



Class Size Matters
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Class Size Matters Testimony on Impact of COVID-19 on Student Learning and Academic Achievement

Thank you for holding these oversight hearings today. My name is Leonie Haimson and I am the Executive Director of Class Size Matters. Recent articles in the NY Post¹, Wall Street Journal², and Gothamist³ have reported that online class sizes this year for NYC public school students have grown to excessive sizes, based on parent reports.

Unfortunately, the DOE failed to report on class sizes this year by Nov. 15 as legally mandated by Local Law 125, first passed in 2005.⁴ After you, Chair Treyger, sent the Chancellor on Oct. 15, 2020, pointing out how this reporting is especially important this year given the extraordinary class sizes reported by many parents, the Deputy Chancellor Karin Goldmark responded a month later that they would not report on class size until Dec. 31.⁵

December 31 came and went. On Jan. 4, I heard from members of the Council staff the DOE intended to postpone their reporting on class sizes *until "early or mid-January."* It is now Jan. 20, and the data is still not posted.

In your original letter, Chair Treyger, you also asked that the class sizes be disaggregated by online classes vs. in-person classes, since the averages will otherwise be meaningless. Yet the Deputy Chancellor said that they would not report on disaggregated class sizes until Feb. 15.

It is difficult to understand why this should take so long, especially as at the Mayor's press conference on Oct. 26, Chancellor Carranza said that schools have been reporting attendance data and thus class size in "*literally three buckets of attendance every single day*": in-person classes, remote blended learning classes, and full-time remote classes.⁶ Thus, they should have been able to report disaggregated class sizes at that time.

¹ <https://nypost.com/2020/09/19/remote-classes-swell-to-unconscionable-sizes-at-nyc-schools/>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/online-classes-in-new-york-could-reach-nearly-70-students-11600800407>

³ <https://gothamist.com/news/overwhelmed-teachers-and-overcrowded-virtual-classes-some-parents-say-remote-learning-failing-their-kids>

⁴ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=444012&GUID=93B2948F-6AE9-4D74-BC34-AA4703DF7A4D&Options=&Search=>

⁵ <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2020/11/doe-to-delay-release-of-any-class-size.html>

⁶ <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/736-20/transcript-mayor-de-blasio-holds-media-availability>

One suspects that DOE officials just don't want people to know how large the online classes actually are.

We do have some data, however, on class sizes of special needs students, because of a survey undertaken by Special Support Services LLC between October 7 and October 26, last fall.

This survey received more than a thousand responses by NYC parents of special needs students, and you can see the disaggregated results below.⁷ It shows many students in self-contained classes that are limited by law to 12 to 15 students were subjected instead to online class sizes as large as 30-38. Some students in ICT (inclusion classes) that are usually limited to 25-34 by union contract were enrolled in online classes as large as 45, 50 or more. Astonishingly, some students on the autistic spectrum in ASD Nest classes – supposed to be extremely small – were subjected to remote classes of thirty or more.

Classes this large make it absolutely impossible for any student to receive the individual feedback they need, especially students with disabilities. Instead, online class sizes should be as small as possible, to ensure sufficient support and engagement in learning.⁸

So, what should be done next year to make up for the huge losses, both academic and emotional, suffered by students this year?

Unfortunately, the Chancellor has announced that for next year, he wants to double-down on online, commercially prepared digital assessments and curriculum, which he calls “personalized”, but which are really the opposite – impersonal and mechanized.⁹ One would think after the disaster of this year, he would know better – that students need more contact with actual teachers and human being rather than less.

Instead, with the help of federal and state funds, NYC schools should focus on two ways to make this happen:

- 1- Class sizes should be reduced to as small a level as possible, to provide enhanced support to all students, but especially those whose education has suffered the most from the pandemic.
- 2- There needs to be an expanded tutoring system for our schools, based on the AmeriCorps model of national service.

As Prof. Susan Dynarski has written, *“The federal government can tap unused energy and talent by funding a big domestic volunteer effort for our schools, in the style of AmeriCorps. There will be far too many unemployed college students — and graduates — in the coming years, because recessions always hit young workers the hardest.”*¹⁰

⁷ See: <https://specialsupportservices.com/covid-19-teacher-shortage-survey/>

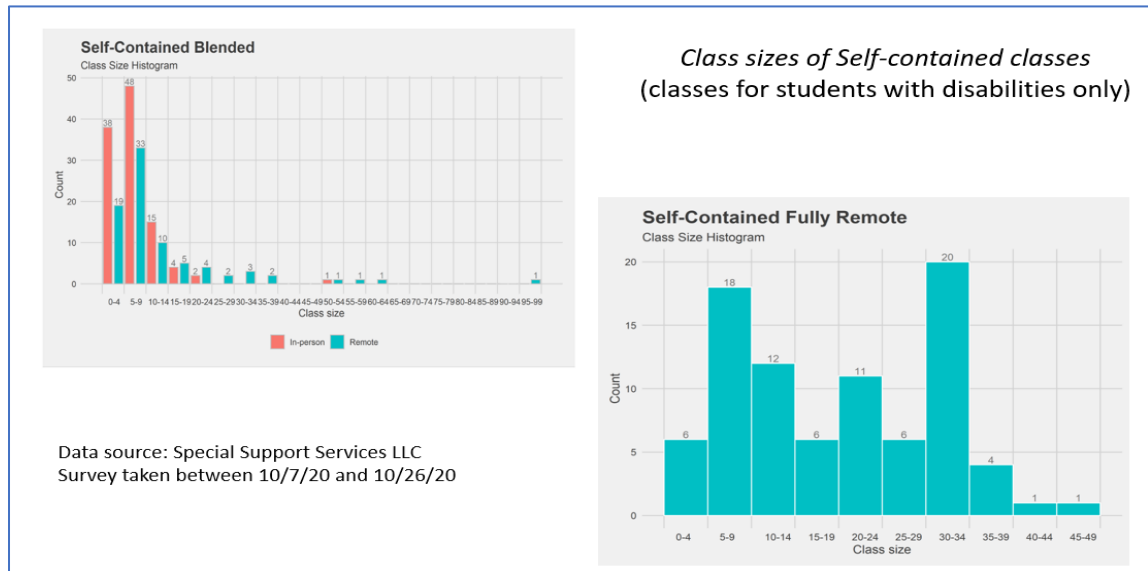
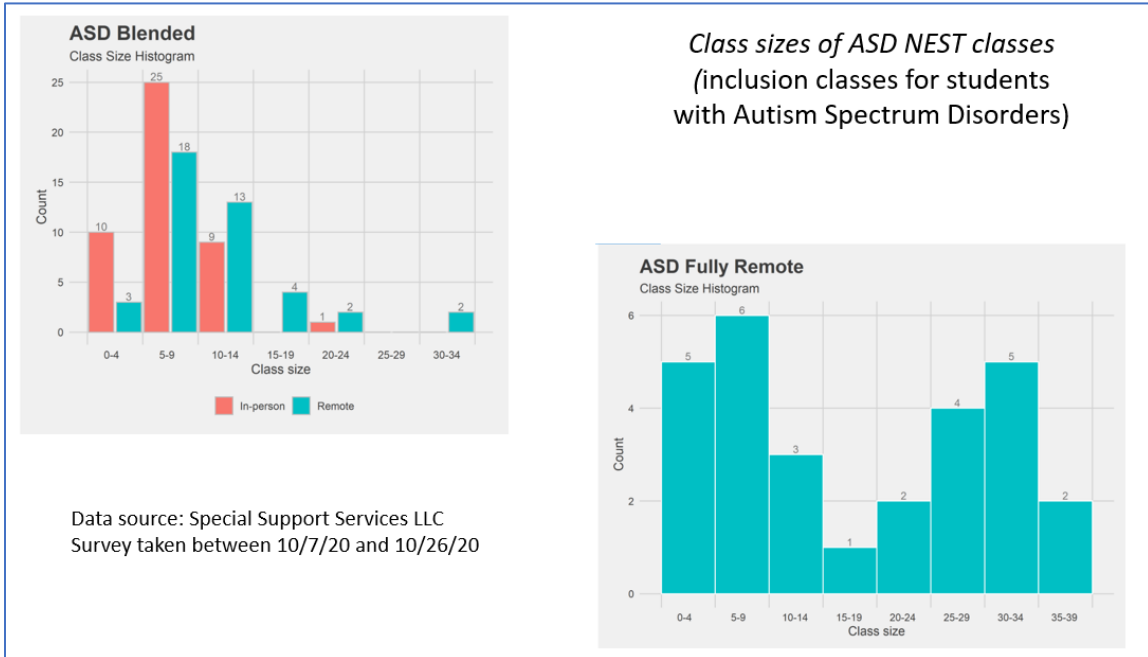
⁸ See comments from Ryan Hill, NJ KIPP leader at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/07/us/remote-learning-fall-2020.html>. who has capped online class sizes in the early grades to no more than ten students, as *“limiting class sizes may be even more important online than in the physical classroom...On Zoom, for example, it is helpful for a teacher to be able to see all of their students' faces at once, instead of having to scroll through multiple screens.”* Two prominent education researchers have written that to improve online learning, *“Common sense suggests that smaller groups and lower student-adult ratios can help increase interactive opportunities.”* <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/09/02/teachers-live-screen-time-is-precious-use.html>

⁹ <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/12/10/22168384/nyc-schools-covid-learning-loss>

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/business/school-education-online-money.html>

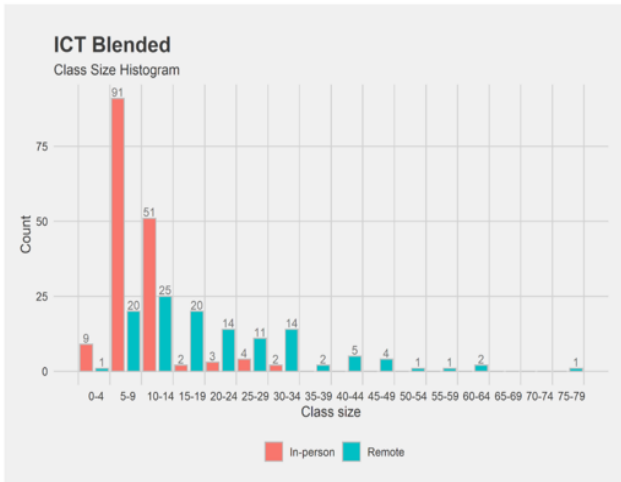
The United Kingdom has instituted a similar national tutoring program.¹¹ And Sen. Chris Coons has introduced a bipartisan bill in Congress called the *(CORPS) Act* to do just that.¹²

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

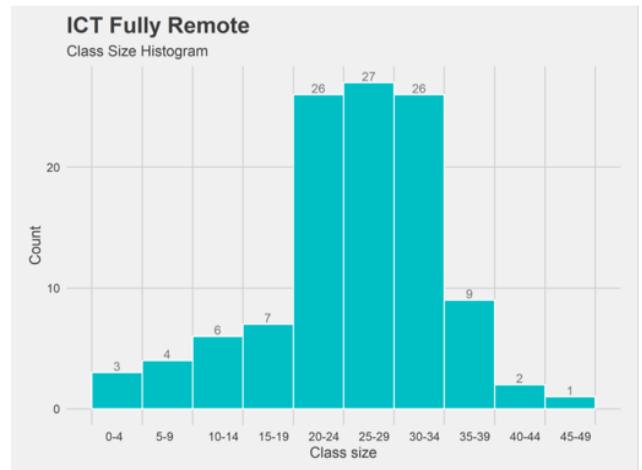


¹¹ <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/faqs>

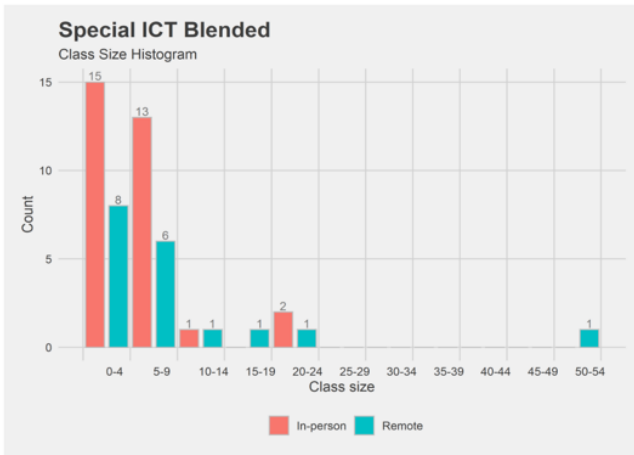
¹² <https://www.coons.senate.gov/news/press-releases/sens-coons-wicker-bipartisan-group-of-colleagues-unveil-bill-to-expand-national-service-dramatically-in-next-covid-19-relief-package> *Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act* would double the number of AmeriCorps positions available this year to 150,000 and provide a total of 600,000 service opportunities nationwide over the next three years to unemployed youth and others looking to assist their communities.



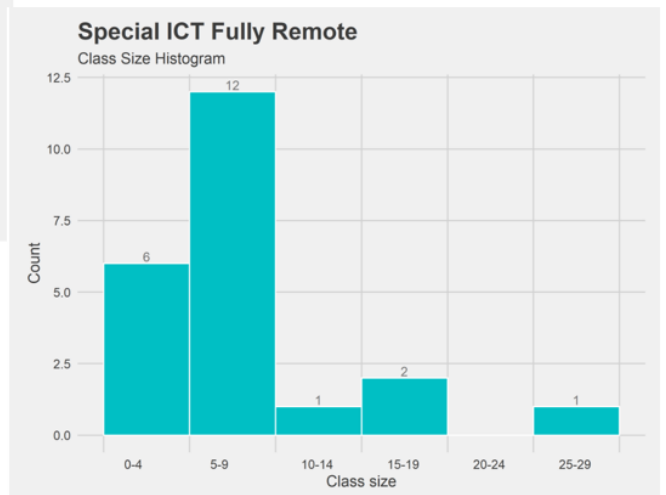
Class sizes of ICT classes
(inclusion classes with general ed and special ed students)



Data source: Special Support Services LLC survey
(between 10/7/20 and 10/26/20)



Class sizes of Special ICT classes
(inclusion classes for general ed students and special needs students for Dual Language, Accelerated and Bilingual Special Education)



Data source: Special Support Services LLC
Survey taken between 10/7/20 and 10/26/20