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Testimony of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President Regarding the Proposed Re-siting of Beacon High School (03M479) to New Building M912 November 17, 2014 Department of Education – Panel for Educational Policy

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

Serving more than 1,200 students, Beacon High School is one of the best public high schools in New York City. Its comprehensive and creative academic programming has yielded exceptionally high rates of graduation, college readiness, and college attendance. The four-year graduation rate for Beacon is 98.5%; within six years, nearly every student graduates (99.3%). This is a terrific accomplishment for a school that serves more than 200 students with special needs.

Well ahead of the current STEAM trend, Beacon worked to integrate the arts and technology into its curriculum since its founding in 1993. Principal Ruth Lacey was an elementary school art teacher before becoming one of Beacon's founding teachers. She sought to establish the same nurturing atmosphere found in elementary schools within this unique high school.

The plans for moving Beacon from its current home at 227-243 W. 61st Street to 521 W. 43rd Street must not disrupt the high-level functioning of this successful school. The proposal would move Beacon from its current horizontal three-level environment to a seven-story vertical environment. If Principal Lacey and the faculty are not able to move into the school in adequate time to establish themselves and provide orientation for all current and incoming students, then this move must be postponed.

It makes no sense to undertake a massive, \$45 million construction project at Beacon's current location when it is not yet clear that Beacon will be able to move out in time. A September 1 move is far too disruptive and would not give Beacon enough time to conduct orientation with its special needs students. It could take weeks for Beacon students to be able to focus on learning—which is unfair to both the students and the school. And moving this large school into a temporary space is not a solution, as two moves in a short amount of time would be equally disruptive.

A midsummer move would require much work and adjustment, but it could work.

It is not clear to me why the construction of the new facility is taking so long. My concerns about the proposal are:

- The construction of interior staircases
- The installation of windows
- The installation of the heat, needed in the building just to complete the rest of the work

I request that the School Construction Authority and the Department of Education provide regular status updates to Beacon's principal and parents, to the CEC 3 representative, and to local elected officials. I also request that the SCA conduct a tour for relevant parties so that we can see firsthand progress on the work there.

When a New York City public school is as successful as Beacon, the SCA and DOE must do all they can to help maintain that success. They certainly should not play a role in the school's demise. I encourage the SCA and DOE to be transparent in their current renovation work. If they cannot guarantee a midsummer move, then they must keep Beacon in its current location until the new space is ready.

Finally, I want to thank the DOE for its assurance that Beacon will, despite its pending new location, remain a District 3 school. Beacon has been supported by District 3 parents and leadership and has provided one of very few premiere high schools here. I appreciate the DOE's willingness to accommodate this history and these strong community ties.