



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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LOWELL D. KERN
Chair

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November 27, 2020

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

Karin Goldmark,
Deputy Chancellor for School Planning and Development
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street
New York NY, 10007

Re: Need for Learning Bridges Sites in Midtown West

Dear Chancellor Carranza and Deputy Chancellor Goldmark,

At its regularly scheduled public meeting held on November 9, 2020, the Arts, Education & Street Life Committee (ACES) of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) heard a presentation from Iris Gersten, Regional Director of Students in Temporary Housing for Schools District 2. Ms. Gersten discussed the challenges that students are having on remote learning days during the COVID pandemic and recommended that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) open a Learning Bridges site in the midtown west area. The Learning Bridges program supports students with remote learning and provides parents with childcare on days when students are not scheduled to attend school in-person.¹

Currently, applications for prospective Learning Bridges sites are due on December 3, 2020, leaving very little time for community-based organizations to apply since the recent stoppage of all in-person learning at school buildings. **MCB4 requests that the DOE & DYCD extend the December 3, 2020 deadline for applying so**

¹ Due to the NYC DOE deadline of December 3rd this letter was approved by the MCB4 Executive Committee on November 23, 2020 and is subject to ratification at the board's full board meeting on Wednesday, December 2nd 2020.

that interested community-based organizations have more time to meet the urgent and recently expanded need for Learning Bridge sites.

The decision to re-close schools on November 18, 2020 has created an urgent childcare need for New York City Public School families around the city, including families living in MCB4. The closure came without substantial advanced warning, leaving families little time to plan. Supports have not been provided for essential workers, who have no place to send their school-aged children. In addition, the many students temporarily housed in shelters located in the midtown west area need access to a safe, supervised childcare location with adequate internet service and technology support to participate successfully in remote learning.

In order to mitigate this current crisis, it is imperative that DOE and the DYCD open Learning Bridges sites in midtown west to serve our city's first responders and families in need.

Background on Learning Bridges

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to meet social distancing guidelines, the DOE moved to two models of learning for the 2020-21 school year: the blended learning model that provides in-school learning 1-3 days per week, and the fully remote model that does not provide in-person classes. Nearly half of public school families citywide chose the blended learning model.

Learning Bridges is a program that was initiated by the DOE and DYCD in September 2020 to provide a free childcare option for students in grades 3K to 8, filling the void for blended learning students on days they were not scheduled to attend school in-person. Learning Bridges sites are operated by community-based organizations and provide students assistance with remote learning, access to social activities and other in-person supports.

Due to the recent closure of schools, Learning Bridges will now serve as the primary daycare program for public school families. Mayor DeBlasio stated the program would prioritize essential workers and families in shelters in his November 18, 2020 press conference. Applications from families for spots at Learning Bridge sites will be accepted on a rolling basis and the city plans to add seats based on need.

The Need in Midtown West

Currently, there are no Learning Bridges sites in the western corridor of midtown Manhattan that includes the West 30's, 40's and 50's Streets. This area is home to three public elementary schools: PS 51, PS 111 and PS 212; and one middle school: City Knoll. These schools combined serve approximately 1,400 students.

In the midtown west area, there are also five Department of Homeless Services family shelters housing approximately 900 students, 15% of whom attend schools located in MCB4. Students in temporary housing have more barriers to success with

remote learning than students based in permanent housing. These students must participate in school calls and complete academic work in small, confined rooms often shared with multiple family members, and sometimes including siblings also on remote learning calls. These students in particular deserve the access to a focused learning space, high speed internet, technology support and instructional assistance that a Learning Bridges site can provide.

Conclusion

MCB4 requests that the DOE and DYCD open Learning Bridges sites in midtown west to support families with remote learning and childcare. The Learning Bridges program is crucial for many midtown west families needing childcare, technology support, and social enrichment for their children. Interested community-based organizations should also have more time to meet the urgent and recently expanded need for Learning Bridge sites than the current December 3, 2020 deadline.

MCB4 is committed to this effort and is actively researching locations to assist in identifying possible sites that meet daycare criteria and conform to Building and Fire codes, as well as Article 47 of the Health Code and Department of Education guidelines. We look forward to following up with DOE and DYCD on this issue in the coming weeks.

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
Billy Chong, Commissioner, NYC DYCD
Andrew Miller, Director, DYCD
Marisol Rosales, Executive Superintendent for Manhattan, NYC DOE