

STOP DESTRUCTION OF THE JULIA RICHMAN EDUCATION COMPLEX!

The Julia Richman Education Complex is in grave danger. The Department of Education and higher ed. administrators have formulated plans to relocate the beautiful constellation of schools housed there so that Hunter College can take over the building. This misconceived plan fails to recognize our Complex for what it is: a highly effective and nationally recognized educational model. These misguided planners have the notion that schools, students, parents and staff can be uprooted, moved like widgets and still continue to operate with success.

We the parents of the Julia Richman Education Complex will not permit our schools to be displaced.

We will not go quietly. Our position has nothing to do with sentimentality. We have tried to build an identity and a sense of security here for our children as well as a professional community for our staff. As all close observers know, a school is never just a physical structure, there's a culture to every educational setting. JREC's rich culture for learning, carefully nurtured in its current space, cannot easily be re-created at another site. Only the uninformed could claim that one school home is as acceptable as another. This Complex and the educational institutions within it cannot be casually reconstructed elsewhere. We urge that the schools remain wholly intact at this specific location, and we respectfully request your understanding and support. It is an uninformed position that says one home is as acceptable as another.

Some years ago, with the greatest concerted effort, we replaced an abysmally failing high school with six effective small schools. By 1990, Julia Richman High School was identified by the Board of Education as having the worst statistics of student achievement in Manhattan and was an eyesore and blight on the neighborhood in which it was located. At that time, the 19th Police Precinct referred to this crime-infested large high school as "Julia Rikers," a violent educational setting marred by graffiti, smashed windows, and destroyed bathrooms. Accordingly, metal detectors were installed and metal cages were used to separate students who were disciplinary problems. Only thirty-seven percent of its enrollees graduated.

Currently, more than ninety percent of our students graduate and go on to college. According to Tom Vander Ark, Executive Director of Education for the Gates Foundation, the Complex *"is the best example in the United States of a multiplex of a group of very effective schools that share a common facility. There's not a better example in the United States. And it's a group of schools that are showing really outstanding results."*

Teachers, parents, and administrators participated in the redesign and renovation to ensure that the building functioned effectively for everyone and that each school had exclusive use of its designated space. Storage areas, bathrooms, and specialized rooms that serve the particular needs of each school (i.e., dark room, nursery, and green house) were designed and constructed. What has been created is a valuable, successful, and irreplaceable environment in a quality building that modern construction practices – however well-intentioned – cannot replicate.

The JREC building serves not the city's white elite but a diverse population of young people from all backgrounds, that consists primarily of low-income, high risk students of color. The Ella Baker Elementary School draws the children of local hospital workers and Hunter College staff, who prefer this setting to their neighborhood schools. JREC has become their community. And the community has become an extension of JREC. We are located near supporting institutions that are critical to the education and development of students in this building. Make no mistake about it: blood, sweat, and tears were invested in the rooms and corridors of the Julia Richman Education Complex. For twelve years, parents, students and teachers from six autonomous schools have worked together to reclaim, redesign, and ultimately to thrive in a unique facility that has reversed its decade-long fate as a high school that was flagrantly a failure.

A constant flow of visitors from all over the United States and abroad comes to JREC to explore how an old, big-city school building can be effectively changed into a safe space for academic excellent. The visitors talk with our faculty, administrators, and kids and routinely are astounded to see what can be done with students in a highly cultivated educational setting. For them, JREC serves as a bright and shining blueprint and a symbol of educational possibility. Many return two and sometimes three times with their school board members and superintendents to study our philosophies and procedures and to understand fully the values that we embrace. Educators from modern "state of the art" buildings marvel at how well JREC is served by an 83-year old structure and say, "We'd swap our new facilities for what you have here anytime."

To hear that all of our hard work and collaboration are at risk not only shocks us, to say the least, but causes us to wonder how the city's school system can be so bold as to boast that it "puts children first." How can the Department of Education consider uprooting an exemplary educational complex, one of the true gems of the system, which has received nation-wide recognition and won numerous awards? How can any educational institution, in this case, Hunter College, be so unethical as to covet a space that others have created? How would Hunter College administrators feel about the sudden seizure, without consultation, of its elementary and secondary lab schools? Are the needs of our student population less important?

As concerned JREC parents and advocates for our children, we ask you to use the weight of your position to stop this outrageous and unjust act.

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Please return signed petitions to 317 East 67th Street at the JREC Security Desk