latinx population consists of Puerto Rican migrants and Latinx immigrants. The majority of Latinx immigrants in Sunset park come from the Dominican Republic and Mexico with additional groups including Ecuador, Columbia, Peru, El Salvador and Nicaragua (Brooklyn's Little Latin America n.d.).

Did You Know 2015). The median number of students in middle schools built in 2014 is 612 and the building size is 118,500 square feet (School Costs: Did You Know 2015).

The School Construction Authority (SCA) manages the development and implementation of the Department of Education's Five-Year Capital Plan, identifies and acquires sites for new schools and leases (School Construction Authority (SCA) 2021). This policy recommendation recommends that SCA add a new Sunset Park middle school to its Capital Plan for FY2025-2029 with anticipated/targeted school opening date of fall 2027. The projected estimated new Sunset Park Middle School Price at \$1,200 square foot for a 60,000-square-foot-facility= \$72 million dollars.

Funding will be allocated from a number of funding streams including SCA. The Fair Student Funding (FSF) funds students in D1-32 Community Schools as the primary support for instruction and school operations. In FSF, every school is entitled to the same amount of money per student based on the student's educational need attributes. More than half of the school funding come from FSF. In addition, there is State, Federal Government, and programmatic funding. Consideration can also be given to private investors already invested in the community (Brooklyn Nets and Industry City). The new school costs include the cost of land, site prep and outfitting, which includes things like computers and furniture (School Construction Authority (SCA) 2021).

The recommended location for the site is in the deep center part of Sunset Park (i.e. 50s along 1-3avenues) and/or near a less congested school section of the neighborhood including Industry City, Brooklyn Army Terminal (home to the Fashion Institute of Technology) or Bush Terminal Piers Park. The location of the new school will be determined by availability and

square footage necessity. The new middle school *SHOULD NOT* be near Park Slope or Bay Ridge because there are already a number of middle schools in close proximity to those communities.

#### **IV. Arguments against Policy Solution including negative consequence**

There are several anticipated arguments against the policy solution, including negative consequences.

##### **1. There is no space in Sunset Park.**

It took 40 years for Sunset Park to get Sunset Park High School and 10 years to get an additional five elementary schools built in Sunset Park. There is no question that space is of utmost concern. However, Sunset Park stretches south of 15<sup>th</sup> Street at the end of park Slope and runs north to 65<sup>th</sup> Street, where it is bordered by bay Ridge. The neighborhood runs to ninth avenue near Borough Park as well as to first avenue in Sunset Park. There are unexplored areas including west of third, which previously had been flagged by environmental concerns by local non-profit UPROSE as well as several developing locations near including Bush Terminal Pier Park.

##### **2. The Middle School should be built elsewhere in District 15.**

There is a growing need for middle schools in Sunset Park based on the number of elementary schools it has and will have by 2024. We acknowledge that other communities can benefit from a new school but recommendations at this time are based on the greatest need.

**A new middle school could bring students from other parts of the district rather than solely serve the Sunset Park community.**

A new Sunset Park middle school can attract students from all parts of the district. This

would be in line with our diversity initiatives and welcome the students to attend school here. All middle schools in District 15 use an open-admissions methods with an admissions priority of 525 of the seats set aside for students from low-income households (who qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program), students in temporary housing, and English Language learners (ELLs) (D15 Diversity Plan 2018). This will benefit Sunset Park students.

**3. The new Middle School will have enrollment issues. It won't be diverse enough.**

**The new Middle School will experience curriculum issues. How will it address inclusivity without alienation?**

The new middle school will offer culturally sustaining pedagogy designed to be student-centered in its approach. The curricula and instruction closely aligned to state academic standards. There will be an emphasis on college readiness and a career focus. Students will be exposed to real-world applications and experience in a variety of fields. There will be four (4) central pillars of teaching: Flexibility, interdisciplinary design, experiential learning and student and community-centered approach. Teachers will be Dual-certified (general and special education) and multi-lingual teachers. Emphasis will be placed on early intervention and proactive intervention. Teachers will also use assessment data several times a year to improve practice, to diagnose student needs, set goals, etc..

**V. Approval and Implementation Process including Policy Supporters**

The idea of a new middle school will need to be presented to the Community Education Council (CECD15), the D15 Community Superintendent and the School

Construction Authority (SCA). Support will be garnered by local politicians including incoming Councilwoman Alexa Quiles, a lifelong Brooklynite, mom, teacher and fierce organizer for fully funded public schools and other local politicians. In addition, support will be needed from local community organizations including Make Space for Quality Schools in Sunset Park and Make Friends with Sunset Park, Sunset Park Parents as well as local non-profit and profit community businesses including UPROSE, an intergenerational, multi-racial, nationally-recognized, women of color led grassroots organization that promotes sustainability through community organizing and education, leadership development and cultural/artistic expression; the Sunset Park Business Improvement District, Industry City, Brooklyn Nets, all headquartered in Sunset Park.

**VI. Obstacles to Approval and Implementation including policy opponents**

The biggest two obstacles will be finding a location for the school and getting the new middle school built in a timely manner to accommodate the growing school needs of the neighborhood. The goal is to get the policy adopted to begin the task of making a new Sunset Park middle school a reality since it will not happen overnight as seen in other new school buildouts.

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