

Teachers and students speak out against New York school closings

A WSWS reporting team
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In the last two weeks reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed students and teachers who attended demonstrations against school closings at several New York City schools and at hearings by various community boards and the city Department of Education's Panel on Educational Policy (PEP).

At a meeting of the PEP, we spoke to Kim, an English teacher at one of the John Jay high schools in Brooklyn:

"I am here because they are trying to phase out two of our middle schools and are trying to set up this Millennium 2 school inside our building. We are being told that we will receive extra funding, but we doubt they will follow through on any of their promises. They never do.

"Even if they come through with the extra money, the amount they are promising won't even come close to the amount needed to repair our school. The school is a complete mess. I don't understand why they just can't spend more money to fix existing schools instead of phasing out public schools and replacing them with charter schools. The entire policy is irrational.

"The Millennium 2 people claim that they want to share space for the benefit of all, but it's obvious that they just want us out of the way. There is no guarantee that any of this will benefit our kids. These people are coming in from outside the education field, how can they possibly evaluate what policies are working and which ones aren't? Only educators, parents, and students should handle the policy-making.

"Our union will not fight for us nearly as hard as we would like them to."

Kwaesi, a junior at John Jay campus, said, "I also feel that teachers, parents, and students should be the ones making important decisions when it comes to education.

"I'm tired of having to go through scanners all the time. And now they just started using armed security guards at my school."

We asked Kwaesi what large social issues he saw behind the conditions in New York City schools.

"The current economic system just isn't working," he said. "I do see a class system in education and society. It feels like they don't want us to get a decent education so that we're forced to do all their dirty work. I think we need an entirely new system. Socialism is okay in my book. I think socialism fits in with my personal beliefs."

Ja-Quan Greene has worked with students from the three John Jay campus schools for a year and a half in the Sports and Arts in School Foundation program. He told the WSWS, "If Millennium gets in, then the after-school programs may be out. Already the different programs for each of the three schools are forced to compete for space. Millennium would get \$8 million funding right away, but we have not had a funding increase in years.

"The working class has not fully realized that the inequality gap between the upper and lower classes is growing and they will continue to be subject to the cuts like this right in their community. I wish students would do what we see overseas, because they take a stronger stance than in America."

Jordan, a freshman in the John Jay Secondary School for Research, said, "They are taking money from our school to help other schools, but this building is old and needs renovation. The heating system is messed up, paint is peeling from the ceilings, and padding is peeling from the gym walls. Some classes have few choices of books. Class sizes are humongous, 32 to a classroom. There is only one language course, Spanish.

"They will give \$3 million to Millennium, but we

only get more money if Millennium gets in here. The DOE is being racist to this school. Saying we are criminals, needing police surveillance and metal detectors, while selective schools like Brooklyn Tech, Morrow, and LaGuardia do not. Millennium school will come and not have them.”

At a demonstration of teachers and students at Paul Robeson High School in Brooklyn, Stefanie Siegel, an English teacher, told the WSWS: “Bloomberg’s daughter [Emma] has a charter school in a brand new school building on Atlantic and Kingston nearby, built with public school money for two charter junior high schools. The thinking is that these charter junior high schools will feed right into the IBM company school. This is why they want to phase Paul Robeson out.”

Nigel Hill, a senior at Paul Robeson, echoed the complaint heard in many closing schools. “A lot of people in the community support our position and have attended our events. I think Bloomberg is trying to close this school because it doesn’t fit in with his plan. If, as they say, this has been a failing school for 10 years, then they should have helped it.

“We had students from other countries come to Robeson after they closed down Prospect High and Erasmus. It takes longer to graduate if you have to learn another language to do that. But the five-year graduation rate is 80 percent. All the results that compare public to charter education show there is little difference in outcome, and the charter schools do not take all students. Students are also being cheated because if there is someone involved who is running education for profits, the money they make is taken away from the students when, in the end, I believe education has to be all about the students.”



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