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Testimony at City Council Oversight hearings of General Welfare and Education
Committees
on the Implementation of UPK and 3K Expansion

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Good afternoon, and thank you for allowing me to speak here today. My name is Leonie Haimson, I am the executive director of Class Size Matters, a non-profit which advocates for smaller class sizes, the elimination of school overcrowding, and reforms to the school planning process.

Public schools in New York City have a huge overcrowding problem. Roughly 575,000 students, more than half of all students, are in overcrowded schools, according to the data from the NYC Department of Education. The problem is especially severe in our elementary schools, where more than two-thirds of elementary students are in overcrowded schools.¹

Overcrowding matters. There are many studies that show the opportunity to learn and succeed is undermined in overcrowded schools, particularly in its impact on increasing class size.² This overcrowding has increased in recent years, largely because school construction and capacity has not kept pace with increased enrollment.³ At the same time, class sizes have increased sharply since 2008, especially in the early elementary grades. In particular, the number of students in classes 30 or more in grades 1-3 has increased an amazing 3800%.⁴

Pre-K for All now enrolls about 70,000 students, with about 50,000 full-day students added since

¹ Leonie Haimson and Sebastian Spitz, "School Overcrowding & Class Size Citywide," February 2018.

<https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Citywide-Presentation-1.pptx>

Data source: School Construction Authority, School Utilization and Capacity Report, 2016-2017, otherwise known as the "Blue Book." Overcrowded schools are defined as schools with a utilization rate of 100% or more..

² Leonie Haimson, "Space Crunch in New York City Public Schools," Class Size Matters, 2014, 7-9.

<https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SPACE-CRUNCH-Report-Final-OL.pdf>

Working Group on School Planning and Siting, "Planning to Learn: The School Building Challenge," New York City Council, March 2018, 10. <https://council.nyc.gov/land-use/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2018/03/Planning-to-Learn-3.16.2018-high-resolution.pdf>

³ "Space Crunch", see above.

⁴ Class Size Matters, "NYC Class Size Data and Trends," November 20, 2017; <https://www.classsizematters.org/in-2017-class-sizes-increase-once-again-according-to-doe-data/>

2013.⁵ The planned expansion of 3K will add thousands more.⁶ Of the current pre-K students, 25,000, or about 35%, are attending classes in public elementary schools. More than half of the students attending pre-K programs in our public schools are in elementary schools at or over 100% utilization. In 76 elementary schools, pre-K has pushed the school over 100%, and in an additional 276 schools, pre-K has exacerbated existing overcrowding.

Pre-K's impact on overcrowding is also demonstrated in Kindergarten waitlists. 590 rising Kindergarteners at 50 schools were waitlisted at their zoned school for the 2018-2019 school year, as of March 2018.⁷ 30 of these schools have pre-K programs, and at 27 of those 30, the waitlist is less than 25, so adding just one more Kindergarten class would have eliminated the waitlist.

The Mayor instituted 3K for All this year in two districts, with four additional districts planned for next year, and four more districts for the year after that.⁸ He eventually plans to add 60,000 3K students as of 2021-2022.⁹ 75 schools are scheduled to add 3K next year, and of these schools, 17 schools are currently overcrowded.

Four of the schools adding 3K next year are Renewal Schools.¹⁰ These four schools have maximum class sizes of 27-31, far too large to provide the close instructional support that these students need.¹¹ These struggling schools should be using any available space to reduce class sizes, rather than adding an additional grade levels.

Our analysis finds that of the 10 districts where 3K is planned over the next three years, five districts have average elementary school utilization rates already above 100%.¹² In six of the districts, a majority of elementary school students attend overcrowded schools.¹³

⁵ All data on preK enrollment is from the NYC Demographic Snapshots from 2016-2017 and 2017-2018; http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/7B3B0E3E-2FA8-4162-8F2E-725A65E418F2/0/DemographicSnapshot201314to201718Public_FINAL.xlsx, combined with the latest available data from the "Blue Book" for 2016-2017.

⁶ Kate Taylor, "New York City Will Offer Free Preschool for All 3-Year-Olds," New York Times, April 24, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/nyregion/de-blasio-pre-k-expansion.html>

⁷ Philissa Cramer, "Here are the 50 New York City Schools with Kindergarten Waitlists in 2018," Chalkbeat, last modified March 22, 2018. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2018/03/22/here-are-the-50-new-york-city-schools-with-kindergarten-waitlists-in-2018/>

⁸ "Mayor de Blasio Speeds up 3-K For All Rollout and Announces 4 New Districts," City of New York, last modified February 2, 2018. <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/078-18/mayor-de-blasio-speeds-up-3-k-all-rollout-announces-4-new-districts#/0>

⁹ Taylor, "New York City Will Offer Free Preschool for All 3-Year-Olds."

¹⁰ "Renewal School Program," New York City Department of Education, <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/RenewalSchools/default>.

¹¹ November 2017 Class Size Report, NYC Department of Education, not currently accessible.

¹² The DOE plans to add 3K in the following districts: 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 16, 19, 27, 29, 31 over the next 3 years. Districts 6, 9, 12, 27, and 31 have elementary school utilization rates of 100% or higher. A list of districts with 3K expansion can be found at "3-K Admissions Overview," NYC Department of Education, <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/3K-for-all/default.htm>

¹³ In Districts 6, 9, 12, 27, 29, and 31, a majority of elementary school students attend overcrowded schools.

The negative impacts of pre-K and 3K on school overcrowding and student learning is a consequence of poor school planning process that is in desperate need of change. Here are some of the inherent flaws of the current process:

- The Projected Public School Ratio, used to estimate how many students will be added as a result of new housing developments is based on Census data that's 20 years old, rather than more recent Census or American Community Survey data.¹⁴
- Worse yet, this Ratio has not been updated to account for any pre-K or 3K students.¹⁵ The result is that the DOE underestimates the number of students projected to enroll in our schools, and then doesn't build nearly enough school space to accommodate them.
- In their estimate for the need for new school seats as reported in their Five Year capital plans, the School Construction Authority currently does not include any pre-K capacity needs.¹⁶
- With 25,000 pre-K students currently in public elementary schools, and more to come given the building boom throughout the city, it is clear that the need to account for additional pre-K students in our public schools must be taken into account in the school planning process.

Pre-K will likely yield significant benefits to some NYC students, although the extent of those benefits remains to be seen, especially if the expansion of the program leads to larger class sizes in the following grades. A recent randomized experimental study, the most rigorous kind of research, found that in Tennessee, public pre-K had no positive long-term effects on students.¹⁷

Several years ago, 73 education researchers and professors wrote an open letter to Chancellor Farina, urging her to invest in reducing class size in grades K-3 and warning her that many of the expected gains from pre-K would likely be otherwise be undermined:

*"We commend you for your commitment to expanding prekindergarten programs, but as you know, early childhood education does not begin and end at age 4. We urge you now to focus on lowering class sizes in all grades."*¹⁸

¹⁴ Working Group on School Planning and Siting, "Planning to Learn," 41. <https://council.nyc.gov/land-use/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2018/03/Planning-to-Learn-3.16.2018-high-resolution.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶ Kaitlyn O'Hagan et al., "Report of the Finance Division on the Fiscal 2019 Preliminary Capital Budget, the February 2018 Proposed Amendment to the FY2015-2019 Five-Year Capital Plan, and the Fiscal 2018 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Education and the School Construction Authority," New York City Council, March 26, 2018, 13. <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2018/03/FY19-Department-of-Education-and-the-School-Construction-Authority.pdf>

¹⁷ Mark W. Lipsey, Dale C. Farran, Kerry G. Hofer, "A Randomized Control Trial of a Statewide Voluntary Prekindergarten Program on Children's Skills and Behaviors through Third Grade," Peabody Research Institute of Vanderbilt University, 2015. https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/research/pri/VPKthrough3rd_final_withcover.pdf

¹⁸ Jacqueline Shannon et al., "73 Education Professors Urge the Chancellor and the Mayor to Reduce Class Size," September 22, 2014, <https://www.classsizematters.org/73-education-professors-urge-the-chancellor-and-the-mayor-to-reduce-class-size/>

Two of the co-authors of this letter, Jacqueline Shannon, chair of the Early Childhood Education program at Brooklyn College, and Assistant Professor Mark Lauterbach of Brooklyn College, followed up with an op-ed in Schoolbook:

“While we acknowledge that the new administration is taking some very positive steps in educational policy, we are extremely concerned that the benefits of these reforms, such as increasing access to prekindergarten, establishing community schools, and inclusion for students with disabilities, may be undermined unless the trend of ballooning class sizes is reversed.”¹⁹

We will be releasing a report in the coming weeks with a more detailed analysis of the impacts of Pre-K on New York City schools.

Meanwhile we make the following recommendations:

- The Council should pass legislation, requiring that City Planning, in collaboration with the Department of Education, update the Public School ratio, to take into account more current census figures as well as the increased number of 3K and Pre-K students in our public schools.
- Finally, it is critical that the our school capacity needs be fully funded in the five-year-capital plan. Right now, the DOE funds only about half of the need they themselves project to address overcrowding in our schools; not even taking into account the expanded number of preK students. If the increased number of preK and 3K students continues to worsen school overcrowding and contribute to rising class sizes, the benefits of the program will likely be severely undermined.

¹⁹ Jaqueline Shannon and Mark Lauterbach, “Opinion: De Blasio Must Put Reducing Class Sizes at Top of His Agenda,” November 6, 2014. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/opinion-de-blasio-must-put-reducing-class-size-first/>