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HEADLINE: **EDUCRATS UPEND AUTISTIC KIDS**

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BODY:

FOR MORAHINA Rodriguez, Angela Donadelle and hundreds of other parents of autistic children, the Julia Richman Education Complex on Manhattan's upper East Side is more than another public school: It is a little-known treasure of our city.

Over the past 10 years the faculty and students at the six small schools that make up the Julia Richman complex have fashioned a unique extended family with its neighbors.

It is a family that has welcomed and nurtured the pupils at P226, the junior high for autistic children at Richman.

That's why Rodriguez and Donadelle are so furious at the callous way Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and his educrats at the Tweed Courthouse are seeking to demolish and relocate the Richman complex to a site 2 miles away near the FDR Drive.

Julia Richman is not some minor chess piece in a grand game of real estate swap, the parents and teachers say.

"The school has been wonderful for my daughter," said Rodriguez, the mother of Kimberly Guerrero, 14, who has attended P226 for two years. "She's been able to adjust very well to the environment there.

That smooth adjustment is due in no small part to the unique "inclusion program" at P226. Under the program, teachers arrange for the students to work a few hours each week at selected neighborhood organizations and businesses.

Kimberly, for example, performs cleaning chores at a nearby community center.

For an autistic child, the most ordinary interaction with strangers and the outside world can sometimes be enormously difficult.

"Her job teaches my daughter and the other children living and coping skills," Rodriguez said.

"The whole thing with a child with autism is consistency and repetition," said Donadelle, whose 12-year-old son Christopher Jones also attends the school. "All the children know, all the teachers know, we don't change things on them."

Thanks to the inclusion program, the school of largely black and Hispanic children has become an accepted part of the wealthy neighborhood that surrounds it.

Klein's aides, however, have given the green light to a proposal by Hunter College to take over the Julia Richman site, demolish it and erect a science center for Hunter students.

Under the plan, the college will provide space for a new building for Julia Richman at an auxiliary campus Hunter owns at 25th St. Hunter would sell the entire 25th St. site to a private developer, who would in turn be required to build a \$130 million public school there.

"It's a brand new, state-of-the-art facility at no cost to the taxpayer," says Hunter spokeswoman Meredith Halpern. And since the project will take years to complete, none of the children currently enrolled at Julia Richman will be affected, she says.

On paper, it's what Department of Education officials call a "win-win" for everyone.

Such is the logic of Robert Moses-like master planners who never consult the little people their decisions actually affect.

If they had, they would have learned all the teachers and parents at Julia Richman love their six schools just the way they are.

"These people don't know what they're talking about," Donadelle said. "It would take years for our school to establish the same kind of community ties in some other neighborhood."

Autistic children in Manhattan public schools, she pointed out, are enrolled in several selected schools according to age group. Most children from ages 12 to 14 end up at Julia Richman's P226.

"But every child at the other schools, even from the early grades, visits P226 each year, so they can get accustomed to the physical setting where they'll be going."

Any relocation of Julia Richman, Donadelle says, will be felt throughout all the Manhattan schools that currently house autistic children.

If this demolition and relocation were absolutely necessary, the parents and teachers would perhaps understand. But no one bothered to ask them what they wanted.

To them, this smells like land grab of a wonderful public school that happens to be sitting on upper East Side land that someone else wants.

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