

March 22, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

Attached is a letter from 135 families in the Jersey City Public Schools PS 16 zone who strongly oppose JCPS' plan to move CASPER and STARS to Danforth for three- and four-year-olds. Families signed by household and represent far more than 135 individual parents and caregivers.

On Friday, March 18, JCPS shared its plan with us—for the first time—after parents had finished gathering signatures. As a result, some details of the plan are unaddressed in the letter.

Despite this, our core message remains: moving CASPER and STARS to Danforth is a mistake.

Sincerely,
Concerned prekindergarten families of PS 16

From: Concerned prekindergarten families of PS 16

Date: Tuesday March 22, 2022

To: Gerald Lyons, President, Jersey City Board of Education (JCBOE)
Natalia Ioffe, Vice President (Non-Instruction), JCBOE
Gina Verdibello, Vice President (Instruction), JCBOE
Alexander Hamilton, Board Trustee, JCBOE
Lorenzo Richardson, Board Trustee, JCBOE
Paula Jones-Watson, Board Trustee, JCBOE
Younass Mohamed Barkouch, Board Trustee, JCBOE
Lekendrick Shaw, Board Trustee, JCBOE
Noemi Velazquez, Board Trustee, JCBOE
Dr. Norma Fernandez, Interim Superintendent, Jersey City Public Schools (JCPS)
Regina Robinson, Business Administrator, JCPS
Dr. Ruth Cummings-Hypolite, Director, Early Childhood Department, JCPS
Dr. Joseph Galano, Director, Division B, JCPS
Valerie Morris, Supervisor, STARS and CASPER Program, JCPS
Michelle West, Principal, Danforth Avenue Early Childhood Center, JCPS
Terry Watkins-Williams, Principal, PS 16 Cornelia Bradford School, JCPS
Asael Salgado, Assistant Principal, PS 16 Cornelia Bradford School, JCPS

Dear Jersey City education leaders,

We write to express our strong opposition to moving the CASPER after-school program for prekindergarten children from the PS 16 Annex to the Danforth Avenue Early Childhood Center. The Jersey City Public Schools (JCPS) moving CASPER to Danforth would cause a significant adverse effects for three- and four-year-old children, as well as their families. JCPS should reverse course and not proceed with the move of CASPER to Danforth.

The negative impacts of moving CASPER from the PS 16 Annex to Danforth are significant:

1. **Young children would have to spend an additional 15 to 35 minutes in an unhealthy, diesel bus.** That children currently travel from Danforth to the PS 16 Annex midday after school and not in the evening after CASPER is of significant value. We know from our current experience with the morning commute that the trip to-and-from Danforth is much longer during rush hour (30 to 50 minutes) than midday (15 minutes). Federal and health authorities recognize traveling in a diesel-emitting school bus is a risk to children. The trip also has little social or educational value. While we recognize that some bussing is necessary, JCPS should share parents' goal to reduce bussing time as much as possible.
2. **Parents would go from a flexible pick-up time to waiting for the bus.** The buses will frequently be late due to the unpredictability of evening rush hour traffic. Parents could wait an extra twenty or thirty minutes without warning, often with their other children. We will lose time and predictability. That parents can currently pick up children anytime before 6:00 recognizes the juggling act that is raising a three- or four-year-old. Parents

who work, pick up children at other locations, and have other caregiving responsibilities benefit tremendously from the flexibility of pick-up time at the Annex.

- 3. The walk from PS 16 to Danforth is two hours and thirty minutes round trip.** On the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail the trip is at best fifty minutes. Many families in Downtown Jersey City do not own a car. Early pick-up from CASPER would be impossible for many families if JCPS moves it to Danforth. Due to its central location, the Annex is within a short walking distance of most of the zone. Walkability is particularly important for three- and four-year-old children who cannot easily walk long distances.

Due to the benefits outlined above, a significant majority of parents would prefer CASPER to remain at the PS 16 Annex. However, some parents with older children who attended CASPER at PS 3 shared that it has more age-appropriate facilities and space for co-curricular activities than the Annex. However, PS 3 is a far walk for most parents, which would be a major impediment for some families. In response to a required survey, 81% of signatories said they would prefer CASPER to remain at the Annex, 15% said they would be happy with either the Annex or PS 3, and 4% preferred only PS 3. This letter takes no position on if Annex or PS 3 is a better location. We share the above statistics for informational purposes.

We also note that the proposed move of STARS morning care from the main PS 16 building to Danforth would be very harmful to the small number of families who use the program. JCPS staff have said the district would provide no transportation to Danforth for STARS, according to parents. The expectation that parents drop their children off at Danforth is completely unreasonable. The district should maintain the current model of STARS at PS 16 and teachers helping students onto the bus to Danforth.

Finally, prekindergarten parents in the PS 16 zone are unrepresented. The surprise decision to move CASPER and STARS is an example of the dangers of non-representation. We know of no effort by JCPS to consult prekindergarten parents on the planned move. The Concerned Parents Association (CPA) for the PS 16 Cornelia Bradford School unexpectedly cut ties with prekindergarten parents this fall. Parents have the impression that the CPA sees prekindergarten children as a burden. The association seems eager to push our children out of zone facilities. Yet, the barriers are high to Danforth parents organizing formally. Two years is too brief a time in the lives of hundreds of busy parents to build a long-lasting group.

The 135 undersigned households are parents and caregivers of prekindergarten children currently enrolled in Danforth and some parents who plan to enroll their children during the upcoming academic year. You will find short testimonials from some parents after the signature page.

We eagerly look forward to your response. You may send your reply to Alex Merchant (alexander.d.merchant@gmail.com) and Silvia Meyer (silvialucie11@gmail.com). Alex and Silvia are the corresponding parents on behalf of the signatories.

Sincerely,
Concerned prekindergarten families of PS 16

CC: Cary Booker, Assistant Commissioner, Early Childhood Education, NJ DOE
Steven Fulop, Mayor, City of Jersey City
Thomas A. DeGise, Executive, Hudson County
Sandra B. Cunningham, Senator, District 31
Angela V. McKnight, Assemblywoman, District 31
William B. Sampson IV, Assemblyman, District 31
James Solomon, Ward E Councilmember, City of Jersey City
Frank Gilmore, Ward F Councilmember, City of Jersey City
Anthony L. Romano, Board of Chosen Commissioners, District 2, Hudson County
Jerry Walker, Board of Chosen Commissioners, District 3, Hudson County
Yraida Aponte Lipski, Board of Chosen Commissioners, District 4, Hudson County
William O'Dea, Board of Chosen Commissioners, District 5, Hudson County
Stacey Flanagan, Director, Dept. of Health and Human Services, City of Jersey City
Leanne Kerr, President, Concerned Parents Association of PS16
Shweta Bhatia, 1st Vice President, Concerned Parents Association of PS16
Jackie Cox, 2nd Vice President, Concerned Parents Association of PS16
Angela Park, Secretary, Concerned Parents Association of PS16
Maeghan Robertson, Recording Secretary, Concerned Parents Association of PS16
Priya Rasquinha, Treasurer, Concerned Parents Association of PS16
Didi Roca, Assistant Treasurer, Concerned Parents Association of PS16

Signatories

Sissi Li, PK4	Sanam Khan, PK4
Dhara Patel, PK4	Yekaterina Gordon, PK3
Motilal Sanjay, PK3	Divya Virmani, PK4
Bani Phul-Anand, PK3	Zixuan Wang and Yi Zheng, PK3
Joyce Wong, PK4	Yulia Leonova, PK3
Shikha Mohta, Incoming PK4	Emily Fan, Incoming PK4
Anubha singh, PK3	Vitalii Neganov, PK4
Luna Spazioso, PK3	Clare Hudson, Incoming PK3
Tingting Huang and Yunsong Huang, PK3	Ritesh Udupudi, PK3
Silvia Meyer, PK3	Shweta Raddi, PK3
Ann Ha and Behrang Behin, PK3	Heather Marie Udo, PK3
Daniella Nabuco, Incoming PK4	Emu Kurihara, PK3
Byul Shin, PK3	Swati Jaiswal, Incoming PK4
Nikeeta sarang, PK4	Anmol Rohatgi, PK4
Bhakti Kanade, PK3	Galina Fisenko, PK3
Maksim Semenov, PK4	Ning Sun, PK3
Christina Sopova, PK4	Ekaterina Neganova, PK4
Sudha Jain, Incoming PK3	Mohit Puri and Tina Naik-Puri, PK3
Theresa and Calvin Yu, PK3	Rucha Bhate and Siddhesh Kajarekar, PK3
Seonha Park, Incoming PK3	Ankita Sonawane, PK3
Huanhuan Shi, Incoming PK3	Shilpa Malani, Incoming PK3
Haein Choi and Raymond Kim, Incoming PK3	Casey Ippolito, PK4
Rifat Rahmab, PK4	Jimmy Yao and Helena Liu, PK3

Vinita Singh, PK4
Vimal Kumar, PK4
Tomohiro Suzuki, Incoming PK3
Vaibhav Rathi and Richa Sodhani, PK3
Irina Decamillo, PK4
Ujjal Dhar, PK4
Cho Uk Ki, Incoming PK3
Cheol Yong Kim, Incoming PK3
Apoorv Gangwal and Marcelline Sahane, PK4
Sunil Palisetti, PK3
Xeniya Skrypnyk, Incoming PK3
Christina Luk, PK3
Carina and Santino Rivello, PK4
Gaurav Jaju, PK3
Ting-Ai Mari, PK3
Suman Mishra, PK4
Jeevitha Raju, PK4
Koyel Basu, PK4
Vishal Gupta and Kamana Sharma, PK4
Sheetal Choudhary, PK4
Ivan Quan & Joanne Lin, PK3
Reshmi Das, Incoming PK4
Hin Kyeol Woo, PK4
Atanu Kumar Ghosh, Incoming PK4
Jaime Simotas, PK4
Nk Phul, PK3
Kayvan Parmani, PK3
Rei Kudo and Takuya Kudo, PK3
Sheetal Anand, PK3
Madeline Lagattuta, PK3
Shivani Mathur, Incoming PK3
Sara Bogle and Justin Bogle, PK3
Shobhit Mathur, Incoming PK3
Sarah Ahmed, Incoming PK3
Paul Mack, Incoming PK3
Gauri Jumde and Nilesh Meshram, PK4
Jenny Peng, PK3
Xialu Yu, PK3
Jingjing liu, PK4
Xiaoshan Liu, PK3
Deepika Sevilimedu, Incoming PK4
Xiaodong Zhao, PK3
Yongrong Sun, PK4
Jessica Garcia, PK4
Angelina Gonzalez and Jhonar Gonzalez, PK3
Govindarajan Iyengar, Incoming PK4
Yifan Guo, PK4
Natalia Diachenko, PK4
Minal Amin and Jitan Patel, PK3
Amy Gardiner-Lowe and Paul Malonzo, PK3
Guanwen Cheng, PK3
Zafar Olimov, PK3
Martin de Haan, Incoming PK4
Angelina Gerayeva and Fuad Gerayev, PK4
Prabhas Pai, PK3
Scarlet Meinders, PK4
Tam Dang, PK3
Hitesh Parikh and Serena Nanda-Parikh, PK4
Satish Vatti and Deepti Vatti, PK3
Hali epstein, PK4
YoungJu Jo, PK4
Elaine Lin, PK3
Shashank Saini and Rishika Arya, PK3
Pallavi Lala and Inaaya Lalla, PK3, PK3
Ahalya Rekha Bayyana, PK4
Deepti Vatti, PK3
Xuemei Zhao, PK3
Alexandre Medeiros, PK3
Zamira Pardaeva, PK3
Hailey Brown, PK3
Rika Nolan, PK4
Ina Tang, PK4
Darya Makarchyk and Andrei Baibakou, PK3
Elizabeth Thompson, Incoming PK3
Tiffini Boyde, PK3
Piyush, PK3
Hiral Thakkar, PK3
Valentina Lombardi, PK3
Deep Ghosh, Incoming PK3
Kostiantyn Diachenko, PK3
Natalia Diachenko, PK4
Subhasis Nanda, PK4
Kumari Garima, PK3
Abay Zhunussov and Aizhan Urmagambetova, PK3
R. Venkataraman and P. Tiwari, Incoming PK3
Nisha Patel, Incoming PK3
Linda Lieu, PK3
Gonzalez Maria, Incoming PK3
Behruz Ishaki, Incoming PK3

Testimonials

Theresa and Calvin Yu, PK3

I believe the (unilateral) decision to move Casper to Danforth was to increase the number of slots available. I am grateful that the school board recognizes the importance and the need for the Casper program. However, moving the program to Danforth or to PS3 will render the program ineffective for many families.

As a parent, I am deeply concerned at the idea of children boarding/unloading school buses in the dark and during rush hour traffic.

Moving the program to Danforth or PS3 will make pick up extremely difficult for many families. This applies to families with multiple children in different age groups who will be picked up at different locations. This also applies to families (like ours) that don't own a car. It is not feasible/affordable for me to Uber back/forth to Danforth or PS3 for pick up each school day. It is also putting undue hardship on the 3- and 4-year-old young children to either walk or take public transit (especially during winter months and inclement weather).

I appreciate the sentiment of the school board in trying to increase the accessibility of the Casper program. However, moving the program to Danforth or PS3 imposes undue hardship on the parents, and most importantly, the children, that the program is supposed to serve. Rather than increasing accessibility to Casper, changing the location would render the program ineffective.

Additionally, it is unacceptable that this decision was made unilaterally, and that our youngest children do not have representation or an advocate.

Anonymous, PK3

We want to share our disappointment on the way choices have been made for our kids without any involvement from the parents. This is not the first time. A year ago, we were promised that Annex will be for Pre-K kids, which changed suddenly without our knowledge. We resigned to the fact that our kids will be bussed but at least we were happy with Casper at Annex. To add insult to injury, we have been provided with absolutely no information through official channels. It seems like the strategy is to break the news to the parents right at the start of school year when they will be scrambling. How does this make sense? Where is the accountability? Why are we changing the current arrangement? We have no answers.

Anonymous, PK3

Pre-k students are the youngest and the ones we keep pushing further away from their home. This is totally unfair to them and there must be a better solution than that.

Nikeeta Sarang, PK4

My son will be in K next year, but I understand the importance of having CASPER at the Annex as it has been this year for us. I've been able to take him out from time to time early and partake in extra-curricular activities, which are not offered at CASPER. I know a lot of parents like this flexibility.

Nisha Patel, Incoming PK3

Annex location preferred as it will provide flexibility to working parents to pick kids up from CASPER. Also, Danforth is far and not close to public transportation, which makes it hard for the caregivers to pick them up without a car. It will create lot of hardship on two working parents with multiple kids in different schools.

Anonymous, PK3

It will be inconvenient for any parents who needs flexibility in pick up. My work day is unpredictable as a bedside nurse who cares for patients all day. If Casper is to move to Danforth, we will have no choice but to unenroll and find alternative care.

Tomohiro Suzuki, Incoming PK3

I really want the option for early pickups in downtown Jersey City. All parents have different schedule and even I alone have different work schedule depending on days of the week. Early pickups in downtown give flexibility to my family to spend more time with my kids.

Anonymous, PK4

We won't be able to use Casper and forced into using a private facility

Joyce Wong, PK4

I feel that the Danforth School should do more to communicate and engage with the parents in an official capacity, rather for us to "hearsay" what's going on (e.g., Aftercare for 2022/23). My kids love school and they have wonderful teachers, but the administrative aspects can and need to be improved (e.g., Sending official circulars, or having parent guidebook would be helpful to keep parents informed and have consistent understanding of school rules/expectations).

Anonymous, PK3

I think the kids will be much better at the Annex instead of taking a bus at 5:45, they are so young and so far from home, I do not think this is fair, the Annex was built for them. I do not understand why they are moving them to Danforth.

Byul Shin, PK3

I want to add the fact that the parents and siblings have to wait outside, many times under harsh weather, with strong wind, rain, and snow. The neighborhood has a lot stronger wind compared to other side of Jersey City. If school bus is delayed because of commute time traffic, the result will be chaotic, and it is most probably going to happen if Casper moves to Danforth.

Also, safety issues: during fall and winter, 6pm is night which means we don't have any light. We don't have decent space there too. It is very narrow path. It is not safe for 3years and 4years old kids to hop off from the bus like that, and again since it is commute time, there will cars at the bus stop too.

Anonymous, PK3

As residents zoned to PS16 we would really like our 3-4 year olds to be in the neighborhood school

Anonymous, PK3

We are zoned for PS16 and think we must be accommodated within the zoned area and our little kids should not be bussed to any other location for school and for Casper. Moving Casper out of PS16 annex will cause a lot of inconvenience to our family because we like to pick up our child at 4:45 and not at 6pm. Driving to Danforth every day is not something that is ok.

Anonymous, PK3

We have 2 children in the Paulus Hook area, moving Casper would prove difficult for pick-ups. Hoping it can stay at The Annex for the PreK kids who were supposed to be there initially.

Anonymous, Incoming PK4

Danforth is extremely difficult to commute from Downtown when you don't have car.

Anonymous, PK3

If CASPER moved to Danforth, it will put more workloads to the staffs for busing and communications as some parents want to skip CASPER for a certain day and those kids have to be sent back to PS16 with other non-CASPER kids. That can be happened randomly, and those communications can be complicated.

Mohit Puri and Tina Naik-Puri, PK3

We are the parents of 2 children, one whom is enrolled in PreK3 at Danforth and the other in Grade 3 at PS 16 main building. Shifting Casper to Danforth or PS 3 would make it very difficult for parents of multiple children to pick up the children at approximately the same time. Please reconsider this decision.

Anonymous, PK3

Your consideration will be greatly appreciated

Sunil Palisetti, PK3

We need shorter commute for kids

Anonymous, Incoming PK4

We don't have car. It would be very difficult for us to commute to pickup my son.

Anonymous, Incoming PK3

I am the only parent who can pick up the kids. My older one will be in K and my younger one will be in Prek3. It would be much more convenient if the Prek3 can do Casper at PS16 annex.

Shivani Mathur, Incoming PK3

Having the youngest students being bussed so far is already nerve wracking, without the added burden of keeping them their longer and losing flexibility of pickup. Please keep Casper and morning stars at PS 16 annex only.

Zafar Olimov, PK3

Location

Anonymous, PK4

I want CASPER to be in Annex building only. With my daughter recent major surgery, I will prefer less commute for her.

Minal Amin and Jitan Patel, PK3

Should we need to do pick ups at Danforth earlier than when busses return to PS 16, it will be a significant challenge, as we do not have a car. Although the light rail is an option, it takes approximately 30-45 mins one way included walking to the school. It will take me 1.5 hours round trip to pick him up.

Pallavi Lala and Inaaya Lalla, PK3

Evening times are more convenient for working parents to pickup kids from annex. Danforth gets busy during eve hours and there is no parking. It's also an additional half hour each way commute.

Anonymous, PK3

If Casper is moved to Danforth, we will have issues picking up our son early or any doctor appointments as his pediatrician office is very close to annex.

Anonymous, PK3

We live close to PS16 Annex and would like to have flexibility to pick up our PreK kid any time after 3pm. This will be taken away with CASPER moving to Danforth. Also, we have 2 kids and we work until 5:30pm, picking up each kid after work hours from two different location will be next to impossible task.

Anonymous, PK3

As a single parent, working full time and with no car this would significantly impact our accessibility to after school care.

Appendix: PS 16 Annex vs. PS 3 survey question

Signatories answered the following required question: “Do you have a preference between the Annex or PS3?” The survey prompt provided the following background information: “JCPS used to offer CASPER at PS 3 for prekindergarten students in the PS16 zone. Some parents with older children who attended CASPER at PS 3 said PS 3 has more age-appropriate facilities and space than the Annex. PS 3 has full indoor and outdoor playgrounds, classrooms designed for three- and four-year-old children, and the space to offer co-curricular enrichment during CASPER hours. HOWEVER, PS 3 is further (a 15-minute walk west from the PS 16 Annex). The letter does not take a position on if PS3 or the Annex would be a better location since different families have different circumstances. However, we will write a sentence summarizing the preferences expressed in this survey.”

Signatories had to choose one (and only one) of three answers. The answers and results are as follows:

I want CASPER to stay at the Annex: 81%

I want CASPER to move to PS 3: 4%

I would be happy at either the Annex or PS 3: 15%

The following placeholder text was provided in the letter, which signatories had seen before signing and responding to the survey question: “Due to the benefits outlined above, many parents would prefer CASPER to remain at the PS 16 Annex. However, some parents with older children who attended CASPER at PS 3 shared that it has more age-appropriate facilities and space for co-curricular activities than the Annex. However, PS 3 is a far walk for most parents, which would be a major impediment for some families. In response to a required survey, xx% of signatories said they would prefer CASPER to remain at the Annex, xx% said they would prefer PS 3, and the remaining xx% said they would be happy with either location. This letter takes no position on if Annex or PS 3 is a better location. We share the above statistics for informational purposes.”