



Class Size Matters  
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## Fund class size reduction now!

**Class Size Matters is proposing that the NYC Council allocate \$200 million to be targeted to reducing class size, starting first in the early grades and in struggling schools.**

That amount would pay for the salaries of about 2,000 new teachers, which could reduce class size in as many as 8,000 classrooms – as adding a new teacher at a grade level lowers class size for all the other students in that same grade in the school.

These funds would represent less than one percent of the \$26.9 billion dollars that will be spent by DOE next year.

### **Research on class size reduction shows a narrowing of achievement gap and eventual cost savings**

As research shows, smaller classes lead to significant improvements in learning, as well as student engagement, disciplinary referrals, teacher attrition, and high school graduation rates, particularly for disadvantaged students.<sup>1</sup> Economists have estimated that smaller classes have economic benefits about twice the costs, especially for low-income students and children of color, who make up the majority of students in NYC public schools.<sup>2</sup> This is why class size reduction has been identified as not only boosting achievement for all students, but also is one of only a handful of reforms shown to narrow the achievement gap between economic and racial groups.<sup>3</sup>

Since Mayor de Blasio took office, student achievement has been flat or declining, as measured on the NAEP exams, the most reliable national assessments, and the achievement gap between students of different economic and racial groups has widened.<sup>4</sup>

Smaller classes will also likely lead to substantial cost savings in terms of lowering special education referrals, raising four year graduation rates as students move through the system more quickly, reducing grade retention rates and lessening teacher training costs, as teacher attrition rates decrease.<sup>5</sup>

While the Mayor has focused most of his efforts on expanding preK and now 3K, a letter sent by over 70 professors of education and psychology to then-Chancellor Farina in 2014 emphasized that any gains from preK would likely be undermined without concurrent effort to reduce class size in grades K-3.<sup>6</sup> The most

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.classsizematters.org/research-and-links>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/economic-considerations-and-class-size.pdf> and <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/The-Non-Cognitive>Returns-to-Class-Size.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.classsizematters.org/research-and-links/#opportunity>

<sup>4</sup> <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2018/04/10/yet-again-new-york-city-shows-no-gains-on-a-national-reading-and-math-exam/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Summary-of-Class-Size-Reduction-Research-NY.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The letter is posted here: <https://www.classsizematters.org/73-education-professors-urge-the-chancellor-and-the-mayor-to-reduce-class-size/> A related oped is here: <https://www.wnyc.org/story/opinion-de-blasio-must-put-reducing-class-size-first/>

authoritative large-scale randomized experiment ever done in preK by Vanderbilt University, the gold standard in research, found no academic benefits from the program once students entered third grade.<sup>7</sup>

As Dale Farran, one of the Vanderbilt lead researchers said, “*Too much has been promised from one year of preschool intervention without the attention needed to the quality of experiences children have and what happens to them in K-12.*”<sup>8</sup> As both Farran and the other lead researcher, Mark Lipsey concluded:

*“The income-related achievement gap ... does not exist solely because children do not have a pre-K experience or even a “high quality” pre-K experience. There are other important factors at play including increasing income segregation in the public schools and the low quality of schools serving the poor.”*<sup>9</sup>

## **History of class size trends in NYC and popular support**

In the landmark Campaign for Fiscal Equity case, the state’s highest court concluded in 2003 that smaller classes were needed for NYC students to receive their constitutional right to a sound basic education. Yet class sizes are even larger now, particularly in the early grades. Since 2007, average NYC class sizes have increased sharply and continue to be 13-30% larger than class sizes in the rest of the state. This fall, there are more than 336,000 students in classes of thirty or more.<sup>10</sup>

The increase in class size in the early grades has been particularly sharp. Until about 2011, the DOE abided by a side agreement to cap class sizes at 28 students per class in grades 1-3, under an initiative that was originally established by the City Council when Peter Vallone was Speaker.<sup>11</sup> After 2011, the DOE refused to abide by those caps, which has led to the number of students in classes of thirty or more in these grades surging by nearly 3,000%.

In a UFT teacher survey from 2014 – the most recent survey publicly available - 99% NYC teachers responded that class size reduction would be an effective reform to improve NYC schools. About 90% of teachers said that this would be a “very effective” reform – far outstripping any other proposal.<sup>12</sup>

According to the DOE’s school environment surveys, smaller classes has been the highest or second highest priority of parents out of nine choices when asked what changes they would like to see in their children’s schools.<sup>13</sup>

## **What about space?**

In about half the school districts, there is space to lower class size now. In some overcrowded districts, preK students could be moved into CBOs, many of which are under-enrolled and in danger of closing. Kindergarten students could also be placed in DOE preK centers where they could be provided with smaller classes and less chaotic conditions. DOE could also choose to move out co-located charter schools.

Overall, there does need to be an expedited capital plan. The proposed five-year capital plan as currently designed is both underfunded and excessively backloaded, with 50,000 of the 57,000 new school seats not completed until 2024 or later. Another \$100 million in upfront costs amortized over time would fund more than 21,000 additional seats, given the current 50% state reimbursement for capital expenses. And as shown in the preK program, where there is political leadership, space can be found. The same can happen with a coordinated and prioritized class size reduction plan.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/research/pri/VPKthrough3rd\\_final\\_withcover.pdf](https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/research/pri/VPKthrough3rd_final_withcover.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nashvillepublicradio.org/post/long-awaited-vanderbilt-pre-k-study-finds-benefits-lacking#stream/0>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Expectations-of-sustained-effects-from-scaled-up-preK-Tennessee-study\\_4.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Expectations-of-sustained-effects-from-scaled-up-preK-Tennessee-study_4.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.classsizematters.org/citywide-class-size-trends-since-1998/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20110416005653/http://www.uft.org/faqs/what-are-class-size-limits-my-grade>

See also <https://web.archive.org/web/20130515094654/http://bradlander.com/largeclasses> and <https://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Timeline-on-C4E-CSR-process-6.5.17.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.uft.org/files/attachments/annual-teacher-survey-2014.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports-and-policies/school-quality/nyc-school-survey/survey-archives>

*Below are budget comparisons to put the proposed \$200 million for class size reduction in perspective:*

### **DOE spending in FY 2019 Education Budget:** <sup>14</sup>

- **\$89 million** for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Literacy coaches (without any positive results so far.)<sup>15</sup>
- **\$125 million:** Increase in fair student funding, without an appreciable impact on class size.<sup>16</sup>
- **\$136 million:** Absent Teacher Reserve.<sup>17</sup>
- **\$192 million per year:** Renewal program to turn around struggling schools (without clear evidence of systemwide academic improvement – except for schools that did lower class size.)<sup>18</sup>
- **\$195 million** for Community Schools. (Results not yet released from RAND evaluation.)
- **\$325 million:** Tuition reimbursement for private schools for students with IEPs.<sup>19</sup>
- **\$878 million** for Universal preK.

### **For FY 2020, the Mayor has proposed:**

- **\$9.3 million** for a new K-8 science curriculum
- **\$109 million** more for 3K expansion
- **\$300 million** in projected increases for special education services

### **Overall NYC DOE budget:**

- Spending on central admin increased by **22%** between 2016 – 2018 (by \$38.3 M)
- School support organizations – increased by **30%** since 2016 (by \$76.6 M)
- General ed instruction – increased by **10%** since 2016 (by \$604 M –much of this for preK)

*Prepared by Leonie Haimson, Class Size Matters, April 2, 2019*

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<sup>14</sup> Much of the data for FY 2019 is from May 2018 NYC Council finance committee report  
<https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2018/05/040-DOE.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-city-study-shows-literacy-coaches-had-no-effect-on-low-income-second-graders-1533248508>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2018/04/25/as-battle-over-education-funding-divides-democrats-new-york-city-mayor-adds-125m-to-citys-schools/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2018/06/14/new-york-citys-absent-teacher-reserve-could-get-pricier-as-teachers-collect-raises-bonuses/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/nyregion/deblasio-school-renewal-bill.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2019/01/07/private-school-tuition-reimbursement/>