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TO: Helaine Doran, Campaign for Fiscal Equity  
New York, New York

FROM: Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund

RE: Utilization of PS 15

Date: April 13, 2010

In response to your request to review the utilization of PS15 as it related to the expansion of the public charter school co-located within the PS 15 building, I am providing you some observations from our visit to the school last week and my review of various school district documents that you were able to provide me. In order to try to understand the space adjacencies and relative sizes, I also got some help from a project management firm here in the DC area to recreate the floor plan, as I did not have one. I have also included an excel spreadsheet of the measurements on the 2009-2010 turnaround survey and some charts that helped me better understand how space is distributed in the school. Hopefully these may be of help to others as well.

I hope our experience with school planning as it relates to co-location of schools, including of traditional with public charter schools here in Washington, DC, as well as our experience nationally with other BEST partners who are involved with joint development and joint use issues through research, policy analysis and with individual projects, will provide some help in finding solutions for the issues in contention at PS15.

From my review of documents and a visit to PS15, the school seems a poster child for a school that is effectively applying what is known about what works when educating children, particularly for schools with a large population of children from low income families:

- Manageable overall school enrollment size
- Small class sizes
- Parental involvement
- Special education inclusion and welcoming of special education students
- Wrap around services—including health, after-care, parent support
- Strong student and academic support services for both special education and regular ed students
- Active teaching and learning—indoors and outdoors—with content rich environment

PS 15 was built in the 1960s and is 80,000 gross square feet. It shares its building with community based organizations and supports school based delivery of social services, and includes a public charter school co-located within the school. These types and the extent of co-location and shared use at PS15 put it on the forefront of new practice in public education as it relates to public building use policy. The question posed to me was: “What do you see when looking at the space and programs at PS15? Is there still excess space that is under utilized at PS 15 that can be disposed of without compromising the quality of the learning experience for students at PS 15?”

First, I will describe my perspective as it relates to the expansion of public charter schools. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, while primarily focused on the quality of public school facilities in urban districts in the traditional public schools, has also been involved in the development of public charter school facilities and in particular, a development in Washington, DC that included a traditional elementary school, a public charter high school and the city Department of Recreation. It is our position that ALL children should be in high quality facilities—those from traditional public schools and those at public charter schools. We will be presenting a seminar on public charter school facility planning at the National Charter Alliance Conference in July, in Chicago, supported by the U.S. Department of Education.

With this background, I offer my observations:

1. The basic classroom and cluster room sizes are on the small size, typical of 1960's schools. Classrooms are crowded and consequently some overflow spaces are needed so that the level of manipulatives, materials and instructional centers can be supported.
  - a. Using the DOE footprint guide, the range of space recommended for basic capacity classrooms (using 500 SF for 12:1:1 classrooms from D75) is a low of 14,550 Net Square Feet (NSF) and a high of 17,750 NSF. PS15 is using 15,835 NSF per the 2009-2010 Annual Facilities Survey.
  - b. Using DOE footprint guide, PS15 is permitted 3 cluster classrooms, the range of space recommended for these three rooms is between 3,000 and 3,900 NSF. PS15, while using 4 rooms, has only 2,800 NSF in cluster classrooms.
2. Special education classrooms for 12:1:1 are appropriately sized.
  - a. D75 identifies 500 NSF as the size for classrooms, which may be appropriate if the space is newly designed for this purpose, but since most classrooms at PS15 tend to be from 600-700 NSF, using a half size of the small classroom would create a substandard special education learning environment.
3. There are not well established industry design standards for special education support services for speech, OT or PT.
  - a. The use of approximately 2,800 NSF of space for special education support seems appropriate since there are approximately 136 students at PS15 who are designated as needing services.
  - b. The public charter school, based on informal conversation during my site visit, also has approximately 25 students designated as special education. It may make sense for the charter school to contract with PS15 for individual special ed

support services, rather than trying to duplicate all supports and spaces within one building.

4. The school level academic and student supports for regular students may be a little on the high side, but again, there are not standards.
  - a. The school has approximately 1,300 NSF of space in use for academic support for all the students. This seems a modest amount given the size of support staff and the services that the classrooms are receiving from academic support.
  - b. The student support space, approximately 2,100 NSF of space—for guidance, records, and a Public Health nurse may be a little on the high side. Included in this space total is room 117, a full sized room used by PS 15 for the health nurse, workshops for parents, a dance class and other activities not easily accommodated in the very crowded classrooms which could be evaluated for whether its utilization is optimized.
5. While the shared spaces of cafeteria, gym, auditorium and outdoor areas may be supporting a two school use in the current year with mostly minor issues, these spaces will not hold up under student population growth without custodial, maintenance, repair, and likely some schedule and space modifications.
6. The under development of the school library, which I know is in planning, seems a loss to the entire school community, and should be brought on line, with a vision for its operation and use that includes both PS 15 and the charter school, as well as the community.

While I did not have much time to speak with the public charter school and arrived unannounced, the Dean of Students was gracious enough to walk me through their areas. These observations are limited, but may be useful.

1. The classroom spaces were some of the larger rooms and seemed adequate for the grades and class sizes.
2. The office areas that were without windows or ventilation did not seem healthy or as if they should be habited on a regular basis.

There are three elements critical to any successful shared use—collaborative process, comprehensive educational facility planning and space design modifications to support shared use. It seems that improvements are needed in all three areas. It is also true that even with the best of process and planning, space is a constraint that is only increased at great expense and with sufficient time.

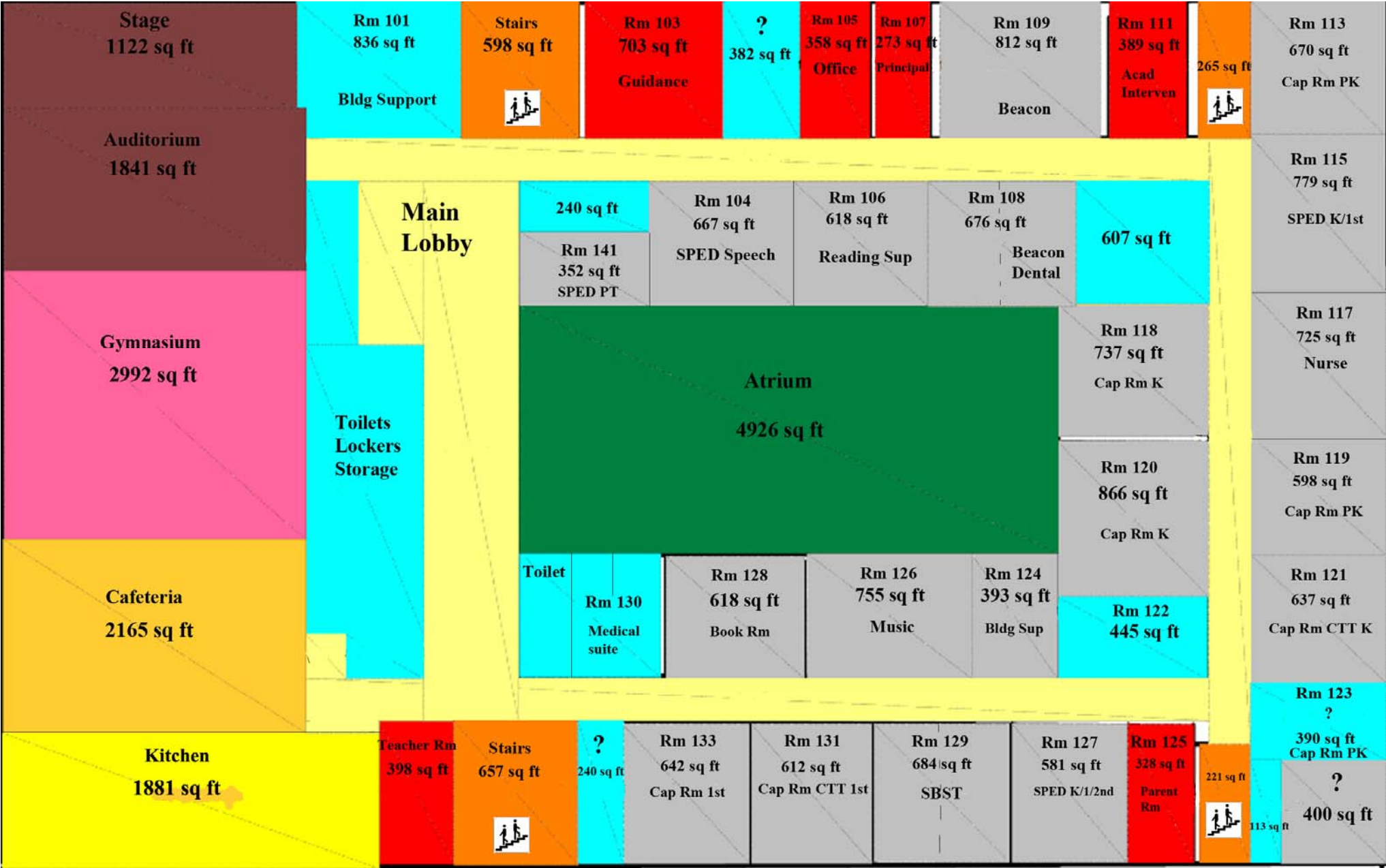
My overall impression is that even following the most optimal collaborative planning process and support from DOE, that it will not be possible for PS 15 to support the continued expansion of PAVE per the DOE proposal. I think it may be possible to free up space equivalent to 1 classroom and one half classroom without having a negative effect on PS 15. However, since these spaces are on the first floor and currently used by PS 15 and their community partners, even this requires some space reorganization, relocation, and design modification of existing spaces to limit the negative impact of losing these additional spaces. The DOE needs to provide PS15 with a architectural space planner to work with the PS15 school and community, including PAVE, to develop educational specifications related to their program and the community based programs and services—including after-school.

- DOE needs to set aside a budget for space and furniture modifications—including relocation services within the school so that rooms can be more efficiently utilized without hurting the programs and services.
- DOE needs to provide ventilation into the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor charter offices if they are to be routinely occupied.
- DOE needs to cap the enrollment of PAVE at 2 classes per grade up to 3rd at PS15 and help them find a location to place its upper grades (some 4th and succeeding grades) until PAVE has a permanent location, or work with PS15 to feed PAVE students into PS15 at the upper grades until class size at PS15 is fully enrolled.
- DOE needs to help PS 15 and PAVE to explore shared use of special ed student support services.
- DOE needs to help PS 15 get library fully online for the next school year.

PS 15 Redhook

April 14, 2010

First Floor



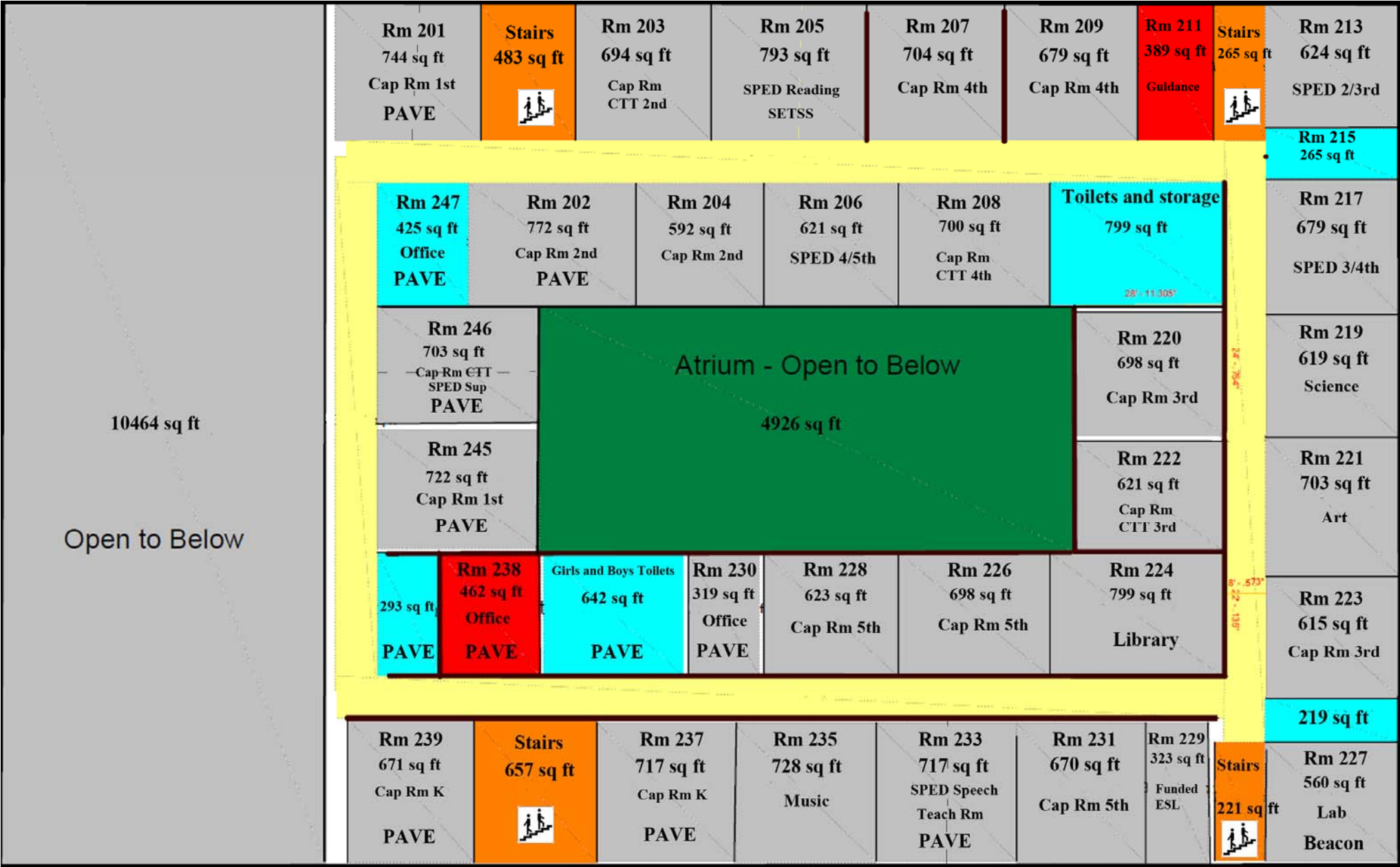
Prepared by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund ([www.21csf.org](http://www.21csf.org)) to be used as a planning tool.

Room sizes are estimates based on 2009-2010 building survey and exterior building dimensions, however drawing is to scale.

PS 15 Redhook

April 14, 2010

Second Floor



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