

October 27, 2021

Regent Kathleen Cashin Testimony to the City Council Education Committee on the importance of reducing class size

Thank you Chair Treyger and the members of the NYC Council Education Committee for holding these important hearings today.

In 1999, when I was Superintendent of District 23, Ocean Hill Brownsville, the fourth graders had to take a multi-faceted state test for the first time, which included reading, writing and listening.

The first thing I did was to reduce class size in that grade.

In those days, the community superintendents had their own budgets and therefore I could invest the necessary funds to provide reasonable class sizes so we could better prepare students to take this important new state test. We lowered class size in all the fourth grade classes to 16 to 20 students per class.

We also helped prepare the teachers by providing them with books in different genres and had them ask their students respond to writing prompts each morning, following reading and listening exercises.

The results were astounding. The children in one of the poorest districts in the nation had the greatest growth of any district in the city in reading, writing and listening. The key initiative that caused this substantial growth, I believe, was lowering their class size.

I also noticed that a more manageable class size promoted collaborative planning among the teachers. This is essential because collaboration improves instruction and collegiality among the staff.

I discovered that class size not only improves the ability of students to learn but also improves the ability of teachers to plan and teach in a more effective manner.

For the first time, they were able to manage their classes better, in that the smaller classes allowed them to develop a relationship of trust with their students, that in turn led to improvements in student discipline and' behavior.

Teachers had more energy and confidence in their ability to do their job, which encouraged them to more enthusiastically collaborate with each other. This fostered a higher degree of professionalism.

My experience as District Superintendent reinforced my conviction in the importance of class size and my understanding of the following principle: If you reduce class size, and provide the right curriculum and structure, the rest will follow.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.