



class size matters

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**Testimony of Leonie Haimson, Executive Director of Class Size Matters
Before the City Council Education Committee
On the proposal to make Kindergarten mandatory and the special education
initiative**

June 12, 2012

Thank you Chair Jackson for holding these hearings today. First, I'd like to make a quick comment on the DOE's special education initiative.

Special education initiative forcing upward pressure on class size

The DOE is intent on pushing through this initiative despite the fact that their own power point showed **no gain in attendance or achievement** for students with disabilities who were moved into general education classrooms in Phase I of the initiative:

- *Phase 1 and Comparison Schools did not have a significant difference in attendance rates.*
- *A preliminary look at the student outcomes showed no statistically significant differences on Math & ELA proficiency between Phase 1 and Comparison Schools.¹*

Moreover, the DOE special education guide provided to principals instructs them **they must enroll any students** suitable for inclusion in regular general education classrooms until the class size hits the **contractual maximum** of 25 in Kindergarten, 32 in grades 1-5, and 30 or 33 in middle school (depending on whether the school gets Title one funding.)²

This is the first time I have seen DOE openly mandating maximum class sizes in any grade since 1990, when the first state class size reduction program began; defying both state-mandated Contracts for Excellence goals and the supposed autonomy of principals to use available funding to reduce class size if they so choose. Whatever gains from inclusion may be undercut by the very large class sizes that the DOE seems determined to force. Finally, the

¹ DOE, NYC Special Education Reform, Preliminary Results, Feb. 2012, see Slide 12, posted at http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Sped-initiative-Public-Phase-I-Results-Deck-Feb-2012_Latest.ppt

² DOE, Special Education Reform Reference Guide: School Year 2012-13, undated; posted at http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/DOE-SPED_Reference_Guide_051612_IEPRevision-22.pdf

same document contains clear warning with a punitive tone to principals, unlike any I have seen before in a DOE directive:

If patterns of recommended programs suggest inappropriate recommendations that do not seem in the best interest of students, central teams will conduct a more intensive audit of student IEPs. For recommendations that are not in the best interest of students, regular progressive disciplinary measures for school leaders and IEP teams will apply.

In my mind, this has the potential for disaster; for both general education and special education students crammed into classes of up to 32 – with insufficient attention and support.

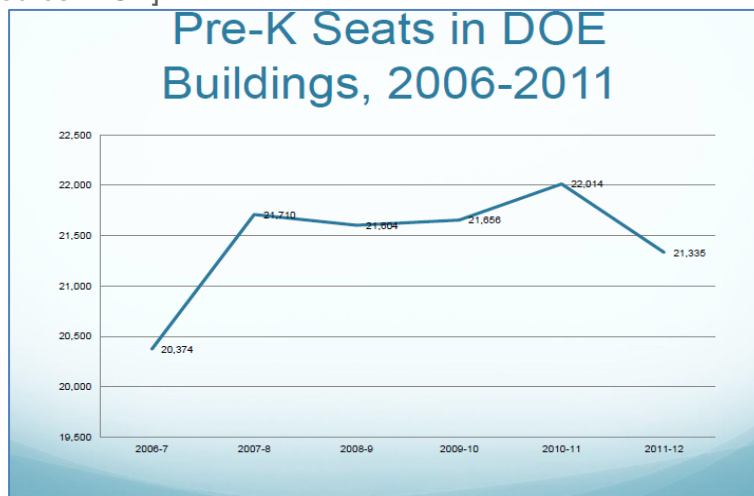
Mandatory Kindergarten will likely make class size and overcrowding worse

Now, for the proposal to make Kindergarten mandatory, which we neither support nor oppose at this time. I urge you to accelerate the capital plan if this proposal is adopted. Why?

Mandatory Kindergarten would lead to an estimated addition of 3,000-6,000 students in the NYC public schools.³ When DOE closed ACS daycare centers in 2010, 3,000 more Kindergarten students entered the system. IBO cited this development as a major contribution to large increases in Kindergarten class sizes.⁴

The space crunch induced by influx of additional Kindergarten students could produce an increased loss of Pre-K seats. This occurs during a time of rising demand for Pre-K: 28,815 applications in 2011 v. 25,487 in 2010.⁵

In 2011, only 68% applicants were admitted to Pre-K, a drop from 72%; over 9,000 children rejected. This year the number of Pre-K seats in DOE buildings dropped to its lowest level since 2006 [data source: DOE].



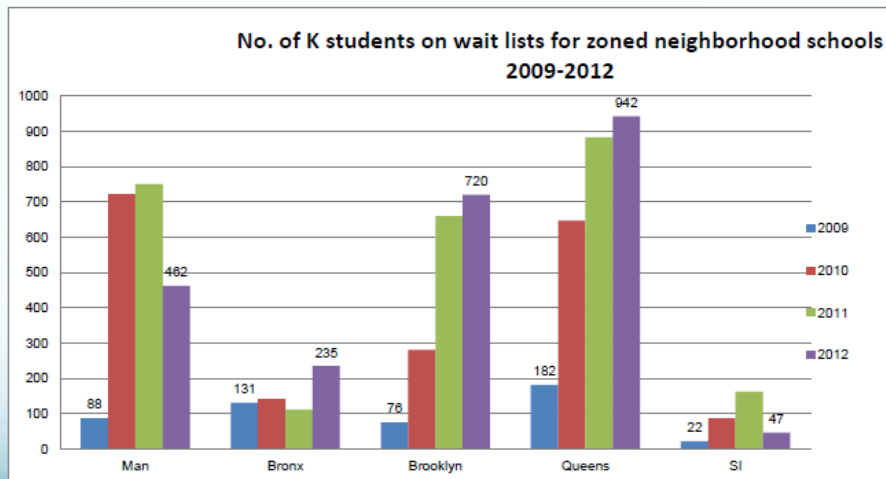
³ NY Times, “To Quinn, No City Child Should Miss Kindergarten,” March 21, 2012.

⁴ Independent Budget Office, Letter to Public Advocate DeBlasio and CM Reyna, June 10, 2010.

⁵ NY Times, “Big Kindergarten Wait List Limits City's Pre-K Slots,” June 10, 2011.

Even without mandatory Kindergarten, there are not enough seats for zoned Kindergarten students. This has led to more than 2400 children being placed on waitlists for Kindergarten in April; with waitlists in all boroughs & in nearly one fifth of elementary schools this spring .

Wait lists worse in 3 out of 5 boroughs this year



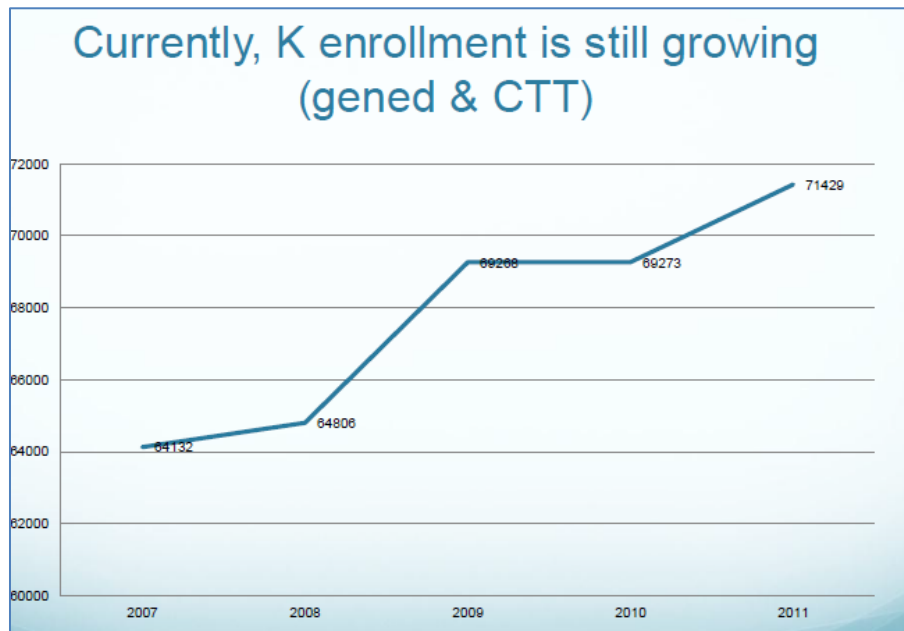
% Elementary Schools with waitlists by district



Though some children will drop off wait lists over time, these numbers show the extreme pressures on schools to sacrifice cluster rooms and further increase class size – not just in K, but in all grades as students move upwards.

Furthermore, substantial Kindergarten wait lists exist in some districts with no funded seats in Capital Plan. Especially large wait lists in District 12 in Bronx and District 21 in Brooklyn where there are NO funded seats in the capital plan.

Even without mandatory Kindergarten, enrollment is still growing:



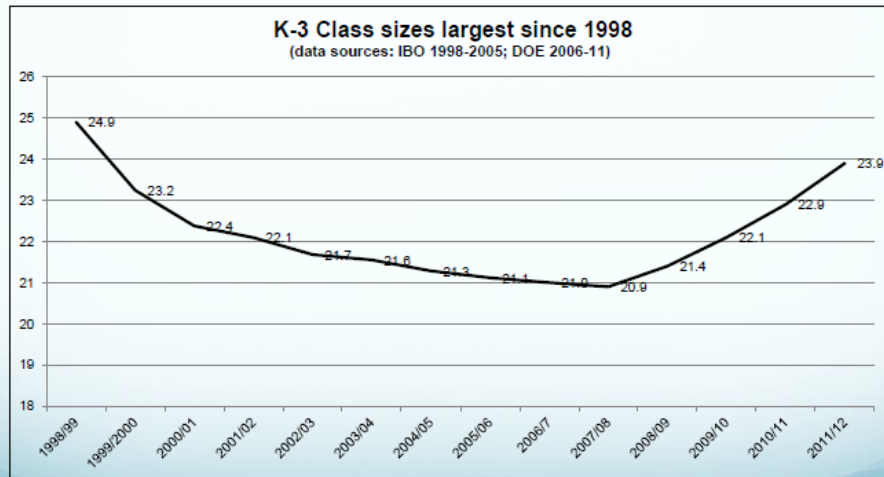
Additionally, class sizes in Kindergarten and the early grades are highest in 13 years, though lower class size one of few reforms proven to narrow achievement gap and lead to more learning for all students; this is an ongoing crisis which cannot be ignored.

When Mayor Bloomberg introduced his first Capital Plan in 2005, he said it would achieve the following goals:

- Alleviate overcrowding
- Provide space for classes of 20 or less in grades K-3 in all schools
- Eliminate the need for trailers

NONE of these goals have been achieved, and class size and overcrowding in elementary schools is now WORSE than in 2005.

K-3 Class Sizes Largest in 13 years

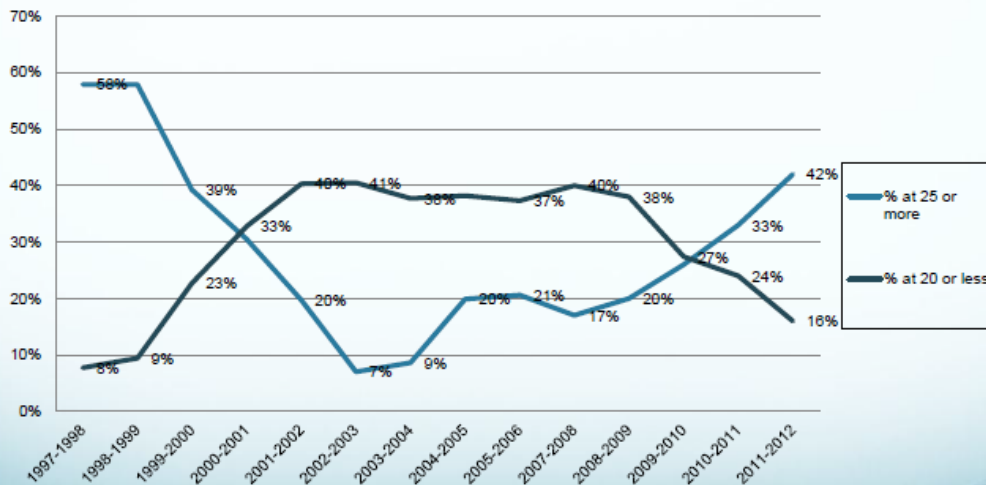


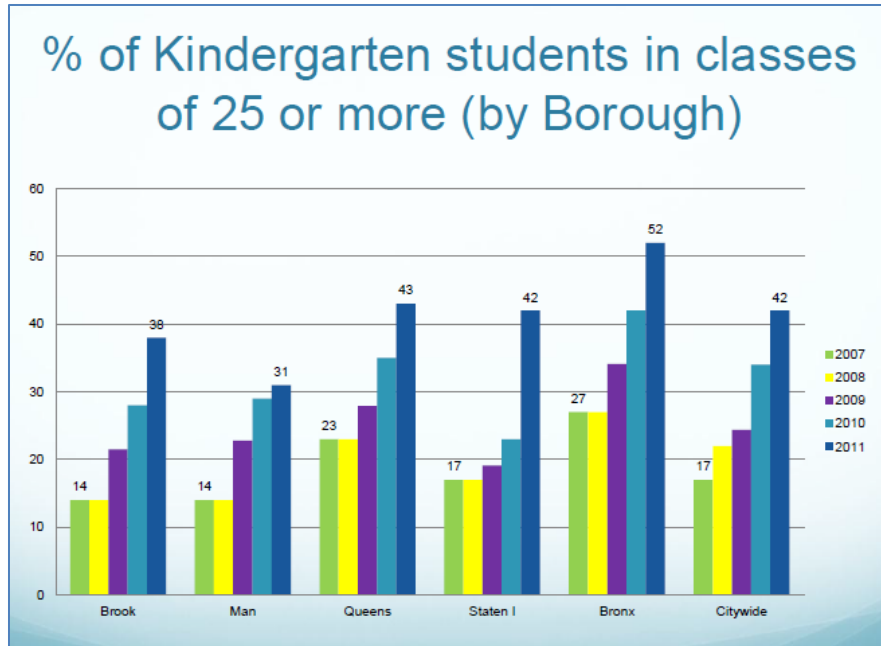
Nearly half of all Kindergarten students are in classes of 25 or more.

Last year was the first year since 1999 that there were more K students in classes in classes of 25 or more than in classes of 20 or less.

42% of Kindergarteners in classes of 25 or more

2010 first year since 1998 that more K students in classes of 25 or more than 20 or less since 1999





According to the “historic” or unchanging formula in the “Blue Book,” more elementary school buildings are now overcrowded than in 2006-7, and about 50,000 more elementary grade students are being educated in overcrowded buildings than before.

Utilization Rate (Historic)	2006-2007	2010-2011
# buildings 100% or over	257	306
# students	118156	167673
% students	24%	33%
% of buildings	28%	32%

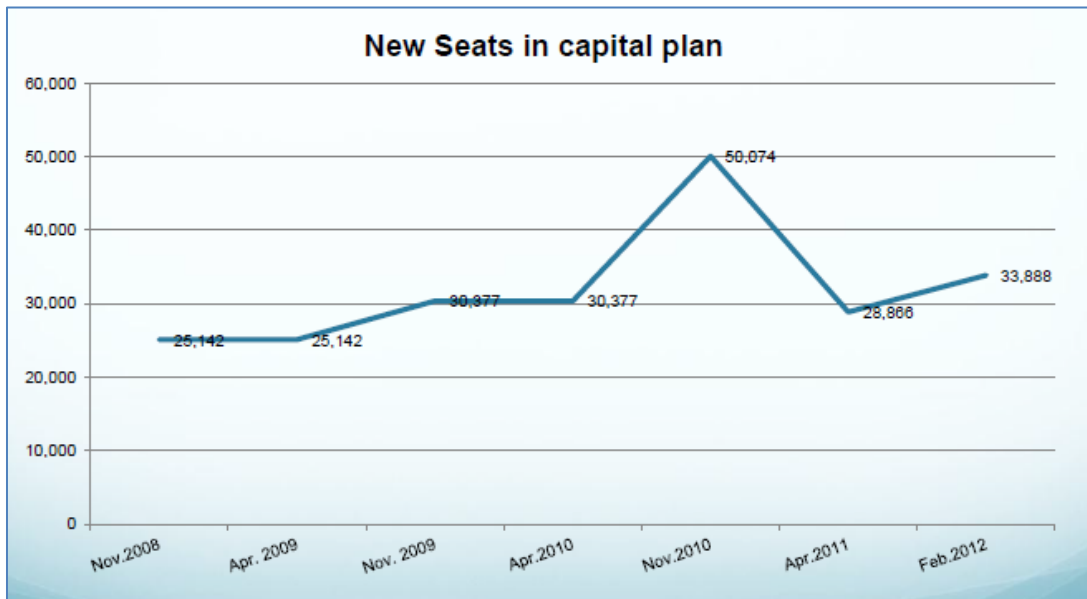
The capital plan is inadequate and back-loaded

In the latest version of the capital plan, DOE has explicitly admitted that their estimates show a need for about 50,000 seats, with **16,186** unfunded seats;

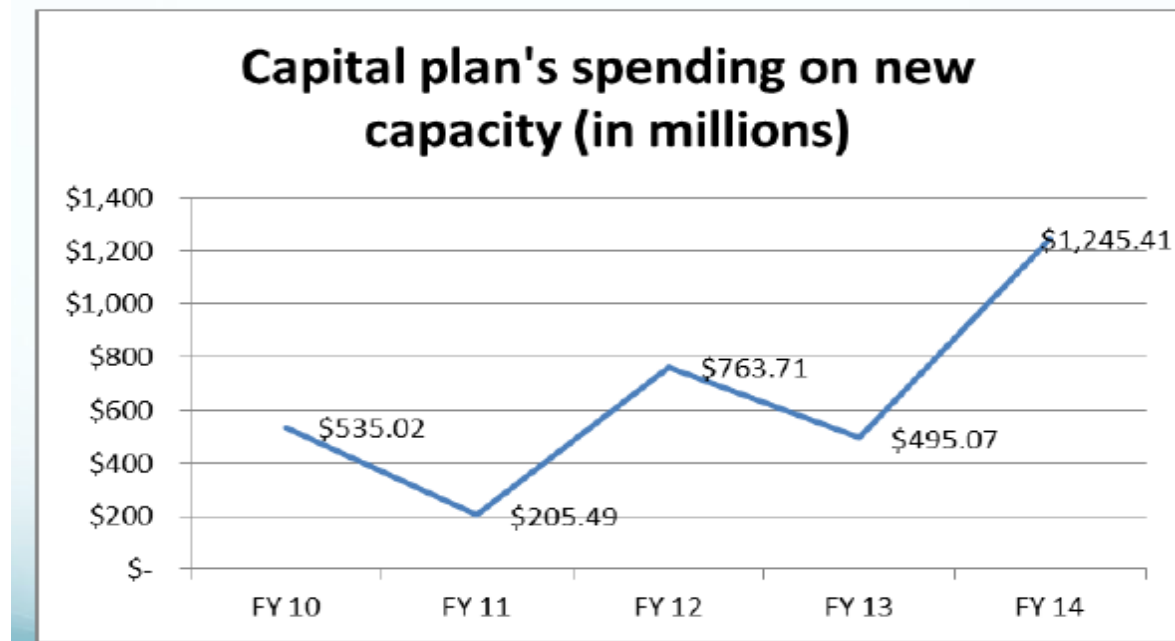
Our estimates of need from building starts alone, using the City Planning multiplier, is that we need more than 78,000 seats, which is likely to be underestimate, because:

- It doesn't count need to alleviate existing overcrowding or to reduce class size;
- It doesn't count need to regain lost cluster and specialty rooms, or eliminate trailers;
- It doesn't count need for more pre-K seats.

The DOE sharply cut back on the seats in the capital plan after November 2010.



Moreover, the spending on new capacity is projected to sharply drop and then increase again in FY 14.



Recommendations:

Though proposal to make Kindergarten mandatory is inherently laudable, this would add thousands of students to an already overcrowded and underfunded system, and would undercut expected gains from the program.

We recommend that funding for school capacity projects be accelerated and moved from FY 14 to next year.

The NYC Comptroller's office points out that this would add no cost to taxpayers, but would produce 15K additional jobs, potentially save millions in the long term by taking advantage of low interest rates and low construction costs, and create many more school seats.⁶

⁶ NYC Comptroller Liu, NYC Capital Acceleration Plan: Creating Jobs Today by Improving Tomorrow's Infrastructure, May 2012.