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### **Requiem for the Renewal schools: what went wrong?**

On February 26, 2019, the Mayor and the Chancellor Carranza announced an end to the Renewal program, which has cost the city \$773 million since 2014. Since that time, of the 94 schools put on the list by Carmen Fariña, nine schools have been merged with other schools, 14 schools have been closed, and 21 schools have improved enough to be renamed “Rise” schools. Fifty schools remain in the program.

In a NY Times interview<sup>1</sup>, de Blasio admitted the original Renewal plan had been flawed:

*“I’m at peace that with the information we had and the structure we had at the time, it was a sensible approach,” he said. But he added, “I would not do it again that way.”*

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza said that the Renewal plan an “absolutely appropriate” attempt to address problems “that no one has solved at 100 percent.”

Yet the comments made by Mayor de Blasio and the Chancellor, and the report<sup>2</sup> released at the same time, provide contradictory and confusing information about whether the program has been successful or has failed, and what if anything will now be changed.

The report itself claims that the Renewal schools have made significant gains in test scores, suspension, attendance and graduation rates than the average NYC public school.

The report also asserts that education officials have learned important lessons about the flaws of their previous strategy and now know far better how to address the problems in these school. Yet it remains unclear exactly how.

The original Renewal program featured a plethora of coaching of teachers and principals; the new plan will provide “intensive coaching and professional development” for school staff. The old plan offered extra learning time and a longer school day for students; the new plan will do the same. The old plan provided wrap-around services, as will the new plan. The old plan required schools to be trained in restorative justice; so will the new plan. The old plan required schools to use new data tools; the new plan offers data tools -- only they're supposedly better.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/nyregion/renewal-initiative-de-blasio.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5750973/Renewalreport-25feb2019.pdf>

The report describes an “adjustment” that has improved their data system:

*Strategic data analysis from the educational non-profit organization New Visions for Public Schools evolved from a fairly rudimentary spreadsheet tracking student attendance and credit accumulation for high schools to much more detailed, real-time analyses of test scores, discipline issues, and other actionable information for each student.*

This “fairly rudimentary spreadsheet” was sold to DOE by New Visions for more than two million dollars in July 2015, and was described this way at the time:

Data Framework for community schools and renewal sites.	\$2,034,633	\$2,034,633	1 year
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Features of New Visions Data Framework
Presents its tools on platforms (Tableau and Google Apps) that are visually pleasing, functional, and agile.
Contains a platform where customized data can be entered by school staff in parts of the tracker while the rest of the tracker updates to reflect source systems.
Identifies students who are at risk of not graduating based on credit accumulation, Regents exams results, attendance, marking period grades, and currently programmed classes.
Allows schools to estimate graduation rates by including both active and discharged students (toggling the discharged students on or off).
Contains a tool that automatically filters students by risk level. Any user – regardless of skill level - can enter attendance and credit thresholds and quickly and easily generate a list of students for intervention.
Allows sorting of students by travel distance, feeder school, and Advanced Placement exams.

*The Data Framework will address the urgent, unique, and complex needs of Renewal Schools. The \$2,034,633 cost covers New Visions program administrators who provide back-end technical data assistance that cannot be replicated by DIIT, as well as a "train-the-trainer" model for school support organizations, including borough field centers and superintendents. This model builds schools' capacity to analyze data differently, including monitoring trends across the school and managing individual students' cases.*

The new report does appear to subtly critique the previous use of outside expensive consultants—one of the most criticized aspects of the Renewal program, along with the increased bureaucracy.<sup>3</sup>

Yet neither the previous plan nor the new one mentions the one reform that would really transform the classroom and improve the opportunity for success for both students and teachers in these schools ---reducing class size.

Last year, I testified to the City Council about how each year since 2014, the DOE had promised the NY State Education Department they would focus their class size reduction efforts on the Renewal schools, as part of their required annual Contract for Excellence (C4E) plan. Here is an excerpt from this fall’s C4E proposed plan<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>3</sup> <https://nypost.com/2017/03/05/citys-renewal-program-costs-big-bucks-but-shows-few-results/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Renewal-Schools-Testimony-Final-2.27.18.pdf>

For the 2018-2019 school year, the DOE will continue its efforts to reduce class size...in the following ways:

- Last year, NYCDOE focused on class size reduction in the Renewal School Program. These schools align well with the goals of Contracts for Excellence, as they serve students with the greatest educational needs, including students in poverty, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency, and many of these schools are historically underperforming and have high class sizes.
- For the 2018-2019 school year, NYCDOE will continue to focus on the Renewal Schools in its class size reduction efforts.

Yet no details were ever been given about how their class size “efforts” would be funded or directed, and never has DOE followed through on this pledge.

This year’s class size data reveals that more than one third, or 36 percent, of the remaining fifty Renewal schools have not lowered their average class size by even a fraction of a student since 2014. The average reduction in class size of all the Renewal schools since 2014 has been is only 0.7 – less than one student per class.

None of the Renewal schools capped class sizes this fall at the original Contract for Excellence goals of 20 students in grades K-3, 23 in grades 4-8, and 25 in high school. Nearly three quarters (74 percent) have maximum class sizes of 30 or more.

In my testimony, I explained that those Renewal schools that did offer small classes were far more likely to have improved achievement, attendance and graduation rates, as measured by their impact ratings on DOE’s school performance dashboard<sup>5</sup>, which controls for student background.

Table 1- Correlation Between Renewal Schools’ Average Class Sizes and School Impact

Class Size Data	N	Pearson Correlation (R Value)	P Value
November 2016 Class Size	85	-0.326**	0.002
February 2017 Class Size	85	-0.314**	0.003

\*\* Correlation is Significant at the .01 Level (1-tailed)

It is not surprising that every one of the five schools that are cited in the DOE report as having improved results also reduced class size by between 2.1 and 4.2 students per class since 2014, to reasonably low levels.

School Name	School Type	November 2014-2015 Average Class Size	November 2015-2016 Average Class Size	November 2016-2017 Average Class Size	November 2017-2018 Average Class Size	November 2018-2019 Average Class Size	Rise or Renewal	Difference in class size betw 2014-2015 and 2018-2019
AUGUST MARTIN HIGH SCHOOL	High School (9-12)	24.8	26.2	26.1	26.4	21.8	Renewal	-3.1
PAN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL	High School (9-12)	25.0	24.6	23.8	21.5	22.9	Rise Program	-2.1
P.S. 015 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	Elementary (K-5)	18.3	18.0	17.7	15.7	14.1	Rise Program	-4.2
RICHMOND HILL HIGH SCHOOL	High School (9-12)	29.1	27.8	25.6	26.3	25.1	Renewal	-4.0
P.S. 154 JONATHAN D. HYATT	Elementary (K-5)	20.6	19.9	19.6	19.9	17.5	Rise Program	-3.1

<sup>5</sup> [https://tools.nycenet.edu/dashboard/#dbn=27Q042&report\\_type=EMS&view=City](https://tools.nycenet.edu/dashboard/#dbn=27Q042&report_type=EMS&view=City)

The issue of class size is not mentioned in the DOE report, which instead ascribes these schools' improvements to more amorphous reasons, including stronger school leadership, more faithful restorative justice practices, better oversight on attendance, and, of course, ongoing data analysis.

Contrast the class sizes in the chart above with DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, where attendance and graduation rates remain low, and average class sizes have *increased* since 2014. This fall maximum classes were larger than 34 students per class in every subject – classes so large they violate the union cap. In 2017, the entire teaching staff at Dewitt Clinton was required to re-apply for their jobs.<sup>6</sup>

At Boys and Girls High School in Brooklyn, another school with also with low attendance and graduation rates, class sizes have actually *increased* on average by three students per class since 2014. This fall at Boys and Girls, maximum classes exceeded 34 students per class in every subject as well.

*No matter what sort of coaching teachers receive, no matter what data analysis is done, results in these schools will not improve unless class sizes are substantially reduced.*

What's astounding is that despite all the apparent obsession with data analysis, no analysis has apparently been done by either DOE or the NY State Department of Education of these schools' class sizes, which is the most obvious data to collect and the most important. For all Chancellor Carranza's repeated statements that he understands that class size matters<sup>7</sup>, he has ignored this critical role that this plays in student performance, as did the five Chancellors who preceded him.

In any case, it is likely that the Renewal program will be supplanted by the so-called "Bronx plan" adopted in the new UFT contract<sup>8</sup>, that leaves school improvement to committees of administrators and teachers to determine the fate of many of these struggling schools – committees that have replaced School Leadership Teams in their decision-making power and leave parents out of the loop<sup>9</sup>.

The "Bronx plan" also includes lots of new, higher paid positions for teachers that the union clearly favors, including "Peer collaborative Teachers", "Teacher Ambassadors", "Master Teachers", "Model Teachers" "Teacher Development Facilitators" and "Teacher Team leaders" rather than hiring additional teachers to help lower class size.

We will see if the "Bronx plan" succeeds any better than the Renewal program, but it seems unlikely, given how little has been learned from the failures of what came before.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2017/10/19/the-entire-staffs-at-two-troubled-new-york-city-high-schools-must-reapply-for-their-jobs/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2018/05/live-tweeting-chancellor-carranzas.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2018/10/another-disappointing-uft-contract-when.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2018/10/in-new-uft-contract-parents-cut-out-of.html>