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Testimony on the proposed new five-year capital plan for schools 2020-2024

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Leonie Haimson, and I'm the Executive Director of Class Size Matters. NYC public schools are critically overcrowded and the new five-year proposed capital plan fails to address the need for new seats either sufficiently or expeditiously.

About 575,000 students, more than half of all students, attended schools that were at or above 100 percent capacity in 2016-2017, according to data from the NYC Department of Education.¹ In recent years, overcrowding has worsened significantly, especially at the elementary school level. Nearly 60 percent of elementary schools are at 100 percent or more and 67 percent of elementary grade students attended these schools. This is due in part to the fact that enrollment in these grades has increased faster than new school construction.

The Mayor and Chancellor proposed a new 2020-2024 Five-Year Capital Plan on November 5, 2018. Although the press release from the Department of Education claimed that new plan includes "funding for 57,000 seats over the next five years,"² our analysis finds that 50,000 of these seats won't be completed until 2024 or later, when the Mayor has long left office.

More than half of these seats – about 37,000 – won't be completed until *after* 2024, when the Five-Year Capital Plan is over. By that time, it is likely that schools our will be even more overcrowded, lagging far behind the fast pace of new residential development and population growth throughout the city.

School overcrowding undermines the quality of education in many ways, from denying students the opportunity to have small classes, preventing their access to the cafeteria at reasonable lunch times, precluding them from adequate time to exercise in the gym and/or playground, and/or impeding their ability to receive art classes, music, counseling or mandated services in dedicated spaces. Students in overcrowded schools experience greater levels of stress, and teachers in overutilized schools are more likely to leave the profession quickly.³

¹ "2016-2017 Blue Book," New York City Department of Education, December 2017. Overutilized schools are defined as schools with a utilization rate of 100 percent or more.

² NYC DOE, "Chancellor Carranza Announces Record 17 Billion Dollar Proposed Capital Plan, Nov 5, 2018. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/news/announcements/contentdetails/2018/11/05/chancellor-carranza-announces-record-17-billion-dollar-proposed-capital-plan>.

³ Class Size Matters, "Space Crunch in New York City Public Schools," 2014, 7-9. <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SPACE-CRUNCH-Report-Final-OL.pdf>

Even as the current and past capital plans have not fully achieved their goals for the creation of new seats, it is unclear whether any proposed five-year capital plan was ever released with such an unacceptably slow timeline, with already at the outset, fewer than half of the seats built during the time period it is supposed to cover.

Current plan did not meet its goals for school construction

When the DOE first released the current five-year plan for 2015-2019, 62 percent of the 32,560 new seats or more than 20,000 were promised to be completed within the five-year period, according to an analysis by the Independent Budget Office at the time.⁴ Though the total number of new seats in the current plan increased during the life of the plan from 32,560 to 44,628, the new plan reveals that only 24 percent of them will be completed by the end of the plan in September 2019. Thus only 11,000 additional seats, or about half of the seats anticipated, were actually built over the last five years.

Moreover, of the more than unbuilt 23,000 seats across 35 projects that are being rolled over into the new proposed plan, almost 20,000 seats will not even be built until 2024 or later, and some not until 2028 – more than a decade after they were originally proposed.

Other problems with proposed five-year plan

There are many other problems with the new proposed plan. For the first time at least since November 2011, the DOE has omitted any mention of their own estimate for the need for new seats is, required to alleviate current overcrowding and address expected enrollment growth. The last time they released an identified needs estimate was in the Feb. 2018 version of the current five-year plan, and it projected the need for more than 83,000 new seats, based upon a DOE analysis from November 2017.

Many advocates and elected officials, including in our report entitled “Space Crunch” and in the City Council report “Planning to Learn,” have pointed out how the DOE’s projections of the need for new school seats are made in a non-transparent manner, using a methodology that is difficult to understand or replicate, including in our report entitled “Space Crunch” and in the City Council report “Planning to Learn.”⁵ Indeed, over time, their projections have been proven wrong.

We have estimated that the actual need for new seats is at least 100,000, given the number of overcrowded schools currently, the likelihood of enrollment growth in many parts of the city due to increased population and development trends, and the need for class size reduction. But for the DOE to exclude any mention of their own needs estimate from this plan further undermines confidence in its adequacy.

Among the other questionable aspects of the new proposed five-year plan is the fact that DOE has now slashed the category in the plan dedicated to class size reduction from \$490 million to \$150 million— despite the fact

⁴ Independent Budget Office, the City’s 2015-2019 Capital Plan for Public Schools: How Many New Seats & When Will They Be Ready?, Aug. 26, 2014. <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/cgi-park2/2014/08/the-citys-2015-2019-capital-plan-for-public-schools-how-many-new-seats-when-will-they-be-ready/>

⁵ Class Size Matters, “Space Crunch” 2014; NYC City Council Working Group on School Planning and Siting, “Planning to Learn”, 2018. <https://council.nyc.gov/land-use/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2018/03/Planning-to-Learn-3.16.2018-high-resolution.pdf>

that class sizes are still unacceptably large and this fall, more than 330,000 students are in classes of 30 or more.⁶ Over the last five years, less than half of the funding in the class size reduction part of the plan was allocated and it took several years before the DOE even identified any projects. When they did, it was unclear what the three small projects had to do with lowering class size, as the City Council has pointed out.⁷

It seems as though including a class size reduction category in the capital plan has been nothing more than a fig leaf, allowing the administration to claim that they actually intend to achieve smaller classes in the city schools when there is no real evidence that they do.

In the new proposed plan, the DOE has omitted the category for replacement seats, for the first time in at least a decade. Every year, hundreds of seats are lost because of lapsed leases; this year alone, two schools in District 2 have been threatened with the loss of their leases.⁸ The spending in this category has veered wildly in, from a high of \$1.3 billion in 2009 to a low of \$60 million in 2016, to \$287 million in the current plan. If there is no allocation at all for replacement seats, where will the necessary funds come from?

Impact of expanded pre-K and 3-K on school overcrowding

The overcrowding crisis has also been exacerbated by the expansion of universal prekindergarten, as detailed in our new report, ***"The Impact of PreK on School Overcrowding: Lack of Planning, Lack of Space."***⁹

Mayor de Blasio's Pre-K for All Initiative enrolls about 70,000 students, an increase from the 20,000 students provided with full-day pre-K prior to de Blasio taking office. Our analysis found that more than half of the pre-K students enrolled in public elementary schools in 2016-2017 were placed in 352 schools at 100 percent utilization or more, thus contributing to worse overcrowding for about 236,000 students.

In about one quarter (22 percent) of these schools, the expansion of pre-K actually pushed the school to these levels. As of 2016-2017, 76 elementary schools, with a total of 45,124 students, became overutilized, according to the DOE's data, because of the additional number of pre-K students at their schools. In addition, thirty schools with pre-K classes had waitlists for Kindergarten, which meant that these children were sent to schools outside their zone and sometimes far from home.

⁶ The DOE released class size data for this fall on Nov. 15, 2018. Their summary concluded that class sizes increased in all grade levels in K through 8, except in three grades, K, 3rd and 8th. The decreases in those grades were very tiny, ranging from .3 of a student (in 5th grade) to .04 student (in 3rd). See https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2018-19_november_class_size_report_-_webdeck_-_11-14-18.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=c46ddc95_2 Class size data overall is posted here: <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports-and-policies/government/intergovernmental-affairs/class-size-reports>

⁷ Kaitlyn O'Hagan et al., "Report of the Finance Division on the Fiscal 2019 Preliminary Capital Budget, February 2018 Proposed Amendment to the FY2015-2019 Five-Year Capital Plan, and the Fiscal 2018 Preliminary the Mayor's Management Report. <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2018/03/FY19-Department-of-Education-and-the-School-Construction-Authority.pdf>, p. 13.

⁸ PS 150 and City Knoll middle school have both been threatened with lost leases, and though the PS 150 loss has been prevented, it is unclear what will happen to City Knoll and whether it will be co-located into PS 111, despite parent protests. <http://www.tribecatrib.com/content/mayor-asked-favor-how-ps-150-won-battle-stay-tribeca> ; <https://patch.com/new-york/midtown-nyc/city-postpones-vote-co-locate-hells-kitchen-schools>

⁹ Class Size Matters, The Impact of PreK on School Overcrowding in NYC: Lack of Planning, Lack of Space, Dec. 2018. <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/PreK-report-12.17.18-final.pdf>

The DOE began to implement 3-K in 18 schools in two districts last year, but three of these schools were already overcrowded in the prior year. Additionally, of the 61 additional schools adding 3-K during the current school year, more than one fourth were already overcrowded. Several of these were also Renewal schools, meaning they were struggling with low performance and in danger of being closed.

To make things worse, the NYC Department of Education failed for many years to update its methodology for projecting the need for new school capacity. The formula used for estimating enrollment is called the Projected Public School Ratio, but it was based on census data over twenty years old. and did not account for the expansion of thousands of new pre-K students in the schools.¹⁰ Though the formula was updated this fall, it remains uncertain whether it fully accounts for additional preK students and it does not include any 3-K students.¹¹

If cramming more pre-K and 3-K students into public schools worsens school overcrowding, and in turn increases class size, and/or sacrifices the space necessary for a well-rounded curriculum, then the educational benefits of the program will be undermined. A letter signed by more than seventy early childhood education and psychology researchers to then-Chancellor Farina made this point, and urged her to broaden her focus from merely expanding pre-K to reducing class size in the elementary grades as well.¹²

A recent large-scale experimental study in Tennessee found that pre-K was no silver bullet, and failed to produce gains in achievement.¹³ The chief investigators of the study emphasized that the lack of positive results underscored how the quality of the entire early childhood educational experience through 3rd grade should be addressed if the goals to improve student learning are to be met.¹⁴

The DOE must cease its practice of making overcrowding worse in our already overutilized elementary schools by jamming more preK and 3K classes in these schools, or else the opportunities of students in the other grades will be seriously impaired.

At the same, the Mayor must increase the number of seats in the capital plan and build them in a more efficient, accelerated manner, or else his legacy will be seriously marred by even more extreme overcrowding and educational neglect.

¹⁰ NYC Council, “Planning to Learn,” p. 41.

¹¹ As of October 2018, the DOE posted a new public school ratio, based on housing data 2012-2016 American Community Survey data – including several years prior to the expansion of pre-K, so it is not entirely clear how it takes this into account.
https://dnnhh5cc1.blob.core.windows.net/portals/0/Capital_Plan/Housing_Projections/2018%20Housing%20Multipliers%20Final%2011022018.pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=1XUUO4VQSVq4cfUJVXX3W6NrDAsvCwasXvyxfcGsr5w%3D

¹² See <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Letter-Reducing-Class-size-to-Farina.pdf>. See also: Jacqueline Shannon and Mark Lauterbach, “Opinion: De Blasio Must Put Reducing Class Sizes at Top of His Agenda,” Schoolbook, November 6, 2014. <https://www.wnyc.org/story/opinion-de-blasio-must-put-reducing-class-size-first/>

¹³ 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

¹⁴ Blake Farmer, “Long-Awaited Vanderbilt Pre-K Study Finds Benefits Lacking,” Nashville Public Radio, September 28, 2015. <http://nashvillepublicradio.org/post/long-awaited-vanderbilt-pre-k-study-finds-benefits-lacking#stream/0>

Summary of new capacity in proposed 2020-2024 Capital Plan

- **2015-2019 Capital Plan - February 2018¹⁵**
 - o Identified Seat Need: 83,056
 - o Seats Funded: 44,628
 - o Seats Unfunded: 38,428

- **How many seats funded in the 2015-2019 Capital are completed and available?**
 - o The most recent data suggests that as of September 2018, 7,981 seats funded in the current plan are available across all five boroughs.¹⁶

- **How does that compare with IBO’s 2014 estimate of seats to be completed from the current plan?**
 - o According to calculations from the IBO in 2014, when the current capital plan was proposed, “62 percent of the 32,560 new seats will be completed within the five-year plan period, including projects that had been funded for design but not construction under the previous plan...Another 21 percent of the seats are expected to be completed in time for the 2020-2021 school year.¹⁷
 - In contrast, according to the 2020-2024 Capital Plan, only 24 percent (10,856 seats) of the 44,628 seats funded to be completed and available by September 2019.
 - Another 10% (4,774 seats) will be completed by September 2020.

- **How many seats will be rolled over from the 2015-2019 Capital Plan into the 2020-2024 Capital Plan?**
 - o 23,376 seats across 35 projects¹⁸
 - 15,352 to be completed between 2022-2024.¹⁹
 - 8,024 to be completed between 2025 to 2028.

- **How many seats are newly added to the new 2020-2024 Capital Plan?**
 - o 33,541 seats²⁰
 - 4,392 to be completed in 2020-2024
 - 29,149 to be completed in 2025-2028

¹⁵ 2015-2019 Capital Plan, p. 21.

https://dnnhh5cc1.blob.core.windows.net/portals/0/Capital_Plan/Capital_plans/02222018_15_19_CapitalPlan.pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=OZhC%2FTlqMoFVv5n5yGt3HanljlU5LaudtcVVXeD3loc%3D

¹⁶ 2020-2024 Capital Plan, pp. 16-17. Available here:

https://dnnhh5cc1.blob.core.windows.net/portals/0/Capital_Plan/Capital_plans/11012018_20_24_CapitalPlan.pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=UoDzgbPdHYLWX6MumIqH2i2ZkmoX9No%2BpGs6g%2FAZZoY%3D

¹⁷ <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/cgi-park2/2014/08/the-citys-2015-2019-capital-plan-for-public-schools-how-many-new-seats-when-will-they-be-ready/>

¹⁸ Projects that were located by matching project numbers between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024 Capital Plans. In the 2015-2019 Capital Plan, these 35 projects had about 18,249 seats and 4,723 seats were added to these projects in the new 2020-2024 Capital Plan. We are counting these seats added as “rolled over” and funded in the 2020-2024 new plan.

¹⁹ Completion of projects are based off of “Actual/Est. Compl” column of “Capacity Projects” appendix, page C7-C11.

²⁰ Seats that are were not in projects listed in the 2015-2019 Capital Plan “Capacity Projects” Appendix (page C7-C11) but found in newly introduced projects in 2020-2024 Capital Plan, listed in the “Capacity Projects” appendix located on page C7-C11.

- **Why does DOE claim the identified seats need made in Nov. 2017 of 83,056 seats will be funded with proposed 2020-2024 Capital Plan?**
 - o 56,917 seats funded in the 2020-2024 Capital Plan²¹
 - o 26,139 funded from 2015-2019 Capital Plan²²

- **What the purported 83,056 seats does not show**
 - o Of the 56,917 seats funded in the 2020-2024 Capital Plan
 - 6,918 seats are supposed to be completed between 2020-2023.
 - 49,999 to be completed between 2024 to 2028
 - o 26,139 seats separately funded from 2015-2019 Capital Plan
 - will be completed 2017-2022

Timeline of seats to be completed from the current and proposed new five-year plans

Year of Completion	# of seat funded in 2020-2024 capital plan	# of seats funded in 2015-2019 capital plan	Total # seats
2017		670	670
2018		3,769	3,769
2019		6,417	6,417
2020	132	4,774	4,906
2021	0	6,917	6,917
2022	2,398	3,592	5,990
2023	4,388		4,388
2024	12,826		12,826
2025	12,978		12,978
2026	15,595		15,595
2027	6,776		6,776
2028	1,824		1,824
2017-2028	56,917	26,139	83,056

²¹ 2015-2019 Capital Plan, p. 19.

²² 2015-2019 Capital Plan, p. 17.