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Comments on Grover Cleveland HS receivership proposal

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Grover Cleveland High School has been identified as a “Struggling School” – a school previously called a priority school, defined as among the lowest performing five percent of schools in the state. It has been on the priority list since at least 2012, and perhaps longer.

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. As such, it is totally unacceptable that last year, Grover Cleveland HS, had classes as large as 37 last year in English, 38 in Social Studies, and 54 in math, according to DOE data.

This is even as the city promised the state in 2007 to comply with the Contracts for Excellence law and reduce class size to an average of 25 students or less in high schools citywide. Yet the DOE has never attempted to achieve these goals and instead class sizes have increased. As a first measure, class sizes at Grover Cleveland should immediately be capped at 25 students or less in order to give students a better chance to learn and teachers a better chance to teach.

In their response to the public comments to their 2014-2015 Contracts for Excellence plan, the DOE said 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.”*¹

Yet last year, 57% of the Renewal schools had some classes of 30 or more and only five out of 94 capped class sizes at Contract for Excellence levels. Two thirds of the 61 NYC schools on the overlapping receivership list had classes of 30 or more, while only three capped class sizes at the Contracts for Excellence levels.

¹ <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/AF304521-9C1E-4EA6-B694-5F9CC80487E9/175614/C4EPublicCommentAssessment20142015FINAL.pdf>

Yet 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.”²

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 lowering class size. By keeping many classes at 30 students or more, 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.

If the administration took the steps necessary to cap class size in all academic classes to 25 students or less, you would soon discover that students are learning more and are more engaged, and teachers would be 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 Grover Cleveland high school deserve that miracle.

² See hearing transcripts of NYC Council Committee on Finance with Committee on Education, May 28, 2015 at: <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=3820568&GUID=C17A693A-0040-4164-910D-FE55BC0DAA78>