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Urban Life 101

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Visual Essay on my childhood school

The location I chose to focus on for this visual essay was my old elementary and middle school, P.S./I.S. 163 in Bath Beach located in South Brooklyn. I spent more than half of my life surrounded by the same community of teachers, students and parents. My parents enrolled me in 2005 when I was four years for pre-kindergarten, and I graduated in 2015 from junior high. The entity of P.S./I.S. 163 (also referred as The Bath Beach school) has existed since 1908.

P.S./I.S. 163 is located in the neighborhood of Bath Beach. Its surrounding neighborhoods are wealthy residencies such as Dyker Heights, Bensonhurst and New Utrecht. It is a fifteen-minute drive from the Verrazano Bridge, Dyker Beach Golf Course, Belt Parkway Highway and exclusive private school Poly Prep Country Day School. The area is surrounded by two story houses with private driveways and apartments with rents over \$2,000.

The residential community of Bath Beach is a diverse population. People from different backgrounds and cultures live along side of each other. The student community of the school is also diverse as well. As a student there I had Asian, Italian, Russian, Polish, Mexican, Guatemalan and Arabic friends. There was a strong sense of belonging and family because we all grew up together and had known each other since early childhood. Since the school is located in a residential area not many activities occur in the space. It is mostly students commuting to school in means of walking or car and adults commuting to their work.

Power is located in P.S./I.S. 163. It is ranked as a Best Value school with high test scores and advanced schoolwork available in STEM subjects. It offers the Spanish, Algebra and Living Environment regents to its top performing 8th grade students. If the student successful passes their regents exam, when they enroll in high school, they will be placed a year ahead. For example, I took the Algebra and Spanish regents exam so when I started freshman year of high school, I was placed in a 10th grade level math class (geometry) and Spanish 3/4 class

(sophomore level Spanish). However, what's so interesting about P.S. 163 is that it shares the block with another elementary school, P.S. 748 the School for Global Scholars. Two completely different schools belonging to different school districts on the same block. Have you ever seen anything like it?

From 2009 – 2010 a new and modern school building was constructed right behind the century old building of P.S. 163. It had everything you could dream of – a state of the art gym, elevators, a roof playground on the fourth floor, science laboratories and a second playground outside. In Fall 2010 I began fourth grade in the brand-new school building. I remember walking through the hallways and being in awe of the new facility. Up until the third grade, The Bath Beach school was only an elementary school, meaning it served pre-kindergarten to fifth grade students. During the move to the new building, the school became a k – 8th grade school. I belonged to the third 8th grade graduating class in 2015. The 100-year-old building became P.S. 748 the School for Global Scholars, another Best Value school. Power is seen with these two education institutions who have endless opportunities and resources to help their students succeed. Each school has an estimated number of 75 students per grade. A 1:14 teacher to student ratio. Which allows for a good support system between the student, the parents/guardians and teachers. This cannot be said for all public schools in Brooklyn. Not all students share the same privileges and opportunities. Schools that are predominately Black and Latino have shown to receive lower funding, have lower test averages and buildings in terrible conditions. This is not a coincidence.

The Department of Education played an active role in building the new school. Before P.S. 748 moved in next door, The Bath Beach School served children from the neighborhoods of Bath Beach and Bensonhurst. Students who attend P.S. 748 do not reside in either neighborhoods, they commute in yellow school buses or their parents drop them off. It is without a doubt, the Department of Education made no mistake in building a second elementary school in a well off and diverse neighborhood.

In regard to the P.S./I.S. 163 and P.S.748, I would like to explore the following question

1. Why do the residents of these neighborhoods deserve the luxury of having an option as to where they can send their children to school?

2. What was the reason that the Department of Education decided to erect a new school building?
3. What was the total cost of construction for the new building?

In order to answer these questions, I would have to do study the DOE's record history of opening new schools, budgets pertaining to opening the new schools and city officials who approved of the building.



I started fourth grade in this school building! I graduated 8th grade in 2015.



The Bath Beach school in all its glory.



When I was in pre – kindergarten my class was actually in a trailer classroom car. The



Standing in front of the 100-year-old building.

the move to the new building happened during summer 2010.



The two story houses right across the block from the schools.



P.S./I.S. 163 and P.S. 748 on the same block.