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## Comments on Flushing HS receivership proposal

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Flushing High School has been identified as a “Struggling School” at risk of receivership– a school among the lowest performing five percent of schools in the state. It has been on the priority list since at least 2012, and perhaps earlier. Flushing is also on the overlapping list of Renewal schools.

Under the receivership law, a school receiver is granted new authority to develop a school intervention plan; convert schools to community schools providing wrap-around services; expand the school day or school year; or remove staff.

Yet none of these changes have been proven through rigorous research to provide the improved learning conditions as much as smaller classes have. Thus it is totally unacceptable that last year, Flushing HS had 34 and 35 students per class – even as the city promised in 2007 to reduce class size to an average of 25 students or less in high schools citywide, as part of their state-mandated Contracts for Excellence plan.

In their response to the public comments on their 2014-2015 C4E plan, the DOE wrote the following: “To better align with the Chancellor’s priorities, C4E’s class size reduction plan will now focus on the 94 schools in the School Renewal Program.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet there was no apparent effort last year to reduce class size at Flushing high school last year, and Flushing teachers have reported that their classes still have more than 30 students this year. As a first measure, class sizes should be immediately capped at 25 or less to give students a better chance to learn and teachers a better chance to teach.

Last year, 57% of the Renewal schools had classes of 30 or more and only five out of 94 capped class sizes at Contract for Excellence levels of 25 or less in high school, 23 in grades 4-8 and 20 in grades K-3.

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<sup>1</sup> New York City Department of Education, *Assessment of 2014-15 Contracts for Excellence Public Comment*, December 30, 2014: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/AF304521-9C1E-4EA6-B694-5F9CC80487E9/175614/C4EPublicCommentAssessment20142015FINAL.pdf>

Similarly, two thirds of the 61 NYC schools on the receivership list had at least some classes of 30 or more, according to DOE data. Only three NYC schools capped class sizes at the Contract for Excellence levels.

The Chancellor opposed reducing class sizes in Renewal schools in her testimony before the City Council last spring. Instead, in high schools, she said the DOE would focus on “credit accumulation.”<sup>2</sup>

Much research shows that there is no better way to ensure that students receive the attention they need, stay engaged in their coursework, and enable them to accumulate credits in a legitimate way than by reducing class size. By keeping class sizes at the maximum of 34-35 students, the DOE is maintaining a damaging status quo which will continue to deprive students at this school and others like it throughout the city of the education they need to succeed.

Another related problem is the extreme overcrowding in this building. In 2012-2013, Flushing HS had a building utilization rate of 149%; in 2013-2014, a utilization rate of 143%; both years it has been one of the overcrowded schools in the entire city.

Rather than of capping enrollment at much lower levels, and using available space to reduce class size, the administration co-located two new schools in the building in 2013-2014: Veritas Academy and Queens High School for Language Studies . This decision was made despite fervent opposition from parents, students and elected officials, who were unanimous that this would further imperil Flushing HS’s progress.<sup>3</sup> The school has steadily lost space to these two other schools, and according to sources at the school, this Fall lost another ten rooms.

Incredibly, the DOE plan for the building is to increase overcrowding to even worse levels, according to the *Educational Impact Statement* written in 2013. Student enrollment in the building is projected to increase until 2016-2017, when the building will house 2,990-3,110 students, triggering an estimated building utilization rate of approximately **147%-153%**.<sup>4</sup>

It is wrong to purposely exacerbate overcrowding at any HS by design, but it is criminal in a school that is struggling to survive. This is equivalent to a planned destruction of students’

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<sup>2</sup> NYC Council Committee on Finance and Committee on Education, *Transcript of Minutes of the Committee on Finance Jointly with Committee on Education* May 28, 2015: <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=3820568&GUID=C17A693A-0040-4164-910D-FE55BC0DAA78>

<sup>3</sup> The reaction of parents, students, and elected officials are summarized in this The New York World article (<http://www.thenewyorkworld.com/2013/03/01/queens-schools/>) and this article in The Queens Courier, (<http://queenscourier.com/parents-teachers-students-fight-to-keep-new-schools-out-of-flushing-hs/>).

<sup>4</sup> NYC DOE, Amended Educational Impact Statement, “*The Proposed Opening and Co-location of New High Schools 25Q240 and 25Q241 with Flushing High School (25Q460) in Building Q460 Beginning in 2013-2014*” February 14, 2013: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BF115982-FF79-4522-AA19-1F9BE2F133D8/139292/Amended\\_PEP\\_Notice\\_Q460\\_MarchPEP\\_vFINAL2.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BF115982-FF79-4522-AA19-1F9BE2F133D8/139292/Amended_PEP_Notice_Q460_MarchPEP_vFINAL2.pdf)

hopes and dreams.

On behalf of Class Size Matters, I urge you to take the steps necessary to cap enrollment in this building at lower levels, to move out the two co-located schools, and use the freed-up space to lower class size in all academic classes to 25 students or less.

You will soon discover that students are learning more and are more engaged, and teachers are vastly improved in their effectiveness. As LouAnne Johnson, the Los Angeles teacher who wrote the book *Dangerous Minds*, has said, "When classes are small enough to allow individual student-teacher interaction, a minor miracle occurs: teachers teach and students learn." The students and teachers at Flushing HS deserve that miracle.