

Jeremy Laufer
District Manager
Community Board 7/Brooklyn
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Council, members of the public and colleagues, good afternoon, my name is Jeremy Laufer and for the past six years I have been the District Manager of Community Board 7 in Brooklyn, serving Sunset Park & Windsor Terrace, a district without a public high school. Prior to that I worked for the City Council for six years. I am a product of NYC schools: PS.206, W. Arthur Cunningham JHS and Edward R. Murrow High School and I am here to speak today about the greatest need of our community, the construction of a high school for the students of our community.

Sunset Park High School has been a dream and a necessity in our community since before I was born. It has been viewed as a necessity by the City as well, as evidenced by the 1969 budget I keep behind my desk at work, which shows \$14.7 million for what was then called North Kings High School. That money was removed from the budget in the mid-70s due to the City's fiscal crisis. By contrast, the high school I attended, Murrow, which was then called North Central High School, is in the same plan, without any money allocated. Somehow, that school was built in the mid-70s.

In 2000, money was again placed in the capital budget for a Sunset Park High School. A site on 37th Street was chosen and the community was very excited. However, that money was removed from the budget in 2003 due to more than \$2 Billion in SCA cost overruns at projects all across the City.

In 2004, money again was placed in the budget for a Sunset Park High School. A site was chosen and purchased, environmental studies were completed, and the school was designed. We expected construction to begin this spring with a 1,650 seat school to open in September 2008.

In December we learned, through the media, that this school may once again be in jeopardy, thanks to the intransigence on the State's part in funding the mandate stemming from the court decision on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit.

Members of the Council, on behalf of more than 120,000 residents of Community District # 7, we implore you to do everything in your power to ensure this school is fully funded and built on time.

Since our Community District's borders changed between 1970 and 1980, a fair assessment of our community's population growth must use 1980 as a baseline. The 1980 Census shows our district with a population of almost 99,000. In 1990, the population was almost 103,000, a 4% increase at a time when the City's population decreased. By 2000, the population had grown to more than 120,000, more than a 20% increase from 1980.

By contrast, the proposed school in 1969 was proposed for 4,000 students, whereas today's high school plan calls for 1,650 seats, a decrease of almost 60% of the seats. The \$14.7 budget in 1969 ballooned to more than \$90 million, an increase of more than 600%. So over a time when our population increased 20%, our proposed high schools decreased by 60%, and at six times the cost.

Who are the students who would benefit from Sunset Park High School? Almost 26% of our population is 18 year of age or younger, more than 31,000 people. According to the 2000 Census, almost 53% of our population is of Hispanic origin and more than 17% is Asian. These populations have fueled our population growth with immigrants from China, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and many other parts of the world. Ac-

According to City Planning in 2004 almost 41% of our population received some form of public support. So we are largely a poor, minority community.

But the benefits of building Sunset Park High School will extend beyond our borders. Each day our children have to travel to other communities to get their education. Many of the closest schools to our community are severely overcrowded. Ft. Hamilton HS is at 160% capacity. Franklin Roosevelt HS is at 134% capacity. John Dewey HS is at 130%. A high school for our community will reduce the burden at these other schools.

Almost two weeks ago, our Community Board held a Town Hall Meeting in conjunction with the Sunset Park High School Task Force. I witnessed something I have never witnessed in my eight years working in this community, a packed house, enthusiastic and ready to fight for the school. Almost 500 people attended, about half of whom are high school age. I had believed that our population had become cynical because, while we only have promises instead of a high school, we do have four power plants, a Federal Prison, two electrical substations, a municipal asphalt facility, numerous petroleum storage facilities, a huge Marine Transfer Station, a 1,000 ton per day private sanitation facility and the blight known as the Gowanus Expressway. I was wrong. Our people are not cynical, they are eager for Sunset Park High School.

I've brought with me today a board from our Town Hall Meeting. Each piece of paper attached to the Board represents an idea for our school or a plea. In addition, I have brought more than 500 letters from parents and students in our community making the case for our school. Many of these letters are very personal and discuss the difficulty of traveling, making and maintaining friendships, stress, parental participation in school activities and initiatives, difficult in getting to after-school jobs or programs or family responsibilities, such as picking up younger siblings in other neighborhoods.

The lack of a public high school is an unfair burden placed upon the parents and young people of our poor and minority community. We at Community Board 7 recognize that our Mayor and our City Council have done their part, but we need you to also fight for the funds from the State. The statistics I cited earlier regarding population and cost will only continue to grow and burden our communities and our neighbors. Do not let cynicism win out over hope. Do not let budgetary expediency condemn another generation to the burdens of their parents and grandparents. Let us not be, as Benjamin Franklin once said, "pennywise but pound foolish".