

Report on Establishing a Neighborhood School in the Lincoln Attendance Zone

City School District of New Rochelle

District-Wide Health and Safety Committee

May, 25, 2022

The District-Wide Health and Safety Committee of the City School District of New Rochelle ("the Committee"), having been duly appointed by the New Rochelle Board of Education ("the Board") is charged by the State of New York under the Rebuild Schools to Uphold Education ("RESCUE") Act (1998) with making recommendations to the Board on matters pertaining to the quality and safety of public school buildings.

The New York State Education Department (1) encourages administrators to take advantage of the opportunity to delegate as much responsibility as possible to the Committee and to reserve their time for district and educational responsibilities; (2) the Committee's duties should be as broad as possible; (3) the Committee has oversight responsibilities for facilities issues in a public school district; (4) those duties include Building Condition Surveys, Annual Visual Inspections, Construction Project Review and Approval Status, and Post-Construction Inspection.

The Committee in the City School District of New Rochelle includes the leadership of FUSE, A/S, the PTA Council, the New Rochelle Board of Education and the City Manager of New Rochelle, among others.

The Committee is not only the legally appropriate venue for preliminary consideration of a Neighborhood School in the Lincoln Attendance Zone but well-placed to do so by the nature of its Board-appointed membership with many representatives of key stakeholders.

Over the past several years there has been a growing belief among some residents, especially in the black community, that the outcome of the Lincoln Desegregation Case, both the Kaufman court decision and the subsequent decision of the New Rochelle Board of Education to tear down the school and turn the property over to the City of New Rochelle as a public park was a bad outcome as it eroded the foundations of the community around the school.

This belief manifest itself in what the Board ultimately concluded after robust discussion was a poorly planned and misguided effort in 2020 to move the alternative high school from its longtime home at St. Gabes School to the Family Life Center at Bethesda Baptist Church, across Lincoln Avenue from to what is now Lincoln Park, the former site of Lincoln Elementary School.

As part of the plan to move the alternative high school to the Family Life Center at Bethesda Baptist Church, the Board terminated its lease at St. Gabes so that when the Board voted against the Bethesda plan, the alternative high school was left homeless. The solution was to move the alternative high school into New Rochelle High School, undercutting the notion of an *alternative* high school. This issues with this move was compounded when Hurricane Ida caused massive flooding at New Rochelle High School on September 3, 2021. The entire high school was closed for two months but the lower floor near the library which housed the alternative high school, since re-

named the Huguenot Academy, was particularly hard hit and has still not re-opened once again leaving the alternative high school homeless.

The District-Wide Healthy and Safety Committee prepared a separate report on Alternative Campus Facilities Specifications released on May 5, 2021. The report was assembled over the course of the 2020-21 school year based on input from a variety of sources including Huguenot Academy Director Andrea Schwach and members of her planning committee, PTA Council members, members of the District-Wide Healthy and Safety Committee and numerous community members and stakeholders.

New Rochelle Schools Superintendent Jonathan P. Raymond announced a plan a few weeks later to move the Huguenot Academy to 140 Huguenot Street, a commercial office building which includes 16,500 square feet of space leased by Monroe College. There were various delays opening the new home. It opened in May 2022. The Huguenot Academy operates through remote-learning, out of space at the New Rochelle Public Library and the Remington Boys & Girls Club adjacent to Christopher Columbus Elementary School over the 2021-22 school year

The Family Life Center at Bethesda Baptist Church was portrayed by Superintendent Dr. Laura Feijóo and then Interim Superintendent Dr. Alex Marrero as a temporary location in anticipation of moving the alternative high school into New Rochelle City Hall in as little as two years when the City government relocated to a new development project at 44 Harrison Street.

The alternative high school, the Huguenot Academy, is a part of New Rochelle High School and not a school in its own right with a Principal. The person who runs the Huguenot Academy carries the title of Director and reports to the Principal of New Rochelle High School.

Advocates for a school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone want a stand-alone school, most likely an elementary school. Many prefer building a brand new building at the

site of the former Lincoln Elementary School, others somewhere else in the Lincoln Attendance Zone and still others at City Hall once the municipal government departs for the downtown area.

The central idea behind replacing the Lincoln Elementary School six decades after it was torn down is to activate the neighborhoods within the Lincoln Attendance Zone as part of a community revitalization centered on a public school.

Under the New York State RESCUE Law, the District-Wide Healthy and Safety Committee has oversight responsibilities for facilities issues in a public school district. The committee is often referred to as “the facilities committee”.

The RESCUE Committee held a meeting on June 2, 2021 to survey and consider the issues involved with a school within the Lincoln Attendance Zone.

The purpose of the agenda discussion item on a Neighborhood School in the Lincoln Attendance Zone was for the Committee members to learn more about why it *might* be appropriate for the Committee to gather information and public input into the question of a neighborhood school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone. The Committee was not formally tasked to work on this item by the President of the New Rochelle Board of Education and/or the Superintendent, so the discussion was not a “first step” but rather a discussion about what a “first step” might look like; not a plan or even a discussion of a plan but a discussion on whether and how to “plan a plan”.

The “ask” at the end of the discussion was whether members of the New Rochelle School Community wished to request a tasking from the President of the New Rochelle Board of Education and/or the Superintendent for the Committee to formally take up the question of a neighborhood school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone and, if so, to define the deliverables and a deadline.

A tasking might be to gather all relevant information about what would be involved in opening a neighborhood school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone, creating

input opportunities at every step of the way and delivering some form of a “discussion document” to the President of the New Rochelle Board of Education and/or the Superintendent within six months of our first meeting after receiving a formally tasking.

Minister Mark McLean, President of the NAACP New Rochelle Branch offered to make such a formal request on behalf of the NAACP New Rochelle Branch.

The only persons participating in terms of speaking and deliberating at the June 2, 2021 meeting were the members of the District-Wide Healthy and Safety Committee. Those participating on the side – from the administration or invited speakers – spoke when called upon to do so. The meeting, while public, was not a public forum. The Committee meetings have a public comment period and members of the public speak after the Committee discussion.

The June 2, 2021 discussion was supported by various documents which are included in the Appendix of this report and covered the following topics:

Enrollment Projections (Co-Chair RESCUE Committee Robert Cox)

- Western Suffolk BOCES
- Talk of the Sound Article on Declining Enrollment

Attendance Zone Maps & K-5 Enrollment (A/S President Melissa Passarelli)

- City School District of New Rochelle
- Lincoln Attendance Zone
- What is involved in redrawing maps?
- Note on History of New Rochelle School Buildings (incomplete draft)

School Assignment & Transportation (A/S President Melissa Passarelli)

- Elementary Schools designated for Lincoln Attendance Zone Students: Davis, Ward, Jefferson, Trinity
- Lincoln Students are eligible like any other student (via lottery) for Magnet School Programs at Barnard, Columbus, Webster and
- Lincoln Students are eligible for busing like another other student, based on a street-distance of more than 1.5 miles (therefore no busing to Trinity, Webster)
- How does LAZ compare to other attendance zones?

NOTE:

New Rochelle City Hall is in Ward District not Lincoln Attendance Zone

What about Barnard? Phase II Reorganization of the City of New Rochelle School District (1978 - 1983) La Ruth H. Gray (2020)

City Hall as a Municipal Building (City Manager & Co-Chair RESCUE Committee Charles B. Strome)

What is the status of City Government Move – eminent domain, new idea to build 44 Harrison on top of firehouse, best/worst-case time frame for City government to vacate City Hall?

City Hall as a School Facility (NR Facilities Director Carl Thurnau)

Building Condition Survey November 2017

Only building systems or components that have been rated as Unsatisfactory (U), Non-Functioning (NF) or Critical Failure (CF) or have a useful life of five or fewer years are listed below and include a repair or replacement cost.

- Repair/Replacement Cost of \$11,135,140 (does not include non-BCS improvements or upgrades)
- Where to put BOE staff on 2nd, 3rd floor?

NYSED Construction and Financing (NR Facilities Director Carl Thurnau)

- New York State Education Department State Aid Office
- New York State Education Department Facilities Planning - Building Aid Unit (BAU)
- Maximum Cost Allowance (MCA)
- District must own property for new construction
- 3-5 acres required for elementary school

Kaufman Decision (NAACP New Rochelle Branch Legal Redress Richard St. Paul)

- What is the Kaufman Decision?
- Why is still in force today?
- How does it impact students today (school assignment, transportation)
- What would it take to reverse the Kaufman Decision today?

Tasking Request (NAACP New Rochelle Branch President Minister Mark McLean)

- Gather all relevant information about what would be involved in opening a neighborhood school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone.
- Create input opportunities

- Draft and adopt “discussion document” to be delivered to the President of the New Rochelle Board of Education and/or the Superintendent within six months of first meeting after formal tasking.

History of Lincoln School (Co-Chair RESCUE Committee Robert Cox)

- Talk of the Sound Series on Lincoln School Desegregation [http:// 56 bit-ly.ws/dHcQ](http://56bit.ly.ws/dHcQ)
- Dr. Gail Guttman's Dissertation on Lincoln School Desegregation: Division and diversity: Community transition in postwar America, 1945-1970. New Rochelle, New York, a case study by Guttman, Gail Kaplan, Columbia University, 2001, 567 pages; 9998163
- Memorial to Lincoln Case: Design Competition, Modeled on Little Rock 9 Bronze Memorial on the grounds of the Arkansas State Capitol in Little Rock.

After a change in District leadership and meetings between the new Superintendent and Minister McLean and RESCUE Co-Chair Robert Cox, the RESCUE Committee was commissioned by New Rochelle Schools Superintendent Jonathan P. Raymond on October 20, 2021 as follows:

I am writing to ask that the District-Wide Healthy and Safety Committee produce a document that outlines the obstacles that need to be overcome on the idea for a school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone.

Please gather all relevant information about what would be involved in opening a neighborhood school, create stakeholder input opportunities, draft and adopt a “discussion document” to frame out various issues, and please de-

live the document to me and the President of the Board of Education within six months of the first meeting to undertake this task.

Likely topics to review include, but are not limited to enrollment projections, attendance zone maps, pre-k - 5 enrollments, school assignment and transportation, City Hall as a school facility, NYSED construction and financing, history of Lincoln School, and the Kaufman decision.

Thank you and the committee for reviewing this request.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Raymond

The RESCUE Committee held a series of input sessions starting in December 2021 and is now looking to deliver a document to the Superintendent and President of the Board of Education by May 2022, within six months of the first meeting to undertake this task.

Neighborhood School in the Lincoln Attendance Zone Discussion Schedule

December 15, 2021 Part I

- *Attendance Zone Maps & K-5 Enrollment*
 - *School Assignment & Transportation*
 - *Enrollment Projections*
 - *Public Input on above topics*

January 19, 2022 Part II

- *City Hall as a Municipal Building*
 - *City Hall as a School Facility*
 - *NYSED Construction and Financing*

- *Public Input on above topics*

February 16, 2022 Part III

- *Leveling Lincoln Documentary (1st half)*
 - *Kaufman Decision*
 - *Public Input on above topics*

March 23, 2022 Input/Draft Discussion

- *Discuss Preliminary Draft of Lincoln Report*
 - *Public Input on all topics*

April 27, 2022 Input/Draft Discussion/Finalize

- *Discuss / Edit Final Draft of Lincoln Report*
 - *Public Input on all topics*
 - *Adopt Final Draft of Lincoln Report (or Hold)*
 - *Transmit Final Report to Superintendent*

May 25, 2022 Adopt

- *Adopt Final Draft of Lincoln Report*
 - *Transmit Final Report to Superintendent*

A series of drafts of this report was prepared and circulated to the Committee and made available to the public.

Findings

1. The Kaufman Decision is still in effect so the federal case from 1961 would need to be addressed with the Federal Court to clear the way for a school

in what amounts to a federally-regulated school district zone within the City School District of New Rochelle. A legal opinion is needed to analyze this.

2. Building a new facility or significantly modifying an existing structure will require tens of millions of dollars. It will require acres of space and a facility to house hundreds of staff and students. Qualifying for reimbursement through the New York State Education Department will be difficult in a declining enrollment environment. Obtaining voter approval for a bond for tens of millions of dollars for a school for one district with the entire City voting on whether to fund a new school that serves a small section of the City would be a major challenge. A new facility will require a substantial parcel of land within the Lincoln Attendance Zone which may be difficult to acquire.
3. City Hall is not in the Lincoln Attendance Zone but just across North Avenue in the Ward Elementary School Districts. Setting aside the building requires tens of millions in renovations, it would require moving a part of the Ward school district into the LAZ which pulls a thread on a knit sweater (see, "What About Barnard?") and risks opening up old arguments, creating new ones and unraveling many districts.
4. City Hall as a school *near* the Lincoln Attendance Zone. Setting aside the building requires tens of millions in renovations, and there are issues with a proposed community center or school (Refugio de Esperanza), it is not a school *in* the Lincoln Attendance Zone. The City of New Rochelle has signed an agreement with Refugio de Esperanza to sell the parking area behind the Church. There is a question of whether the City had the right to sign such a deal and regardless of a decision on the use of City Hall as a

Lincoln Attendance Zone school, the District should sort out the legality of the Refugio de Esperanza parking lot deal.

5. One idea that was not on the agenda but came up through follow on discussions was combining the Lincoln Attendance Zone with an adjoining district. Another school may or may not be able to accommodate hundreds of students from the currently defined Lincoln Attendance Zone. If not it may require millions of dollars to expand a school. The most likely adjoining district is the Webster Elementary School District.
6. The District-Wide Healthy and Safety (RESCUE) Committee looks at issues from a facilities perspective only. The Committee does not get involved in issues such as curriculum, district border realignment, purchasing or leasing property, magnet-status, staffing, etc. This report is an effort to clarify the obstacles which must be overcome in order to establish (via new construction or by converting an existing structure) a school building, most likely an elementary school building, on property of sufficient acreage (4-5 acres). An appropriate next step would be to use this report as the basis for an initial framework for a larger discussion best undertaken by a community-wide committee with a much larger number of people drawn from among all appropriate stakeholders in the City School District of New Rochelle, a committee with enough members to staff multiple sub-committees to take on each issue identified by the RESCUE Committee and any other issues the Board deems relevant. Our recommendation is that that Board accept the findings in this report, discuss whether or not to explore the subject beyond the scope of the report (which we recommend), and if so then establish a "Community Stakeholder Committee for Best Address-

ing the Historical Issues with the Long Abandoned Lincoln Attendance Zone". We leave it to the board to come up with a catchier title.

The Committee would like to single out two community members who regularly attended our meetings and provided valuable community input at each meeting: Joe Andrews and Myriam Decime.

ADDENDUM:

There is additional work that should be undertaken by a stakeholder community if one is appointed:

- Obtain title search information and escrow records for City Hall Parking Area from City of New Rochelle Corporation Counsel
- Obtain written summary from Carl Thurnau, on NYSED Construction and Financing (including reimbursement eligibility)
- Evaluate the impact on Title I Funding for current Title I schools (Columbus, Trinity, Barnard, Jefferson) if students are relocated from current Title I schools to a school in the Lincoln Attendance Zone.