



September 2, 2015

MaryEllen Elia  
Commissioner  
New York State Education Department  
89 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12234

Carmen Fariña  
Chancellor  
New York City Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Elia and Chancellor Fariña:

We write as elected officials representing the families of P.S./M.S. 191 (PS 191) students to express serious concerns regarding the school's designation as a "Persistently Dangerous School" and the manner in which the designation was communicated to local stakeholders mere weeks before the start of the 2015-2016 school year.

We were surprised to learn that PS 191 was designated "persistently dangerous," given that the school community has not perceived an increase in dangerous behavior and has consistently expressed confidence in it. While we understand the designation is based on self-reported data, several sources have indicated that problems with data collection and reporting mechanisms may have contributed to the designation. For example, New York State's Violent and Disruptive Incident Reporting (VADIR) index classifies non-weapons such as pencils as weapons, indicating that the persistently dangerous designation does not show the full picture of school safety. Moreover, we were disturbed by reports that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) advised PS 191's leadership not to appeal the designation even after the potential data errors were made known.

Additionally, we understand that the New York State Education Department (SED) notified the DOE of the designation several months before the DOE shared this information with the school community and local elected officials. We request that (i) SED and DOE explain the reasons for not notifying these interested parties and stakeholders in a timely manner, (ii) SED and DOE explain how they plan to avoid such delayed notification in the future, and (iii) DOE please supply us with a list of each alternate school placement for both PS 191 zoned families and PS 199 waitlist families.

We wish to express our firm support for PS 191. The school, which is under the new leadership of Principal Lauren Keville, has ushered in a strong and reinvigorated school

culture with a renewed emphasis on academic rigor. Close collaboration is underway between PS 191 and community leaders, elected officials, and local civic and cultural institutions. There is also a newly active parent body, which includes a parent on the District 3 Community Education Council.

Beginning in 2014, PS 191 has enhanced and grown its collaboration with Lincoln Center Education and Kids Creative, and has added a partnership with the Westside YMCA. The school also has a full time guidance counselor, new reading programs, a gardening curriculum, STEM programming through its new Media Center, and many new arts enrichment programs.

Given these promising developments, it is extremely unfortunate that the efforts of the PS 191 community might be undermined by this untimely and possibly inaccurate designation. We ask that SED and DOE address the aforementioned concerns and work with our offices, school leadership, and PS 191 families to ensure this school has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer  
New York City Comptroller



Jerrold L. Nadler  
Member of Congress



Gale Brewer  
Manhattan Borough President



Brad Hoylman  
New York State Senator



Linda B. Rosenthal  
New York State Assembly Member



Helen Rosenthal  
New York City Council Member

cc: Renee Rider, Assistant Commissioner, NY State Education Department  
Elizabeth Rose, Deputy Chancellor, Division of Operations, NYC Department of Education  
Ilene Altschul, School District 3 Community Superintendent, NYC Department of Education