

New York City targets 19 more schools for closing

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A new list of 19 “low-performing” schools in New York City has been scheduled for closing over the next several years. Another six schools will have their middle school grades eliminated. The schools targeted include two major high schools, Washington Irving in Manhattan and Grace Dodge Career and Technical Education High School in the Bronx. Also on the list are 12 elementary and middle schools and several other high schools.

Washington Irving and Grace Dodge had each been scheduled to receive more than \$2 million in federal stimulus money over three years, geared toward extending class time and improving curriculums. The money will now go to the schools that replace those that are being closed.

The proposed closings must be approved by the Panel for Educational Policy. Since eight of its 13 members are appointed by the mayor under the system of mayoral control of the school system that began ten years ago, the body is expected to rubber stamp the proposals, which must also be approved by the state.

Parents and students expressed disappointment and anger over the announced closings. Students don’t know whether to stay at their present schools or try to find new ones. Under complex school application procedures, many students are unable to attend schools of their choice or schools that are in their neighborhoods.

One news report quoted a teacher at the Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing Arts in Manhattan. The school has lost a math coach and guidance counselor in the last year, and its students no longer have gym class. “We haven’t seen any help from the D.O.E. (Department of Education),” said this teacher. Yet this same school is now slated to lose its middle school grades because only 16 percent of the

students scored proficient on the state’s English exam.

The latest closings are only the most recent in a long list of attacks, amid much-hyped but fraudulent claims that mayoral control of the schools, or the introduction of charters into the existing system and existing school buildings, or the establishment of many smaller schools to replace existing larger ones, would, in some fashion or another lead to dramatic improvements.

In fact, ten of the 25 schools on the current list for closing or truncating were themselves opened in recent years to replace schools that were in turn closed because of “low performance.”

The fundamental problem remains what it has been for decades, with no significant improvement in education offered to the majority of working class youth. Poverty and all of the social ills associated with it are compounded by aging school buildings, the elimination of programs like art and music, and overcrowded classrooms.

Of course, the political establishment, in New York, faithfully representing the corporate and financial elite—in New York City these elements are combined in the same individual, billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg—has no intention of doing anything about poverty and inequality. Hence its efforts to divert attention from the obvious source of the crisis by demonizing teachers and promoting charter schools. The misnamed “school reform” movement with which Bloomberg has closely associated himself is out to dismantle public education entirely.

The mayor, now midway through his third term in office, has of late been unable to hide his growing anger and nervousness in the face of the Occupy Wall Street movement and other signs of the pent-up anger in the working class. Bloomberg is also rattled because the nature of his policies have become increasingly

clear to students, parents and teachers throughout the city. A few years ago, the higher test scores that had been touted by Bloomberg and his schools Chancellor Joel Klein were exposed as phony. Then his nominee to succeed Klein, Upper East Side socialite Cathie Black, lasted barely three months on the job.

Bloomberg's venom was on display only a few weeks ago when he spoke at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"Education is very much, I've always thought, just like the real estate business. Real estate business, there are three things that matter: location, location location is the old joke," said the mayor. "Well in education, it is: quality of teacher, quality of teacher, quality of teacher. And I would, if I had the ability – which nobody does really.... cut the number of teachers in half, but you would double the compensation of them and you would weed out all of the bad ones and just have good teachers. And double the class size with a better teacher is a good deal for the students."

Bloomberg's "modest proposal" for the city's schools provoked widespread anger. His own daughters went to Spence, the exclusive private school, where classes range from 10 to 15 students and tuition is at least \$35,000 a year. But the mayor arrogantly prescribes classes of 70 students with "good" teachers for the working class, while tens of thousands of hardworking teachers who don't meet his standards, based on standardized testing and other discredited nostrums, would be thrown onto the unemployment lines. Teachers who were asked about this idea made plain that, doubled salary or not, they would be unable to prepare the lessons, grade the papers and write the college recommendations for those numbers of students.



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