



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

Senator Krueger Joins Other Electeds in Letter to Chancellor Walcott Regarding Overcrowding at East Side Middle School

LIZ KRUEGER May 16, 2011

Dear Chancellor Walcott:

We are writing regarding the future enrollment at East Side Middle School. Parents and staff at the school have expressed their concerns that the DOE's apparent plans will lead to significant overcrowding at the school and a loss of many of the features that have made East Side Middle School a success over the years.

We know that you are well aware of the issues at East Side Middle School and we appreciate the time you have taken to meet with parents and to address their concerns. However, some of the facts do bear repeating. This year is East Side Middle School's first in its new facility and already the school has had to convert its music room into general classroom space. This is upsetting to us as well as to the school community because the whole point of building the new school was to take advantage of improved facilities. Too many students make that impossible. The bottom line appears to be that the new building does not have enough rooms to accommodate the number of children the DOE envisions attending it without converting cluster rooms away from their original intention. This was exactly the situation that occurred over a number of years at elementary schools in this community. It would be a shame to repeat the same mistakes at the middle school level.

We welcome the DOE's decision – as expressed in letters on March 25 and May 11 – to limit enrollment at East Side Middle School to five sections per incoming sixth grade class. This is a reasonable limit that, while higher than many parents would prefer, would allow the school to continue operating with a minimum of disruption to its existing program.

Furthermore, the anticipated 15 sections of students would bring enrollment in line with the 450 students we were told to expect would be attending this new facility. This is a reasonable solution that will allow East Side Middle School to expand the number of students it serves and the number of programs it can offer without excessively crowding the building. We commend the DOE for agreeing to it.

However, even with this plan in place, there remains an issue with maintaining the 15 section enrollment at East Side Middle School. Because this year's 6th grade class consisted of six sections, subsequent incoming classes of five sections each would result in a total enrollment of 16 sections for the 2012-2013 school year. While certainly not as bad as the 18 sections we would expect if this year's enrollment trend of six 6th grade sections continued, it would still be an increase over what the school can reasonably accommodate. As such, the DOE must take steps to ensure that the total enrollment of the school does not rise above the 15 sections that both the DOE and parents have agreed is feasible. The most direct solution would be for the DOE to enroll only four sections of sixth graders in either the 2011-2012 or 2012-2013 school year. A one-year dip in enrollment would balance out the one-year surge in enrollment this school year and would allow the school to continue to operate its successful model while still accommodating an increased student population in subsequent years.

The bottom line here is less about how many kids can fit into the building than about how many kids should attend school there. The teachers and administrators at East Side Middle School have created an acclaimed and successful program that should be allowed to continue to thrive. Unduly swelling enrollment beyond what the building can reasonably

accommodate would be detrimental for the school and for the students who attend. Sacrificing music, art, and science instruction in the rooms designed for them should not be an option for any school, let alone a brand new one, and should function as an alert to the DOE that more capacity is needed.

Again, we commend the DOE for your decision to limit enrollment to five sections per year and we strongly urge you to take reasonable steps to ensure that the school does not exceed a total of 15 sections across all three of its grades. Thank you very much for your attention to this matter and we will look forward to your response.