



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LOWELL D. KERN

Chair

Jesse R. Bodine

District Manager

September 10, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Mayor, City of New York
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York NY, 10007

Re: Outdoor Learning Initiative & Safety Issues

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) understands that COVID-19 has created enormous challenges in reopening schools safely. We also understand that reduced school capacity is necessary for social distancing requirements and that the Outdoor Learning Initiative was implemented to create additional space. However, we believe it is critical to ensure that public safety for students and staff utilizing outdoor spaces has not been fully addressed in this plan.

MCB4 urges the Mayor and the Department of Education to provide more guidance and detail on the Outdoor Learning Initiative specifically relating to public safety. We request that officials from the Mayor's office and the DOE attend our Arts, Culture, Education & Street Life (ACES) Zoom meeting on Monday, September 14, 2020 to discuss these concerns. MCB4 at its duly noticed Full Board meeting on September 2, 2020, voted, by a vote of 34 in favor, 01 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present not eligible to vote, to support the following recommendations.

Background

- Social Distancing guidelines require reduced occupancy in classrooms and communal spaces by at least two thirds at any given time.
- Schools will shift to a cohort-based schedule to reduce building occupancy.
- Outdoor spaces will be used to create additional space for learning and recreation.

Outdoor Learning Initiative

- Allows the use of outdoor spaces for activities that require even more space than normal to meet social distancing guidelines for physical education, dance, theater, chorus & band.
- Spaces to be used for outdoor classes include schoolyards, streets in front and/or adjacent to schools, and public park spaces.
- DOE is working with the Department of Parks & Recreation, Department of Transportation, Department of Sanitation, FDNY and NYPD to expedite turn around on spaces feasible for use.

Safety Issues

- Attention to safety in the plan is focused on traffic issues including the closure of streets in front of and/or adjacent to schools, the denial of spaces on major thoroughfares, opposite subway stations and on streets with bus routes.
- **The safety plan for this initiative must also address measures to prevent crime at and around spaces designated for outdoor learning.**

Many of these concerns are in line with similar concerns raised in past letters from MCB4 regarding public safety in Open Streets for Dining and the concentrated use of hotels as temporary shelters with minimal oversight or social service support from shelter providers.

In addition to security issues, MCB4 is also concerned that no financial resources have been allocated to this initiative leaving schools on their own to pay for necessities such as barricades and tents. Without funding, this plan will exacerbate already existing disparities between schools that have well funded PTAs and others that do not.

MCB4 is committed to working with your agencies to help ensure that our schools reopen safely and equitably. We look forward to discussing the issues stated here in greater detail.

Sincerely,



Lowell D. Kern
Chair
Community Board 4



Allen Oster
Co-Chair
ACES Committee



Kit Tollerson
Co-Chair
ACES Committee

cc: Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, City Council
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Helen Rosenthal, City Council
Karin Goldmark, Deputy Chancellor, School Planning & Development, NYC Department of Education
Donalda Chumney, Superintendent, District 2 Schools, NYC Department of Education
Community Education Council District 2