

# The Independent Parent Survey:

Views of New York City  
public school parents and  
parent leaders  
on class size, testing, and  
Mayoral control



*a report  
from  
Class Size  
Matters*





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Views of NYC public school parents and parent leaders on class size, testing, and Mayoral control

*A report from Class Size Matters*

February 2008

By Leonie Haimson

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## Summary

This report explores how New York City public school parents view conditions in their children's schools and the system as a whole.

The official parent survey developed by the Department of Education had some glaring deficiencies. It omitted any questions involving the overall direction of our public schools and the key policies put in place by this administration, and relegated critical concerns of parents involving class size, testing, and other issues into a catch-all question towards the end of the survey – in an apparent attempt to minimize their importance.

Several participants in the parent focus groups assembled by DOE to give input into the official survey design were disappointed in the process and the final version. They decided to develop their own independent, parent-driven survey that would cover some of the key areas left out of the official DOE survey.

Our analysis summarizes the responses to this independent survey from two complementary sources. One set of parents was polled at random by telephone and was a representative cross section of NYC public school parents in terms of ethnicity, income, and residence. Another set of parents responded online. The latter group was unusually active, involved, and informed about conditions at their schools and system-wide. Many of them were Parent Association officers, belonged to their School Leadership Teams, and/or were elected members of the Community Education Council in their districts.

In both cases, we asked a series of questions relating to class size, testing, and Mayoral control. Both sets of parents had observed little or no progress in terms of relieving overcrowding or lowering class size over the last few years, and believed that class size reduction was the most important reform that should be taken to improve the schools.

On testing, most parents opposed the DOE policy of holding back students primarily based on their scores on standardized exams, and felt that the emphasis on the results of such exams caused too much stress for their children. In the online survey, when asked about the new initiative that will pay students for high test scores, parents overwhelmingly opposed it.

A substantial majority of respondents in both groups believed that Mayoral control should be ended or amended by the State Legislature. Parents who responded online had an opportunity to express why they felt the way they did on this issue. Nearly 800 of them provided detailed comments, which clustered around several main themes: In the current system of governance, there was a lack of checks and balances, leading to almost dictatorial powers being exercised by the Mayor and Chancellor. Accordingly, the views of important stakeholders such as parents had been routinely ignored, and the school system had been run more like a business than an educational enterprise.

Other common criticisms revolved around what parents saw as the results of this unchecked, unaccountable power. The DOE had mismanaged finances and spent too much money on consultants and contractors, had embarked on too many confusing reorganizations, and had put in place the wrong educational policies. Finally, many parents expressed the view that schools and the educational system as a whole needed more separation from the political sphere and greater continuity than politics could provide.

When asked about the positive and negative aspects of their child's school, more than one thousand parents responded in detail.\* Their comments on this issue, as well as Mayoral control, proved to be a rich source of information about the views of New York public school parents, as well as some of our most engaged and active parent leaders.

\*Comments are quoted exactly as written, except for minor changes in punctuation.

# Survey rationale, design, and participants

## Survey Rationale

One of the projects undertaken by the NYC Department of Education in its latest phase of reorganization is a system by which every public school is assigned a grade, A to F, depending on its ratings in three categories: Student Performance (30 percent); Student Progress (55 percent) and School Environment (15 percent). The first two categories are based on test scores alone. In the School Environment category, attendance accounts for five percent of the grade, while the results of surveys from parents, teachers and students account for the other ten percent. Thus, the results of the parent survey determine approximately three to five percent of a school's grade.<sup>1</sup>

During February and March of 2007, representatives from the DOE Accountability office held several parent focus group sessions at the midtown offices of the consulting firm KPMG. According to DOE officials, these sessions were organized to help them identify issues important to parents, and shape questions to be included in the parent survey. When participants of the first focus group met again in March, KPMG staff summarized the areas that this group as well as other parents had identified as critical. These areas included class size, testing, and the principal's attitude to parents. Yet when the focus group was presented with a draft of the proposed survey, not a single question dealt with any of these issues.

When this was pointed out, a discussion ensued, and later, an exchange of emails. A compromise was offered: a new catch-all question at the end of the survey would be included, with class size reduction and more or less test preparation among ten different options from which parents would have to choose one as their top priority.

Several parent leaders and participants in the focus groups then sent a follow-up letter to Chancellor Klein, asking him to intercede so that the final version of the parent survey could more adequately address the issues that parents had

identified as important and deserving of their own questions.\*

They also asked that DOE give more emphasis to the results of the parent survey so that it would account for a larger fraction of each school's grade. As they wrote, *"the entire accountability system as currently designed gives scant importance and value to the views of parents."*

The response from the Chancellor was swift – and negative. In short, DOE would disseminate the survey that contained the questions that DOE wanted to ask.

Participants in the parent focus groups had hoped for a survey that might improve the administration's grasp of the continuing concerns that parents have about their children's schools, as well as enlarge the public's understanding of these issues. Class Size Matters, along with parent leaders from District 1 and District 3, decided to undertake our own independent survey – one that would be truly parent-driven, and would contain relevant questions omitted from the official DOE survey.

## Survey Design

A group of parents, some of whom had been involved in the DOE focus groups, came together for a planning session at the offices of the National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University in May, and began drafting the questions of the survey that formed the basis of this report. They had the advantage of knowing the results of the previous focus groups convened by KPMG. Yet as they deliberated, additional concerns arose related to the direction and leadership of the school system as a whole.

With the help of a District 3 parent with professional experience developing surveys, a list of questions was developed. The survey was posted online from June 26 through August 15, with technical assistance from the National Center on Schools and Communities, and publicized through various parent email lists, blogs, and the news media.<sup>2</sup>

A national polling company, Peter D. Hart Research Associates, conducted a

\*See the Appendix for an exchange of emails on this issue.

separate telephone poll in late June, with a somewhat shorter list of questions.<sup>3</sup>

The United Federation of Teachers covered the costs of the telephone poll and helped underwrite the online survey. At no time did the union attempt to influence the questions asked or our analysis of the results.

### Survey participants

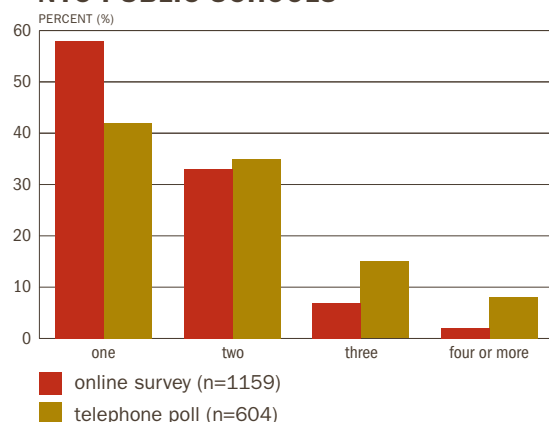
604 New York City parents were polled by telephone by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. 1159 parents completed our survey online.\*

When asked how they had heard about the survey, the largest percentage of online respondents – over 30 percent – credited their awareness to members of their school communities, more specifically, to the principals, parent coordinators, Parent-Teacher Associations, School Leadership Teams, or other parents at their children’s schools.

We also received more than 1,000 detailed responses from parents to our open ended online questions as to which aspects they liked and did not like about their children’s schools, and why they felt the way they did about Mayoral control – a treasure-trove of information about views on these questions.

Most online and phone respondents had either one child or two attending NYC public schools.

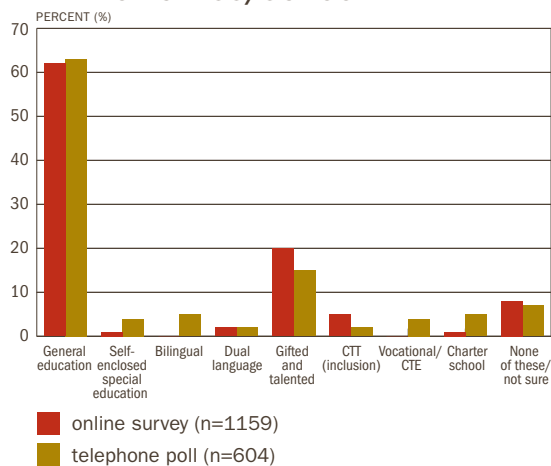
### NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS



\*Not all the parents who logged into the online survey responded to every question. We have removed the non-responses from our calculations and totals, but report on the total number of online respondents to each question in the demographic chart in the Appendix and/or the charts in the text.

Nearly two thirds of both the online respondents and telephone respondents had children attending general education classes. Fewer online parents had children attending self-contained special education or bilingual classes, as well as vocational and/or charter schools. 20 percent had children in Gifted and talented classes, compared to 15 percent of telephone poll parents.

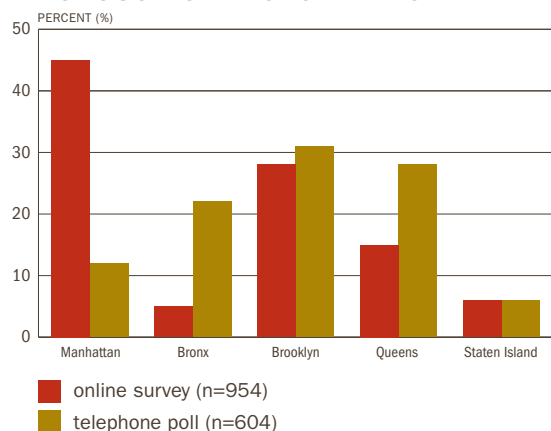
### TYPE OF CLASS/SCHOOL



The geographical distribution of the two groups was far different.

The online parents were mostly from Manhattan (45 percent), followed by Brooklyn (28 percent), Queens (15 percent), Staten Island (6 percent) and the Bronx (5 percent). Those polled by telephone encompassed a representative sample, from Brooklyn (31 percent), Queens (28 percent), Bronx (22 percent), Manhattan (12 percent), and Staten Island (6 percent).

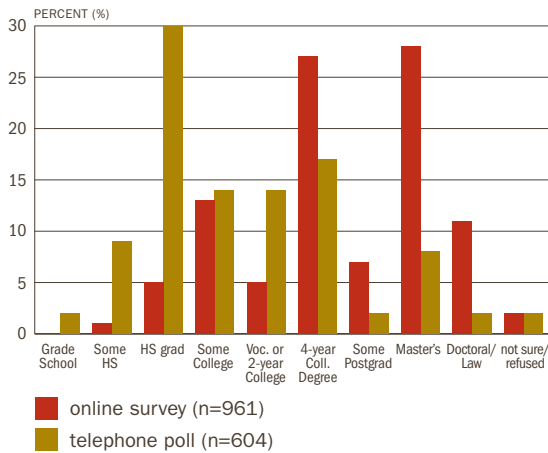
### BOROUGH OF RESPONDENTS



The online respondents were also far more likely to be white, college educated, and have higher household incomes. Of these, 72 percent were white, 10 percent were Hispanic, 9 percent black, 3 percent were Asian, and 5 percent were “mixed” or other. Among the telephone poll respondents, 33 percent were Hispanic, 31 percent black, 14 percent white, 12 percent Asian, and 8 percent “other”—again, a far more accurate reflection of the demographic background of the NYC parent population as a whole.

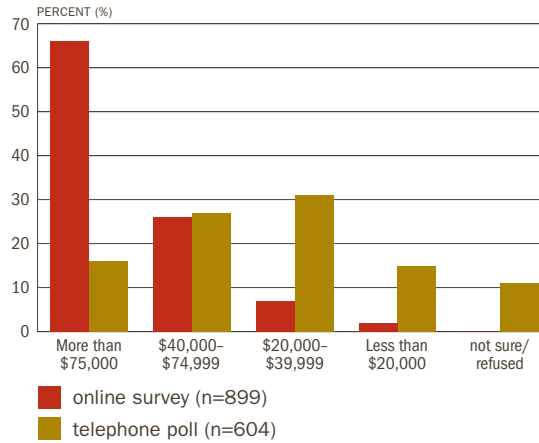
Most online respondents held either college diplomas (at 27 percent) or masters degrees (28 percent), compared to those surveyed by telephone (17 percent and 8 percent respectively).

### EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS



The online respondents were much wealthier: 66 percent had annual household incomes of more than \$75,000, while 16 percent of telephone poll respondents were in this category. 31 percent of the parents in the telephone poll sample had annual household income levels of \$20,000-40,000 per year, with 27 percent earning \$40,000-\$75,000.

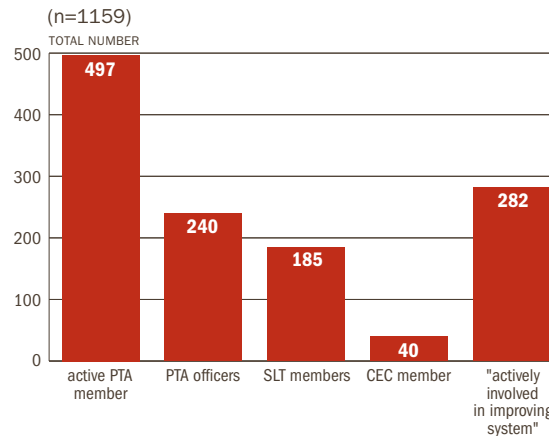
### ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



The online survey respondents were also far more likely to be involved in their children’s schools and to hold leadership positions. Of this group, 556 parents – or about half of our online respondents – served in a total of 962 leadership positions in their schools or districts.

497 (or 43 percent) said they were active members of their school’s PTA; 240 were PTA officers (21 percent), 185 were members of a School Leadership Team (16 percent), and 40 (4 percent) belonged to their district’s Community Education Council. An additional 282 parents said that they were “actively involved in improving the school system.”

### LEADERSHIP STATUS OF ONLINE RESPONDENTS



**Brooklyn PTA officer with a 2nd grader:**

The class sizes are still around 31 per class even though we are considered to be under utilizing our space.

**A Staten Island mom:**

Class size is too large; very crowded classes and hallways.

**Manhattan SLT member and parent of 3rd grader:**

Class sizes increased – school lost library and other space due to increase in student body.

# Findings: Smaller classes widely supported

In our survey, we asked parents how large their children’s classes were, whether they had observed any trend in class size over the past few years, how they viewed class size reduction as a policy option compared to others favored by this administration, and what they believed class sizes should be at different grade levels.

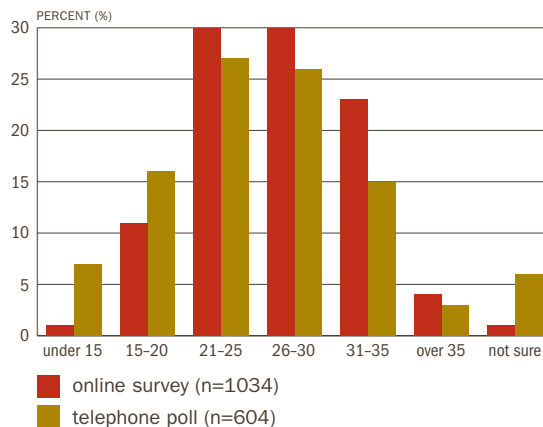
What we discovered documents the importance of class size to New York City public school parents – and their continued lack of satisfaction with the current class sizes in the public schools.

## Actual class size

When asked to estimate the size of their children’s classes, the largest subset of parents in both groups said that their child’s class size was 26 students or over (57 percent online and 44 percent telephone poll) or 21-25 students (30 percent and 27 percent). More than a quarter of online parents and nearly a fifth of the phone poll parents cited class sizes of 31 or above.

The distribution of reported class sizes were similar to the system as a whole, especially when the smaller class size of self-enclosed special education classes is taken into account.<sup>4</sup>

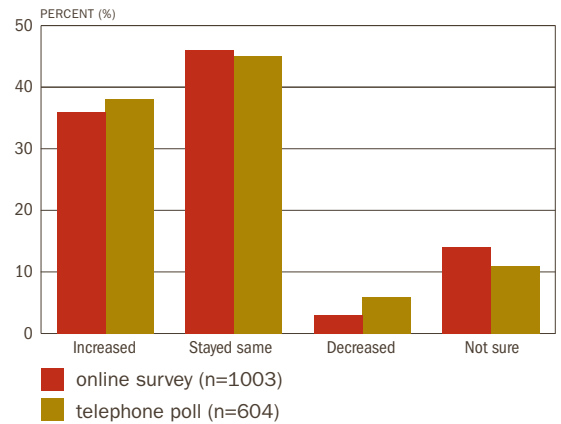
## LAST YEAR’S CLASS SIZE



## Trends in overcrowding and class size

Both groups of parents agreed as to the trend in school overcrowding and class size. Almost exactly the same percentage of parents – 37 to 38 percent – said that overcrowding in their child’s school had increased over the past few years, while 45 to 46 percent said that it had remained the same. Only four to six percent of parents reported that overcrowding had decreased.

## TREND IN OVERCROWDING

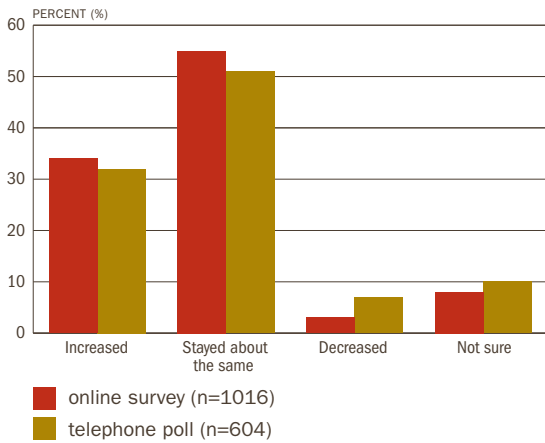


**Manhattan SLT member:**

**The school is getting very, very crowded. Specialty rooms and the library were taken away in order to make room for more classrooms for the new enrollment.**



## TREND IN CLASS SIZE



Similarly, while a little over half of parents in both groups said that class sizes in their child's school had remained the same, a substantial percentage – 34 percent of the online group and 32 percent of the phone group – reported that class sizes had increased over the past few years.

### Parent of 2nd grader:

**The classes have grown even larger and that compromises the needs of each student.**

Very small numbers of parents in both groups (3 percent online and 7 percent telephone) reported that class sizes had actually decreased in their children's schools.

These findings contrast sharply with the administration's claim to have alleviated overcrowding and lowered class size over the last six years. Clearly, most parents we polled did not perceive either trend in their children's schools.

### Manhattan mother of a 4th grader:

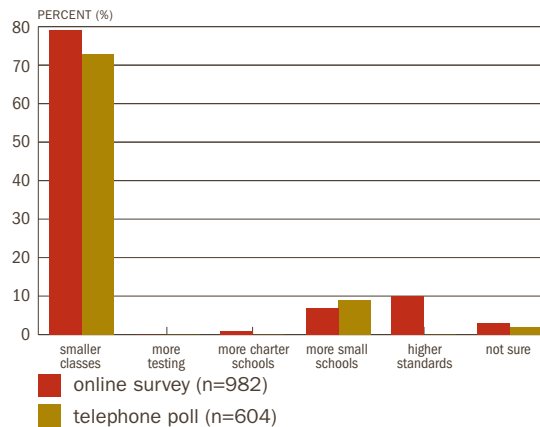
**Class size, the single most important thing for a quality educational experience, keeps increasing...**

## Class size as policy

When asked whether providing smaller schools or smaller classes would be the best method to improve student achievement, 73 percent of phone respondents reported that providing smaller classes would be more effective, while only nine percent favored creating smaller schools.

The online poll offered parents a wider range of options, including several that have been the signature policies of this administration: more small schools, more charter schools, more testing, and higher standards. Smaller classes led all other choices by a large margin, at 79 percent.

## WHAT WOULD WORK BEST TO IMPROVE OUR SCHOOLS



### Brooklyn PTA officer and

### mom of 7th grader:

**Class size issues are URGENT!! We have got to save the dreams of all the children including minority children of this city! At any cost (where's that \$\$ from Albany?)**

There appeared to be little difference between those surveyed online and by telephone in terms of their overwhelming preference for smaller classes, and this reform topped the list of options by a wide margin among every ethnic and racial group.

### Brooklyn parent of 3rd grader:

Attention and discipline suffer as a result of rising class sizes. We know that, the politicians talk about that, but class sizes just are not going down.

### Manhattan parent of 6th grader:

The class size is TOO LARGE with 35 children in my son's class. Hard to garner individual attention, participate in class...maintain discipline.

### Brooklyn parent of eighth grader, when asked what the negative things about her child's school were:

Class Size, Class Size, CLASS SIZE. Poor, overcrowded facilities.

**Brooklyn mom:**

Kindergarten should NOT be only one teacher for 25 kids - that is insane!!!!

**Manhattan mom of second grader:**

CLASSROOMS TOO CROWDED: too many kids per square feet.

**Queens PTA and SLT member:**

My son was in 4th grade this year...35 kids in a class. The level of concentration was off, the kids are uncomfortable being crammed into such small spaces...The teachers try as hard as they can to control things and to oversee each student, but...now that the kids are older they will try to act out a little more; that is just human nature; they want to see what they can get away with. If the classes were smaller, the teacher would have more of a handle on the flow of the class. Class sizes should be smaller because the teacher would be more able to assess which children need more guidance and the teacher would be better able to help that child.

**Appropriate class sizes**

When asked about what size class should be at various grade levels, parents in both surveys favored substantially smaller classes than exist currently in our schools.

Online parents selected class sizes slightly smaller than those polled by telephone, but substantial majorities in both groups felt that classes in grades K-8 should be no larger than 20 students per class and in middle and high schools, no larger than 25 students.

Here are more detailed results.

Elementary schools:

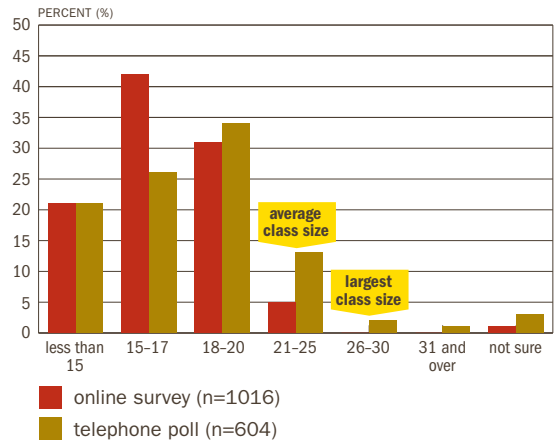
When asked how many students should be in a class in Kindergarten through 3rd grade, most parents selected sizes much smaller than the current average in city schools. The largest subset of online parents chose 15-17 students per class, while the largest group of telephone parents said a slightly higher size of 18-20 students was appropriate for these grades.

Relatively few parents in either group believed that these classes should be 21 or more (only five percent of the online group and 16 percent of telephone poll respondents) – which is the average size for general education classes in K-3 grades currently. In many schools throughout the city, class sizes in these grades are far larger – reflecting the contractual limits in Kindergarten of 25 and in grades 1-3 of 28 students per class.

**A PTA officer with a 1st grader:  
We continue to have class sizes that really stretch resources. With smaller class size our children would be able to better learn and grow.**

In fact, in the fall of 2007, nearly two thirds of general education students in grades K-3 were in classes 21 or larger.<sup>5</sup>

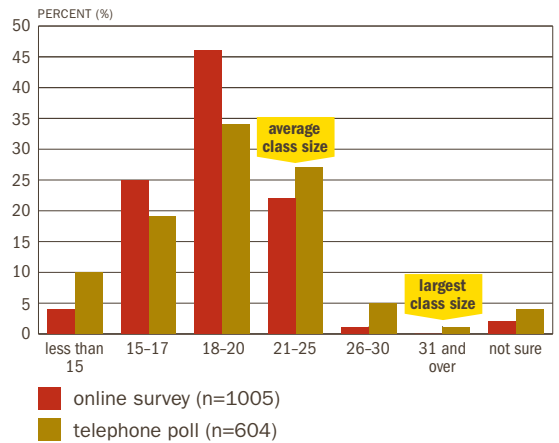
**WHAT SHOULD CLASS SIZE BE IN GRADES K-3**



For grades 4-5, the largest subsets of both groups of parents believed that classes should be 18 to 20 students per class, instead of 24, where the average for general education classes is now.

**Bronx parent of a 5th grader:  
The class sizes are still too big. It would be great to get down to 20 children in a class instead of 28.**

**WHAT SHOULD CLASS SIZE BE IN 4-5th GRADES**

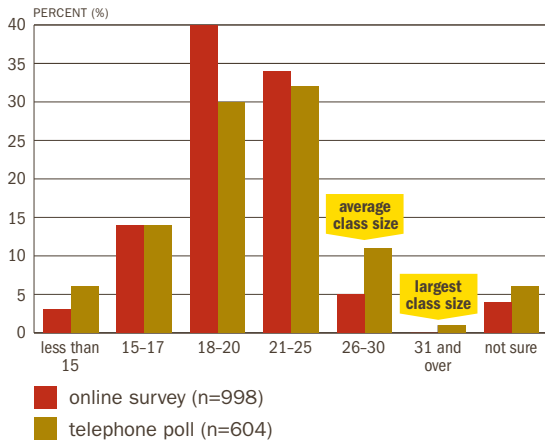


Only one percent of online survey takers, and six percent of telephone poll respondents said that class sizes in these grades should be 26 or above – which they are for nearly half of all general education students in these grades.<sup>6</sup>

### Middle schools:

In the middle grades, the disparity was even more glaring between the reality and what parents believed class sizes should be.

#### WHAT SHOULD CLASS SIZE BE IN 6–8th GRADES



Most respondents thought that classes in grades six through eight should contain 18-20 or 21-25 students, with those polled by telephone again opting for slightly larger classes. Relatively small percentages (only five percent of online and 12 percent of telephone parents) believed classes should contain 26 students or over – where the average is now.

**Manhattan middle school parent:**  
**Class size is way too big. 33 in my son's class...teachers are not able to keep track of each kid...I was sometimes notified a little too late or not at all if my son had a problem. Teachers didn't always get back to me if I called. I don't blame the teachers; I think they did their best; it is just too many students per teacher.**

While 19-25 percent of middle school students remain in classes 31 or above, depending on grade level, only one percent or less of parents believe that classes should be this large.<sup>7</sup>

**Queens mother of 8th grader, PTA officer:**  
**My daughter was one of 35 children in her class. This is totally unacceptable.**

**Fifth grade parent:**  
The large class size (28 students) which means that at the very luckiest of times, kids will get 1-2 minutes of a teacher's undivided attention during a lesson.

**Manhattan, mom of 8th grader:**  
There are between 30-33 kids in each class, even inclusion classes. These makes it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to students or for kids to have adequate opportunities to speak out in class. In addition, teachers do not have time to go over homework in a thorough manner which is frustrating since children put so much time into their work.

**A PTA committee member with a middle school child:**  
The class sizes are ENORMOUS...it is too easy for a child to get lost in the system and to fall behind without anyone knowing that it is happening.

**Manhattan parent of sixth grader in CTT (inclusion) class:**  
Limited feedback from teachers regarding students' progress...I think class size is way too large and this makes it impossible to have more extensive communication from teachers when smaller issues occur.

**A PTA officer from Brooklyn with a high school child:**

[The administration should] get the class size down to a size where each child is getting an education in each subject; NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND? Come on, they are ALL being left behind!

**Queens 9th grade parent:**

Large class size. Not enough feedback for parents...not enough time at parent teacher conferences.

**Manhattan parent of 10th grader:**

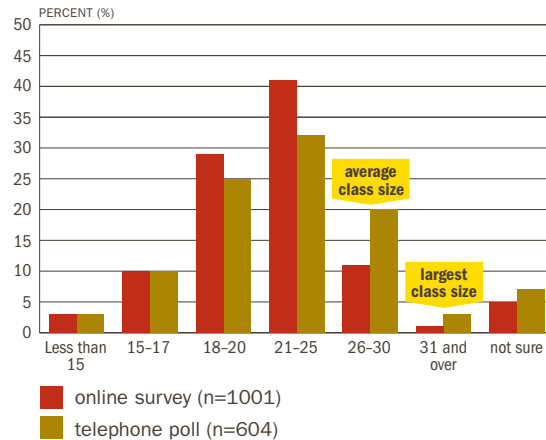
Class size so large that some students could not see the board in some rooms...

High schools:

Finally, the largest group of parents in both surveys said that high school classes should have 21-25 students – with 18-20 students close behind. Only 12 percent of those online and 23 percent of those polled by telephone responded that classes should contain 26 students or above, where the average is now.

While an astonishing 39-47 percent of high school students remain in classes of 31 or more, depending on the subject and grade, only one percent of online and three percent of telephone parents believe that classes should be this large.<sup>8</sup>

**WHAT SHOULD CLASS SIZE BE IN HIGH SCHOOL**



**In short, whether surveyed online or by telephone, New York City parents overwhelming believe that at every grade level, classes should be substantially smaller than the average class sizes that currently exist in our public schools.**

There were few if any ethnic or racial differences among parents holding these views.

What is striking is that parent opinion seems to be consistent with what the research suggests about appropriate class sizes at the various grade levels. The smallest classes, according to most experts, should be reserved for the early grades, with the greatest gains expected

for K-3 students in classes that are smaller than 20 students – just as parents recommended in our surveys.<sup>9</sup>

**Manhattan high school parent: 30 kids in a class is too much for the challenging work of high school. She barely gets any feedback on homework – i.e. checkmarks or x's on an English paper is not helpful for her as a developing writer.**

Although no ideal figure has yet been identified for classes in the middle and upper grades, many studies show a strong correlation between smaller class size and improved achievement and graduation rates at these grade levels as well, though it is generally believed that as students move upwards through the grades, their classes can grow somewhat in size.<sup>10</sup>

# Opposition to high-stakes testing

Another area of concern for many New York City parents has been the increased emphasis on high stakes testing during this administration.

The way in which standardized exams are being used to evaluate student performance and assess the quality of schools to the near exclusion of all other factors, and the consequent increase in class time given over to test preparation was a central concern of many parents who participated in the DOE focus groups, as well as those who responded to our survey.

## Promotional policies

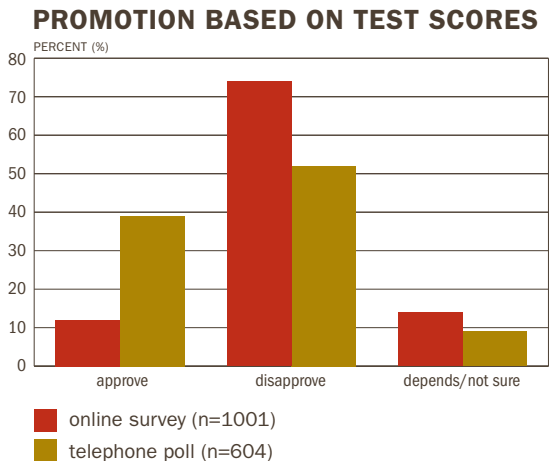
On January 17, 2008, in his State of the City address, Mayor Bloomberg announced that starting next year, eighth graders will be held back if they received low marks on their state standardized exams in English or math. They will join the ranks of third, fifth, and seventh graders, who already have to pass these tests to be promoted.

The decision to apply the use of high-stakes testing to an additional grade was made despite any evidence that the promotional policies already put in place had improved student achievement, and in the face of an overwhelming consensus in the research that holding back students on the basis of their scores on standardized tests is not only unfair, given the unreliability of these measures, but also increases the chances that they will fall further behind and eventually drop out of school.<sup>11</sup>

In our survey, parents appear to concur with expert opinion, and most opposed the use of high-stakes exams for promotional purposes

In our survey, we asked the following question: *“Do you approve or disapprove of making the decision about a student’s promotion to the next grade primarily on the basis of standardized tests?”*

More than half of all parents opposed this policy, with online respondents more likely to disapprove than those polled by telephone.



## Queens mom of 3rd grader:

**I graduated from sixth grade with a fourth grade reading level. I never got left back...and eventually caught up with my peers. I have a Master’s Degree...Under mayoral control I would have been left back in the sixth grade.**

## Brooklyn, 1st grade parent:

Bloomberg has instituted high-stakes testing (for grade promotion) in 3rd, 5th, and 7th grades – that is outrageous!! No single test should ever determine a child’s future. (And he fired or arranged for the firing of 3 members of his educational panel to plow that decision through!!)... Schools have become test prep factories; not places for real learning.

## Manhattan, PTA member:

I strongly disagree that there should be more testing. The kids sit in the classroom and learn rote answers and how to take the test. Already this is the case. They do “not” learn how to reason or to think for themselves. Testing does not create better students, but more bored students with frustrations.

## Brooklyn parent of second grader:

I do not think that the emphasis on testing is the right path and I strongly oppose the continued march in that direction. Children learn in different ways. ...The test has stifled creativity, stressed out the kids and the teachers, and takes up far too much class time.

## Manhattan PTA officer, SLT member and parent of fifth grader:

The NYS standardized tests are shameful. They take up too much class time from actual learning to teach how to take one specific test that many children feel stressed about taking. Teachers know the children and how they are learning. The mayor is not trusting the educators enough.

**Brooklyn parent of 8th grader, SLT member and PTA officer:**

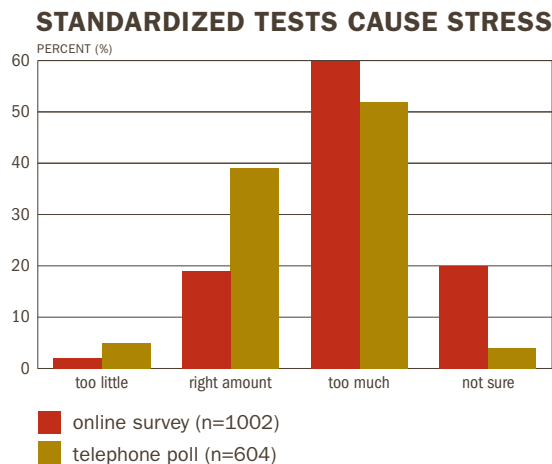
The mayor's program is only about testing. Too much pressure on teachers student and family to be productive.

**Manhattan parent of fifth grader:**

TOO MANY TESTS...I think it was one test per month with the assessments.

**Stress caused by testing**

Not surprisingly, many parents have noted that the increased emphasis on testing had deleterious effects on their children's psychological well-being. A solid majority (60 percent) of online respondents and those polled by telephone (52 percent) indicated that standardized tests caused "too much stress" for their children.



**Parent of 5th grader, SLT member:**  
**The city's students education now seems to be in the hands of lawyers, not educators. The trend is towards standardized testing, as if standardized testing is the great equalizer, while educators know that the best way to create equality in our society is by meeting individual children's needs in ways appropriate to them.**

**Brooklyn high school parent:**

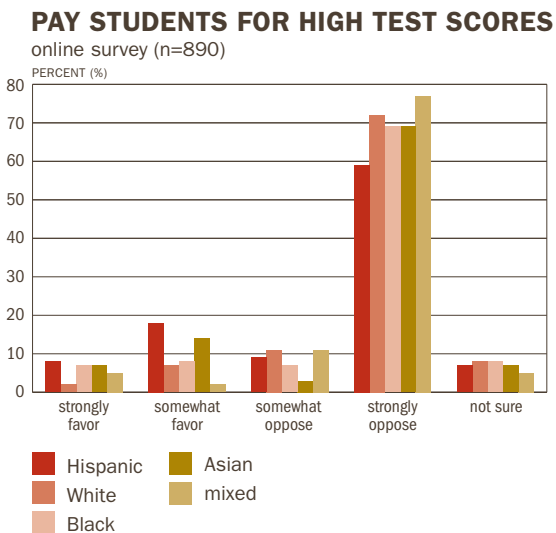
**...the Mayor wants to pay our students and, if I'm correct, even give the parents something for passing grades with money. He's lost sight that the rewards the children and their parents receive should come from them receiving good grades in school. To me, that's buying people, and the children who struggle - what rewards do they get at the end of the year?**

**Paying for high test scores**

In the online survey, we also asked a question about the new experiment that will pay students for high test scores.<sup>12</sup>

There was overwhelming disapproval, with 70 percent of all parents "strongly" opposed, and 80 percent overall opposing this policy.

This vehement opposition prevailed across all racial groups.



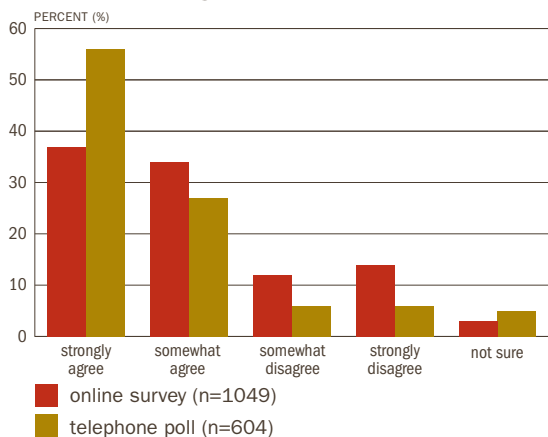
# Principal responsiveness and an educator leading the school system

## Principal responsiveness

In our survey, we asked parents whether their principals were responsive to their input. A solid majority of both sets of parents agreed that their principals were responsive.

Online parents, many of whom were involved at the school level through their PTA and School Leadership Teams, were considerably less positive and less likely to “strongly agree” that their principals were responsive to parental concerns (at 37 percent) than those polled by telephone (at 56 percent.)

## PRINCIPAL RESPONSIVE TO PARENT INPUT



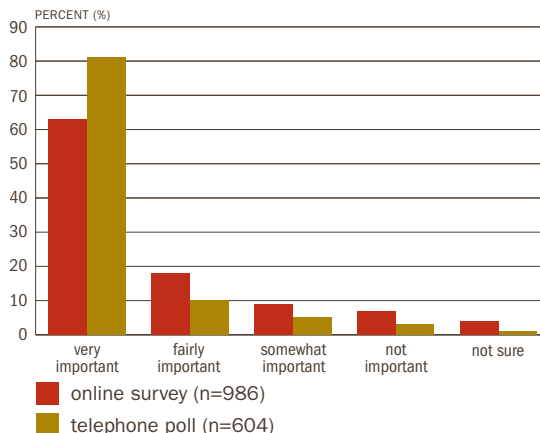
## DOE led by an educator

We asked parents if it was important that an educator run the Department of Education.

Substantial majorities of parents in both groups said that it was “very important” that the school system be led by an educator, with 63 percent of online respondents and 81 percent of the telephone sample responding this way.

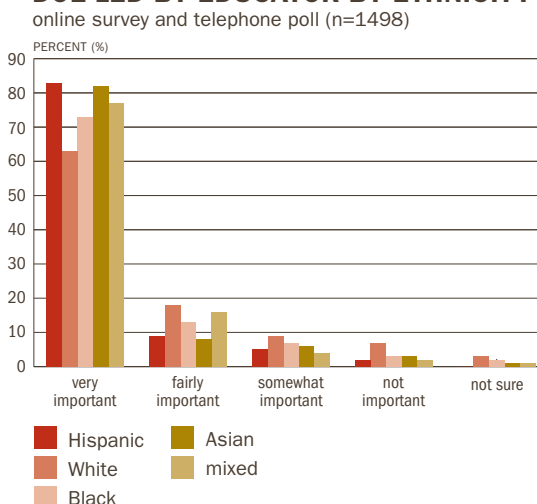
Another 18 and 10 percent of online and phone poll respondents indicated that it was “fairly important” that our schools be headed by an educator. Only seven percent of online parents and three percent of those polled by telephone believed that it was not important at all.

## DOE LED BY AN EDUCATOR



A large majority of the respondents in every racial and ethnic group in both polls agreed that this was “very important.”

## DOE LED BY EDUCATOR BY ETHNICITY



## HS Queens parent, PTA officer:

**The Mayor needs to realize that the schools cannot be run as a business. Our children are not numbers on a spread sheet. He should leave the running of the schools to professional educators, NOT LAWYERS AND BUREAUCRATS.**

## Staten Island SLT member:

The principal is very good and responsive and the teachers try hard to work with you.

## 6th grade parent and PTA officer:

The principal of my child's school is a Leadership Academy person and spins constantly. No one can tell what the principal is doing or what is really going on because it's nonstop spin and pr.

## Manhattan high school parent:

Mayors may be very smart and very experienced in business, but they need to have educational experts running the schools.

## Manhattan parent of 5th grader, PTA officer:

We need educators in charge of school and by this I mean top flight educators not hacks.

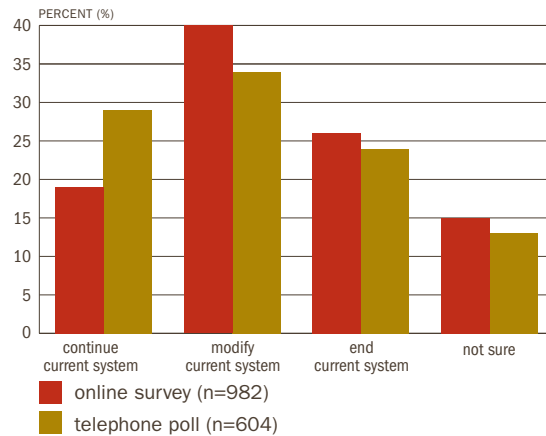
# Views on the future of Mayoral control

When asked about the current governance system, the largest subsets of parents in both our online and phone surveys indicated that the State Legislature (40 and 34 percent respectively) should modify Mayoral control.

About a quarter of both groups said that Mayoral control should end completely (26 percent of online parents vs. 24 percent of telephone sample.)

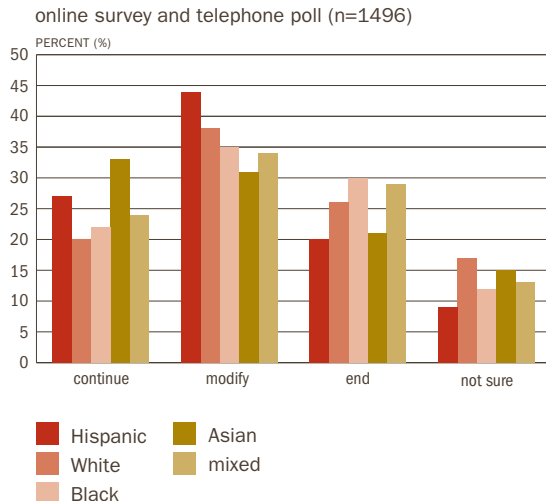
Less than a fifth of online respondents and less than a third of telephone respondents indicated that the current system should remain unchanged (19 percent versus 29 percent, respectively.)

## MAYORAL CONTROL OF SCHOOLS



The largest subset of every racial and ethnic group favored modifying or ending the system. White and Black parents supported ending Mayoral control outright in somewhat larger numbers than Hispanics and Asians.

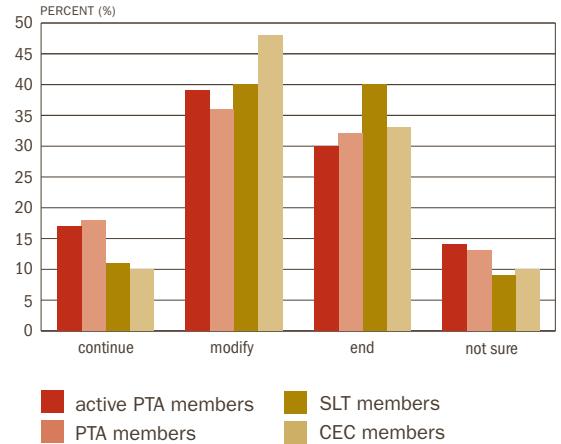
## MAYORAL CONTROL BY ETHNICITY



Among online respondents, those who were parent leaders (active PTA members, PTA officers, members of School Leadership Teams, and members of district Community Education Councils) were even less likely to believe that Mayoral control should continue unchanged – with 18 percent or less responding this way in each of these categories.

## MAYORAL CONTROL BY LEADERSHIP STATUS

online survey (n=556)



To find out why most parents believe that Mayoral control should be ended or modified, we looked closely at the open-ended comments from the 776 who responded to the open-ended question, “Why do you feel this way about Mayoral control?”

**Manhattan ninth grade parent: Mayoral control as practiced is a one-size fits all approach: overly obsessed on quantitative testing, autocratic, paternalistic, and unsympathetic to the voices and opinions of parents, teachers, and other stakeholders in the community.**



## **Lack of checks and balances**

Even though the comments were wide-ranging, six major themes seem to emerge.

Many parents said that the current governance system allowed too much autocratic control by the Mayor, with few if any countervailing forces to intercede. In their view, this has led to often arbitrary and damaging policies being imposed, without any other governmental body or stakeholder group able to question or overturn them.

Parents who called for “modifying” rather than “ending” the current system of mayoral control often referred to a lack of “checks and balances.” The observations of several parents who believed the system needed to be modified follow.

### **Brooklyn SLT member:**

*The mayor, Michael Bloomberg, is basically operating in a dictatorial fashion...He needs checks and balances. It's great that he's on a mission and that he's passionate, but the problem is that he's also WRONG a lot when it comes to education and he doesn't LISTEN to people who disagree with him.*

### **Queens CEC member:**

*Education is partnership among the teachers, parents, schools, and the school system. It's not dictatorship. Input should be from all parties.*

### **Brooklyn 7th grade parent:**

*I do not think one person should be in control of anything. There needs to be checks and balances and input from not only educators, but parents as well.*

### **Manhattan middle school mom and PTA member:**

*I think the mayor has done a good job bringing funds to public schools but he has done a bad job supporting teachers and improving in-school environments for learning. Checks and balances would improve the system.*

### **Brooklyn HS parent, PTA officer:**

**Even the Fed and State government have a series of checks and balances. One person with total control and no systems of checks has created a dictatorship in the schools that has left the parents virtually out in the cold. Telling people what you are going to do is not consulting.**

## **Ignoring stakeholder views**

Just as respondents believed that Mayoral control had allowed for the exercise of arbitrary and dictatorial power, many said that it had also led DOE to ignore the input of stakeholders such as teachers and parents. As a result, parents lacked any voice in how their children were being educated. For such an important public enterprise such as public education, respondents believed that this was wrong and essentially undemocratic.

Here are typical comments from several parents who called for ending or modifying the current system:

### **Bronx SLT member and PTA officer:**

*As an active parent in the school and as a CPAC (Chancellors Parent Advisory council) participant, I have firsthand knowledge of how the Mayor and his cronies completely ignore the parents. This trickles down to the individual school districts (and former Regions) which trickles down to the principals which trickles down to their staff. The staff take things to a whole new level. Children's rights are violated left and right. The security staff treats parents like people going to see someone in prison. They use intimidation tactics to cause fear in the parents.*

### **Brooklyn parent of middle school student:**

*There should be more a requirement for parental involvement in decision making beyond noisy town hall meetings where parent input is ignored anyway. **The parents' roles have been wiped out of having any meaningful impact on decisions that affect our children.***

## **School system run like a business and by non-educators**

Another major theme frequently expressed by respondents was that Mayoral control had caused the school system to run more like a corporation than an educational enterprise – and by executives and/or lawyers who knew little about education.

These officials were more apt to “experiment” with unproven or trendy strategies, rather than implement the important reforms that educators (and parents) widely understood would improve the schools.

Here are the comments of several parents who expressed views along these lines:

### **Brooklyn CEC member:**

*It is important for educators to have an equal say and that we just not move our school to operating as a business model.*

### **Brooklyn SLT member:**

*No one person, who is not primarily an educator, should be in charge of the school system. At the present time, the children are being treated like they are a business venture instead of like human beings.*

**Queens PTA officer:**

**On the one hand, the mayor broke away from previous practices, and did address many of the problems with the previous system...At the same time, the mayor's limited knowledge of educational policy and practices has meant that there is too much experimentation and too little concern with implementation. An emphasis on quick results is also anathema to the very foundations of education, which are of course based on incremental change/learning and reinforcement.**

**Misguided educational policies**

Just as parents believed that the people in charge of our schools knew little about education, they also believed that many of the current administration's specific policies, on issues including class size, testing, and lack of arts education were wrongheaded.

In fact, parents who responded in all ways to the question on Mayoral control – whether continue, modify, or end – often referred to class size in their comments:

**Brooklyn mom:**

*It's [mayoral control] working however creating smaller schools and decreasing classroom size would greatly benefit all children.*

**Manhattan, PTA member:**

*I haven't seen any attempt to deal with the CLASS SIZE, which is the major concern of every parent I talk to who has a child in a NYC public school.*

**Brooklyn HS parent:**

*The mayor has run rough-shod over the schools. He is not an educator and it shows. While judgements for funds to reduce class size have come from the state, he is refusing to comply. The arts have been drastically cut along with after school programs, both of which have proven to improve educational performance.*

**Manhattan parent of a third grader:**

**The reluctance to use any portion of our surplus to build new schools and create new classroom space, allowing for a reduction in school class size...This is really a lost opportunity for the future of our city. Middle class and low income families should have a reasonably low class size; this should not be reserved for private school children.**

**Mismanagement of funds**

Many parents said that this administration had also wasted too much money on expensive and ineffective consultants and no-bid contracts, and had generally mismanaged the finances of the school system:

**Manhattan High school parent:**

*Mayoral control has created a system that favor businesses and contractors and excludes parents; educators and citizens from the decision making process.*

**Manhattan PTA and SLT member:**

*This administration has mismanaged funds by no bid hiring of consultants many of whom are not highly qualified educators.*

**Queens SLT member and PTA officer:**

*He [the mayor] has refused to support smaller class size and has instead lined the pockets of consultants who have attempted to create new educational plans to justify their hefty compensation.*

**Manhattan first grade parent:**

**I don't think that the current system is well run. Massive wastes of money, too much testing, huge classes, no accountability in teaching, false promotions. I don't know if this is due to mayoral control, but I do know that it is being badly done.**

## **Too many reorganizations**

Related to this perception of mismanagement was a widespread belief that under this administration, there had been too many conflicting reorganizations in too short a time – leading to confusion and chaos.

### **Manhattan 4th grade parent:**

*In my opinion, the mayor has too much control. He makes changes and changes those changes (ex: regions established and then disbanded a year later; 207 schools that don't need to follow the mandated curriculum.) This causes confusion for the parents.*

### **Brooklyn PTA officer:**

*Dismantling of regions and constant restructure only adds to the chaos.*

### **Staten Island CEC member:**

*...They made a mess of splitting the city into 10 regions, which didn't work – so they now eliminated the regions and are trying something very much like what was in place 4 years ago...So we are going through so much change and chaos just to end up back where we started.*

A Queens parent referred to many of these issues in her comments, explaining why she favored modifying the system:

### **Queens high school parent:**

*Mayoral control has created absolute power to one person. Parents and teachers are left out of the loop. Major reorganization every couple of years has led to confusion and non productivity. All participants need to be engaged. The upper management of the education dept is run by attorneys not educators. Too much money has been spent on consultants and no bid contracts.*

### **Staten Island 7th parent, PTA officer:**

**I think we should give the schools back to the educators, not to lawyers and politicians. We have seen 3 major reorganizations of the school system in 5 years. It's time for parents and teachers to band together and say enough! We need to give the classrooms back to the teachers and let our children get the sound education that they are promised by law.**

## **Education should not be political**

Finally, some parents also argued that the system of Mayoral control should be allowed to lapse or be substantially modified, because schools are too important to be left to politics, or politicians. In their view, education was a basic human right, and as so, required protection and independence from the political sphere.

### **Parent of third grader; SLT member:**

*Education is one of the most important issues in the city; the mayor does not seem to have the capacity and the knowledge to sustain the continuity that a good education system requires. The education of our children should not be part of any political platform. Leaving all of the education issues under the mayor's control runs the risk of making it a process that will constantly shift depending on the political climate. Education requires a continuity the mayor can not provide.*

### **Brooklyn high school parent:**

*Mayoral Control has lots of advantages in terms of operational effectiveness, accountability, financial resources, and coordination with other city services. BUT IT SHOULD NOT BE A DICTATORSHIP RUN FOR THE MAYOR'S POLITICAL ENDS.*

### **Manhattan 11th grade parent, PTA officer:**

*What does the mayor know about education? Nothing... In a political or corporate mode you want everyone on message...political control translates into politicization of all educational functions and the politicization of the system in general – that's why it's nonstop spin control these days.*

More than 80 percent of the online parents who said that the Mayoral control should be modified made predominantly negative comments about the current administration and its policies.

**Indeed, in many cases, it was hard to distinguish those who favored modifying the system from those who favored ending it.**

Sometimes even those parents who said they were not sure whether the current governance system should be continued or ended appeared extremely dissatisfied about how Mayoral control had worked out in practice.

For example, see the comments of a parent, below:

### **Manhattan high school parent:**

*In theory, it sounded as if mayoral control would allow for improvements, but in fact, mayoral control seems to have somehow led to a system that does not answer to or even inform parents, teachers, students, or the public in any way and that instead makes drastic changes year after year, without input from the people who will be affected; at great cost, both monetary and in terms of stress and difficulty.*

*The endless reorganizations of the districts and of school oversights, the traumatic changes in school bus routes, the hiring of misguided consultants at great cost, the cell phone ban disaster, the increasing of standardized tests at the expense of teaching and learning time, the ostracizing of parents and teachers from all decision-making processes, all could have and should have been avoided.*

*But somehow, instead of mayoral control cutting through such obvious mistakes, it seems to have insulated the bad decision making process.*

## Discussion and conclusions

The thrust of the current reorganization assumes that each individual school, along with its principal and teachers, is primarily responsible for the success or failure of its students. This assumption also underlies the DOE parent survey, as well as the new school grading system and progress reports. Yet this supposition ignores the many systemic problems that remain throughout our public schools, and that were a focus of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case, including overcrowding and large classes. As a result, the DOE survey avoided asking many of the most important questions relating to the allocation of resources and policies that parents believe result in an inferior education for their children.

The large classes in our public schools have been a perennial issue for New York City parents, as well as New Yorkers as a whole. In 2001, Quinnipiac polled New Yorkers as to what would be the most effective method to improve the schools. Smaller classes led the list of choices, with 79 percent saying this would be “very effective” and 14 percent “somewhat effective.”<sup>13</sup> Class size was still the top education concern of registered voters in a *Newsday*/NY1 poll four years later in 2005.<sup>14</sup>

The results of the official DOE parent survey this fall made clear the persistent and overriding preference of parents for smaller classes. When offered ten different options and asked what improvement they would most like to see in their children’s schools, parents selected class size reduction above all others at 24 percent.<sup>15</sup>

A subsequent school-based analysis of the results of the official parent survey found that parents opted for smaller class sizes as their most desired improvement at schools containing 59 percent of the city’s general education students –more students than every other school combined.<sup>16</sup>

In our telephone poll and online survey, over 70 percent of New York City parents responded that the most important step that should be taken to improve our

schools would be to provide smaller classes, far above other methods favored by this administration, whether creating more small schools or charter schools.

Moreover, most parents, whether polled by telephone or online, indicated that overcrowding and/or class sizes had increased or stayed the same under this administration and believed that class sizes should be significantly smaller than they are currently in our schools.

In general, there was also low approval of the emphasis on high-stakes testing introduced by this administration, whether the decision to base promotion primarily on results of standardized tests, or the more recent experiment to pay students for high scores. The latter received overwhelming disfavor among every ethnic and racial group. In addition, very few parents – only one tenth of a percent of the online sample– responded that more testing was the best way to improve our schools.

Instead of giving credence to the administration’s claim that more frequent testing in and of itself would facilitate “differentiated instruction,” most parents appear to believe that the best way to provide the individual help that students need is to reduce class sizes to far lower levels than now exist.

### **Manhattan third grade mom:**

*Class size is way too big, which leads to too much standardized testing—if the teachers don't have enough time to spend with individual children to assess their ongoing and changing needs they must do this kind of meaningless, but terribly stressful testing to be accountable for the children's progress. This is truly unfortunate; as it detracts from important teaching time.*

### **Parent of seventh grader:**

**When are they going to make smaller classes – test the kids blue – it won't change the learning structure – put the test personnel into teaching slots and SHRINK THE CLASS SIZE!**

As to the future of the governance system, a large majority of both sets of parents, whether polled by telephone or online, said that mayoral control should be ended or modified.

Overall, 66 percent of the parents who responded to our online survey, and 58 percent of those who responded by telephone held this view. Our findings agreed substantially with the results of the latest Quinnipiac poll from July 2007, in which 64 percent of public school parents said that after Bloomberg leaves office, Mayoral control should either cease or that the next Mayor should share control with an independent board.<sup>17</sup>

Our survey was able to go further than previous polls, however, by examining the reasons why most parents felt that Mayoral control should lapse or be amended. They included the following:

- The system allowed unchecked power to be exercised by the administration, to the detriment of key stakeholder groups, such as parents and teachers, whose views were routinely ignored.
- The school system had been run more like a business than an educational enterprise, with officials in charge at DOE who knew little about education.
- Tweed had mismanaged finances and spent too much money on consultants and contractors, and had embarked on too many confusing reorganizations.
- In general, the wrong policies had been put into place, including an overemphasis on high stakes testing, and a failure to reduce class size significantly, despite the existence of overly large classes that impeded the ability of students to succeed.
- Finally, parents said that the educational system need more protection from the political sphere and more continuity than electoral politics could provide.

**Those parents who held leadership positions, whether in their children's schools or as members of Community Education Councils, were even more likely to be critical of the effects of Mayoral control, and more likely to believe that the system should end or be modified.**

These were not parents who, as the Mayor sometimes described critics, want to "subvert the system and sit

around and complain and not make it any better."<sup>18</sup> Our respondents were strikingly articulate and passionate, and actively involved at the school and district level. Many had worked hard to improve their children's schools and the system as a whole.

Most of these parent leaders, as well as parents in general, were convinced that the experiment of absolute Mayoral control in New York City had, in various ways, caused significant damage to their children's education, serious enough so that the current governance system needed to be brought to a halt or significantly modified.

They also said that in any governance system, public education should be recognized as a public enterprise in which parents, teachers, and other members of the community were partners, with significant contributions to make.

We will end with the eloquent statements of two of our online respondents:

**4th grade parent, SLT member:**

*The mayor has not been open to parents and educators when making public education policy....Our schools needed improvement, but not without the collective voice and participation of parents, teachers, community residents, students, and all that should be involved in the future of this city (our children)....Some of us mistakenly thought "control" would mean "review" and that he would "weigh in" on matters that required support. We didn't think we would become puppets in his play...Our mayor has allowed the Chancellor to implement testing above real learning, reduce children to scores; take guidance counselors, teachers, and principals out of high school admissions and selections, close schools but not build new schools, and to criminalize students of color through school security practices that mimics correctional facility practices. When will parents be able to weigh in on decisions again? When will we be able to be treated as citizens in a democratic system again?*

**Manhattan middle school parent, SLT member:**

**The school system is not a private body; it is a public body accountable to the dreams and hopes of parents and the city at large. The business community is only one group among many. Please return the schools to the public- and allow educators to lead the way, supported by parent's hopes for their children, and informed by the business communities' needs for the future workforce.**

# ENDNOTES

1 Student surveys were elicited only at the middle and high school levels. For more on the school grading system, see <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/ProgressReports/default.htm>.

2 NY1, "School Advocates To Release Results Of Unofficial Survey," June 25, 2007; Brooklyn Courier-Life Publications, "Parents have better questions for the DOE," Aug. 3, 2007; "A Report Card from Students", Gotham Gazette, August 2007.

3 This was because, as explained to us, telephone poll respondents are generally less patient in terms of sitting through a long list of questions.

4 According to preliminary data from the DOE, average general education class sizes ranged from 20.6 in Kindergarten to 24.1 in fifth grade in October 2007, though there is tremendous variation across schools. In grades 6-12 grades, class sizes averaged 26-27, with even wider variations. See below for more details. All the class size data cited in this report is posted on the DOE website here: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/InformationforResearchers/ClassSizeReport/classize.htm>.

5 Preliminary 2007-8 class size data from the Department of Education reveals that 59% of Kindergarten students, 62% of 1st and 2nd graders, and 61% of 3rd graders are in classes of 21 or more.

6 2007-8 class size data from the Department of Education reveals that 40% of 4th graders and 46% of 5th graders are in classes of 26 or more.

7 2007-8 class size data from the Department of Education indicates that 19% of sixth graders are in classes of 31 or more, 23% of 7th graders, and 25% of 8th graders.

8 According to 2007-8 class size data from DOE, 39% of HS math students are in classes of 31 or more, 41% in HS English, and 47% of HS students in social studies and science.

9 The Tennessee STAR studies are the best source of information on this issue, with the greatest gains seen for students who were randomly assigned to classes of 15-18 students. One of the best summaries is here: Alan B. Krueger and Diane M. Whitmore, "Would Smaller Classes Help Close the Black-White Achievement Gap?" in: Bridging the Achievement Gap, Brookings Institution Press 2002. Available at: [www.irs.princeton.edu/pubs/pdfs/451.pdf](http://www.irs.princeton.edu/pubs/pdfs/451.pdf). See also J. Finn, Reducing Class Size: What Do We Know? US Department of Education, 1999; [www.ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass/](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass/).

10 There are at least fifteen studies that link smaller classes in the middle and upper grades to higher student achievement and lower rates of dropouts and disciplinary referrals. For citations, see <http://www.classsizematters.org/research.html>.

11. The performance of NYC students on the NAEP in 4th grade English and 8th grade Math has been stagnant since these promotional policies were put into place. In 8th grade English, there has an actual decline in performance, particularly in comparison with all other major cities. See NY Times, "Little Progress for City Schools on National Test," November 16, 2007, and the 2007 NAEP TUDA results at <http://nationsreportcard.gov/>. For citations showing that holding back students leads to lower achievement and higher dropout rates, see the expert letter signed by over one hundred academics, heads of organizations, and national experts on testing at <http://www.classsizematters.org/retentionletter.html> See also the Class Size Matters testimony from 2004 at [www.classsizematters.org/testimony\\_retention\\_6.22.04.doc](http://www.classsizematters.org/testimony_retention_6.22.04.doc).

12 See "A Plan to Pay for Top Scores on Some Tests Gains Ground," NY Times, June 9, 2007; this question was not asked in the phone poll.

13 See "New Yorkers Give Schools C, D And F Grades, Quinnipiac University Poll Finds; Support For Term Limits Is 2 - 1," March 1, 2001; <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1302.xml?ReleaseID=533>.

14 When asked, "What is the biggest issue facing the city public school system?" class size was the number one response of registered voters, at 26 percent, among seven choices. The second most popular response, at 20 percent was not enough money. See "Newsday/NY1 Poll: Troubled school system unchanged", Newsday, Sept. 13, 2005; posted at <http://www.classsizematters.org/newsdaypoll.html>.

15 "Smaller classes" led at 24% followed by "More or better enrichment programs" at 19%, "More hands-on learning" at 13%, "Better communication with parents" at 10%, "More preparation for state tests" at 10%, "More challenging courses" at 8%, "More teacher training" at 6%, "More or better arts programs" at 5%, "More effective school leadership" at 5%, and "Less preparation for state tests" at 1%. For the full survey results, see here: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/94AA43CA-0343-4F86-92C9-2CB1E6E7A09E/25283/SurveyReport\\_Citywide.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/94AA43CA-0343-4F86-92C9-2CB1E6E7A09E/25283/SurveyReport_Citywide.pdf).

Nevertheless, the Sept. 6 press release from DOE and the Mayor's office contrasted the 24% of parents who selected smaller classes as their highest priority with "45% of parents who said creating more or better programs should be their school's top priority," while omitting the critical fact that four different responses were lumped together to achieve this higher figure (more or better enrichment, more hands-on learning, more challenging courses, and more or better arts programs.) See September 6, 2007, "Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein Announce Results of First Citywide Public School Surveys," at [http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2007-2008/20070906\\_surveys.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2007-2008/20070906_surveys.htm) At his press conference that day, and on his radio show the next day, the Mayor repeatedly misrepresented the results, claiming that "By a big majority, two to one, parents would rather have you spend more money on enriching the programs rather than reducing class size," whereas according to the actual results, enrichment significantly trailed class size in terms of priorities. NY Post, "Gangs rule schools, Sept. 7, 2007. See also NY Times, "Survey Reveals Student Attitudes, Parental Goals and Teacher Mistrust," Sept. 7, 2007. For a partial transcript of the Mayor's comments on his Sept. 7 radio show, see <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2007/09/bloomberg-gets-it-wrong-repeatedly.html>.

As a result, Class Size Matters, along with Council Member Robert Jackson, the United Federation of Teachers and several advocacy groups, sent a letter on Sept. 11 to the Mayor asking him to retract his misstatements concerning this issue. See "Letter to Mayor from UFT, CSM, Hispanic Federation, CDF and Robert Jackson," at <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2007/09/letter-to-mayor-from-uft-csm-hispanic.html>. See also NY Sun, "Mayor asked to Correct Class Size Statements," Sept.12, 2007. Nevertheless, to this day the administration has refused to retract these errors. See NY1, "Officials At Odds Over Parent Survey Results," Sept. 13, 2007, in which Chancellor Klein continued to maintain that the "The numbers are clear; the mayor's representation is accurate."

16 See the analysis by Steve Koss, posted on the NYC public school parent blog at: <http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2007/10/parent-survey-results-more-spin-spin.html>.

17 "Congestion Pricing Is Bad, But Fare Hikes Are Worse, New York City Voters Tell Quinnipiac University Poll; Most Say Bring Back Board Of Education," July 26, 2007; <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1302.xml?ReleaseID=1087>. 25% of NYC public school parents polled said that the next mayor should retain control over the schools, 53% said that the next mayor should share control, and 11% said that he or she should give up control. When all NYC voters were asked, 28% said the next mayor should retain control, 51% said the next mayor should share control and 9% said the next mayor should give up control.

18 This is how the Mayor described the parents involved in the DOE focus groups who criticized and asked for a boycott of the official parent survey; see NY Times, "Views of Parents, Students and Teachers Sought," May 1, 2007.

# APPENDIX A Background history of the independent parent survey

## Email from Adina Lopatin of DOE's Accountability Office following first DOE parent focus group meeting at KPMG offices

From: Lopatin Adina [mailto:ALopatin@schools.nyc.gov]  
Sent: Friday, February 02, 2007 3:31 PM  
Subject: last night's working session

Thanks so much for joining us for an [sic] the first parent surveys working session last night. I know that Nitzan and I, and our colleagues at KPMG, found the conversation immensely helpful, both in clarifying priorities and direction for the survey, and in raising some new questions. We're very much looking forward to our upcoming conversations about messaging and distribution, on March 6 or 8, and about the results of the field tests, on March 20 or 22. We'll be in touch closer to those dates with meeting locations and other details. I hope you'll keep thinking about the issues we started to raise last night, and will give me a call or an email with more thoughts and ideas.

Also, below is schedule for our other working sessions and focus groups in the next couple of weeks--if you can think of parents, teachers and principals in your schools who might be interested in joining, please email me names and contact information and I'll follow up with details. Also, we'll be visiting schools all over the city to meet with students and teachers throughout the next couple of weeks, and are looking for input from every direction. If you have ideas about demographics or areas of the city we might be missing, just send me an email with suggestions of groups and meeting locations, and we'll work on adding sessions to the calendar.

Thanks again for all of your input--I'm looking forward to talking more soon.

Best, Adina

## Message from participants of the DOE parent survey focus groups to Chancellor Klein

From: Leonie Haimson [mailto:leonie@worldnet.att.net]  
Sent: Thursday, April 26, 2007 6:17 PM  
To: Klein Joel I.  
Cc: Liebman James; Lopatin Adina; Stroud William  
Subject: parent survey

April 26, 2007

Dear Chancellor Klein:

We, the undersigned, are parents who volunteered to be part of the focus groups organized by DOE to help develop the parent survey, due to be distributed at the end of the month. We were told that our interests and concerns would help determine which questions would be included. There was remarkable unanimity in our group, and in the other focus groups whose results we were shown. Certain issues repeatedly came to the fore, including class size, which remains a central priority for parents. Other questions that we said should be addressed in the survey include the emphasis on testing and test prep, the relationship of the principal to parents, and whether our School Leadership Teams were functioning well.

Yet at a subsequent meeting, when we went over the written version, not one of these issues was addressed. Neither KPMG nor the DOE officials present could explain why they were excluded, but they did mention that principals had seen an earlier draft and had objected to some of the questions.

During this meeting and in subsequent emails, some of us objected to the fact that all these core issues had been apparently censored from the survey. DOE officials then made an offer that class size and test prep would be included in a catch-all question at the end, so that parents could select one of these among a long list of ten issues that

concerned them. Still omitted completely was any mention of SLTs, and/or the attitude towards the principal towards parents.

This is not an adequate compromise. The survey is quite lengthy and repetitive, with several questions that do not relate at all to our concerns and do not appear to have come from our groups. Instead, some of the questions appear to put the burden on us as parents if our children are not being adequately provided with individualized instruction.

We feel strongly that, especially given such a lengthy survey, each of the core issues mentioned above – class size, testing and test prep, SLTs, and the principal's attitude towards parents, are critically important, and each deserves its own separate question in the survey.

There is a further point – which is that even if the survey had been composed to honestly measure what issues we believe need addressing in our schools, its results will only count towards 3-5 percent at most of any school's grade – with 85 percent relying primarily on student test scores. Therefore the entire accountability system as currently designed gives scant importance and value to the views of parents.

If the parent survey is not rewritten to address all of our core issues, and then to account for a larger portion of our schools' grades, we may encourage the parents in our various networks to boycott the survey, to protest that once again, DOE officials have not listened to us adequately, do not take our concerns seriously and do not respect our input – even as it relates to the parent survey itself.

We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Lisa Donlan, Community Education Council District 1\*

Leonie Haimson, D2 parent and Executive Director, Class Size Matters

Bijou Miller, District 2 Presidents Council

Marvin Shelton, President, Community Education Council District 10\*

Sue Dietrich, CPAC representative for District 31

Rob Caloras, President, Community Education Council District 26

Sherri Donders, Staten Island parent leader

\* affiliation for identification purposes only

## Response from Chancellor Klein

From: Klein Joel I. [mailto:JKlein@schools.nyc.gov]  
Sent: Friday, April 27, 2007 4:04 PM  
To: Leonie Haimson  
Cc: Liebman James; Lopatin Adina; Stroud William  
Subject: RE: parent survey

Thank you for your [sic] email.

I have every confidence in the open and encompassing process used to develop these surveys and their sensitive [sic] reflection of the concerns of the many parents, teachers and students we consulted in the design process. The surveys will provide an important way for parents, teachers and students to be heard, and powerful tools for evaluating and improving our schools.

I invite you to sit down with my survey design team to go over in detail the process that was used (which you have mischaracterized in your email) and the reasons why any one or another of the many hundreds [sic] questions that were proposed were not included in the surveys. Please contact Jim Liebman if you would like to follow up.

Most importantly, I hope you will not deprive yourselves or seek to deprive anyone else of the chance to exercise the kind of voice and influence over our schools that every parent, secondary student, and teacher in the City deserves.

# APPENDIX B Demographic characteristics of the respondents

## Summary of Demographic Variables of Online and Phone Respondents

	Online Respondents	Phone Respondents (n=604 for all)
<b>Ethnicity*</b> (n=896)		
- Hispanic or Latino/a	10%	33%
- White	72%	14%
- Black or African American	9%	31%
- Asian	3%	12%
- Mixed/other	5%	8%
<b>Education</b> (n=961)		
- Grade School	0%	2%
- Some High School	1%	9%
- High School Graduate	5%	30%
- Some College, No Degree	13%	14%
- Vocational Training, 2-year College	5%	14%
- 4-year College/Bachelor's Degree	27%	17%
- Some Postgraduate Work/ No Degree	7%	2%
- Master's Degree**	28%	8%
- Doctoral/Law Degree	11%	2%
- not sure/refused	2%	2%
<b>Borough</b> (n=954)		
- Manhattan	45%	12%
- Bronx	5%	22%
- Brooklyn	28%	31%
- Queens	15%	28%
- Staten Island	6%	6%
- not sure/refused	1%	1%
<b>Employment Status</b> (n=870)		
- Not employed	14%	28%
- Employed, part-time	24%	12%
- Employed, full-time	61%	58%
- Not sure/Refused	1%	2%
<b>Primary Language Spoken at Home</b> (n=929)		
- English	96%	75%
- Spanish	3%	12%
- Chinese	0%	1%
- Russian	1%	n/a
- French/Creole	0%	1%
- Hindi	0%	1%
- Other	n/a	9%
- not sure/refused	n/a	1%

Online Respondents      Phone Respondents  
(n=604 for all)

<b>Income*</b> (n=899)		
- More than \$75,000	66%	16%
-\$40,000 - \$74,999	26%	27%
-\$20,000 - \$39,999	7%	31%
- Less than \$20,000	2%	15%
- not sure/refused	n/a	11%
<b>Children in NYC public schools</b> (n=1159)		
- one	58%	42%
- two	33%	35%
- three	7%	15%
- four or more	2%	8%
<b>Child's Grade Level*</b> (n=1159)		
-pre Kindergarten	4%	4%
- grades K- 5	53%	41%
- grades 6-8	20%	22%
-grades 9-12	22%	33%
<b>Type of class/school*</b> (n=1159)		
- General education	62%	63%
- Self-enclosed special education	1%	4%
- Bilingual	0%	5%
- Dual language	2%	2%
- Gifted&Talented	20%	15%
- CTT (inclusion)	5%	2%
- Vocational/CTE	0%	4%
- Charter school	1%	5%
- None of these/not sure	8%	7%
<b>Child's gender</b> (n=1137)		
- Boy	51%	51%
- Girl	49%	49%

\*Percent does not add to 100 percent due to rounding or a small number of "other" or "not sure" responses.

\*\*Phone Survey question: 2 or 3 years postgraduate work/Master's Degree



# APPENDIX C Survey questions and responses

## telephone poll vs. online survey\*

1. On average, how many students would you say there were in your child's classes this year?

Under 15	7	(1)
15 to 20	16	(11)
21 to 25	27	(30)
26 to 30	26	(30)
31 to 35	15	(23)
Over 35	3	(4)
Not sure/refused	6	(1)

2. Over the past few years, has the amount of overcrowding in your child's school increased a lot, increased a little, stayed about the same, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?\*\*\*

Increased a lot (very significantly)	19	(17)
Increased a little (somewhat significantly)	19	(20)
Stayed about the same	45	(46)
Decreased a little (somewhat significantly)	5	(3)
Decreased a lot (very significantly)	1	(1)
Not sure	11	(14)

3. Over the past few years, has the class size in your child's classroom increased a lot, increased a little, stayed about the same, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?

Increased a lot (very significantly)	15	(15)
Increased a little (somewhat significantly)	17	(19)
Stayed about the same	51	(55)
Decreased a little (somewhat significantly)	5	(2)
Decreased a lot (very significantly)	2	(1)
Not sure	10	(8)

4a. Which would do more to improve student achievement – providing smaller schools or providing smaller classes? (telephone poll only)

Providing smaller schools	9
Providing smaller classes	73
Both	16
Not sure/refused	2

10. Based on your experience, how many students should be in a class in the following grades?

	Less than 15	15 to 17	18 to 20	21 to 25	26 to 30	Over 30	Not Sure/Refused
Grades K through Three	21 (21)	26 (42)	34 (31)	13 (5)	2 (0)	1 (0)	3 (1)
Grades Four and Five	10 (4)	19 (25)	34 (46)	27 (22)	5 (1)	1 (0)	4 (2)
Grades Six through Eight	6 (3)	14 (14)	30 (40)	32 (34)	11 (5)	1 (0)	6 (4)
High schools	3 (3)	10 (10)	25 (29)	32 (41)	20 (11)	3 (1)	7 (5)

4b. Which of the following do you think would work best to improve our schools? (online survey only)

Smaller classes.	(79)	More testing.	(0)
More charter schools	(1)	More small schools	(7)
Higher standards	(10)	Not sure	(3)

5. Do you approve or disapprove of making the decision about a student's promotion to the next grade primarily on the basis of standardized tests?

Approve	39	(12)
Disapprove	52	(74)
Depends/not sure	9	(14)

6. Do you feel standardized tests create too much stress, too little stress, or the right amount of stress for your child?\*\*\*

Too much stress	52	(60)
Too little stress	5	(2)
The right amount of stress	39	(19)
Not sure	4	(20)

7. Indicate to what extent you favor or oppose paying students for higher test scores. (online survey only)

Strongly favor	(4)	Somewhat favor	(8)
Somewhat oppose	(10)	Strongly oppose	(70)
Not sure	(8)		

8. How important is it to you that the Department of Education be run by a professional educator—very important, fairly important, just somewhat important, or not important?\*\*\*

Very important	81	(63)
Fairly important	10	(16)
Just somewhat important	5	(9)
Not important	3	(7)
Not sure	1	(4)

9. As you may know, for the past several years the New York City schools have been under the control of the mayor, rather than the Board of Education. Next year, the state legislature will have to decide whether to continue this system of mayoral control.

Would you favor continuing the current system of mayoral control, modifying the current system of mayoral control, or ending the current system of mayoral control?

Continuing the current system	29	(19)
Modifying the current system	34	(40)
Ending the current system	24	(26)
Not sure	13	(15)

\*Exact wording for online survey and responses in red, and all figures are percentages. \*\*\*Percent does not add to 100 percent due to rounding

# Acknowledgements

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Any error in fact or interpretation is mine alone and not the responsibility of any of those mentioned above.

– *Leonie Haimson*

Class Size Matters is a non-profit organization of parents and other concerned citizens, dedicated to achieving smaller classes in New York City and in the nation as a whole. Despite the fact that class size reduction is one of the few education reforms shown to narrow the achievement gap, excessively large classes are extremely common in high-needs urban districts around the country.

In addition to improved student achievement and lower dropout rates, smaller classes have been linked to a host of other benefits, including less teacher attrition, lower rates of disciplinary referrals and school violence, more student engagement and greater parental involvement.

We examine the research, analyze data on class size and student achievement, and provide information to parents, public officials, advocates and school board members throughout the country on the benefits of smaller classes.

We also are at the forefront of the effort to lower class size in New York City public schools, which continue to have the largest classes in the state and some of the largest in the nation.

For more information or to make a tax-deductible donation, please contact:

Class Size Matters  
124 Waverly Pl., New York, NY 10011  
212-674-7320 phone/fax  
[www.classsizematters.org](http://www.classsizematters.org)

*This report is available for free download at [www.classsizematters.org](http://www.classsizematters.org)*





