

The THHS/Queens College Relationship is in Jeopardy

Mr. Condon from Townsend Harris High School has sent you a message:

Dear Students and Families,

This communication is a call to action to the entire Townsend Harris High School Community. On Wednesday, July 29th, I will be meeting with the Senior Budget Director for Queens North to discuss the status of the funding for our Queens College Bridge Year Program, an essential part of our school community that has been a cornerstone of our program since the school's inception in 1984. The Bridge Year is one of the defining opportunities that Townsend Harris has to offer. It allows seniors to take four college classes at Queens College for college credit. It also contributes funding to numerous other essential aspects of Townsend Harris, including the Election Simulation, college essay tutoring, the school play, and the school newspaper. It is my belief that at this meeting Townsend Harris will be notified that the DOE intends to either cut or completely eliminate funding for this essential program for our school community.

This cannot be allowed to happen, and it is up to each and every one of us to stand up and insist that this does not happen. We must marshal all of our efforts and assets and bring them to bear to save this essential program that makes Townsend Harris High School at Queens College the special and unique place it is. We need all members of our community to lift up their voices and make it known that defunding this long standing partnership is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

Though this may be intended to appear as a typical budget cut in an economic crisis, the fact is that this is a program that the DOE has worked in the past to undercut. In actuality, this is a cynical and opportunistic attempt to undo a 36 year legacy, under the cover of crisis. It is an exploitation of the pandemic to do what could not be done in the light of day over the past four years, despite the best efforts of a few thoughtless bureaucrats and politically-motivated actors who have been set on decimating the program that has consistently led Townsend Harris to being recognized as one of the best schools in our borough, our city, our state, and our nation.

At any time, losing funding for this program would directly impact each of our nearly 300 seniors who will be left with large gaps in their programs. Cutting this funding now, however, would have a devastating impact on our community during the pandemic. It will accomplish all of the following:

1. It will harm our seniors' programs and impair our ability to open our building safely. Without this funding, seniors will not be able to take a Queens College elective, and we will not have the resources to provide them with an additional Townsend Harris elective. This will leave a hole in their programs, a hole in their college applications, and at a time when we are trying to meet challenging social distancing expectations, add students to our school building during the day who would normally be programmed out of the building during that time. Our students are set to begin their college coursework in mere weeks. To cut this funding will throw our programming into disarray and make opening the building with adequate programs for our seniors nearly impossible.
2. Each year, all Townsend Harris seniors graduate with twelve college credits that they can use at CUNY or transfer to another institution. Put simply, these credits can save our families money, especially at this time. There are few such programs that so effectively offer both educational and financial benefits simultaneously. It is an exemplary and efficient use of public funds, and we could line up numerous alumni who will share how much it helped them not only be ready for college but to save money at the same time. Now, at the very moment when our families are hurting economically, is not the time to be taking away this excellent opportunity.
3. We are looking at a difficult and uncertain year. Our seniors do not need the additional stress of a program that will be thrown into complete chaos without this program. As it is, we face an enormous challenge in programming, given the lack of information coming from the DOE on how to effectively create a "blended" school. Though our last senior class had a difficult and unfortunate spring, they had at least applied to college by the time schools closed. This year's seniors will face much uncertainty and will need to make difficult decisions about their future. To have them be the first class to lose the Queens College opportunity every other class has had at our school while also having to navigate the challenges a worldwide pandemic already poses is cruel and wrong.

This last point leads to a point that impacts not just our seniors, but our entire community: the DOE has promised each of our students that during their senior year they would be attending Queens College while simultaneously completing their graduation requirements at Townsend Harris. Defunding this program is a violation of the public trust. Promises made must be kept. The students at Townsend Harris have done all that has been asked of them to prepare for this transformative college experience with fidelity, only to have the DOE pull the rug out from underneath them at the last minute with no warning. This is dishonest and immoral. Commitments made must be kept. Our largest ever freshman class will be joining THHS this fall. We encouraged them, and all of our classes, to join precisely because of the opportunities afforded by this arrangement. At a time when trust in the institutions of government is at an all time low, the DOE must keep trust with its students and their families. If not, it must be held accountable and forced to keep its commitment.

At a time when the country is recognizing how essential educational opportunities are, our students are facing the elimination of an opportunity that they have spent their entire careers as NYC public school students working to achieve. This isn't the time to abandon the advantages the collaboration has provided for our community.

In the meantime, we urge you to reach out to your local elected officials, city council members, state assembly members, state senators, and CEC members to express your strong disagreement with Defunding Townsend Harris High School. A list of city council, state assembly and senators, and CEC members' contacts are linked below as well as a sample letter that can be pasted into an email. Feel free to modify it to fit your personal voice.

We will be setting up a town hall meeting shortly to help organize and focus our efforts to prevent this from happening.

Your partner in education
Brian Condon, Principal

Form Letter:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UhlfOnSi9jAsz0mWEFITC2tzGJ7_VTgTRsfRhAxTkls/edit?usp=sharing

Contact List:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wcg3safPfUPbwB-ZNfFc_U4vGeh0HQWVHfuKQW_jWdM/edit?usp=sharing