

Testimony of Shino Tanikawa
before the New York City Council Committee on Education
In Support of Intro. 2374 to Establish Classroom Capacity

October 29, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on Intro. 2374 to amend the administrative code of the City of New York in relation to classroom capacity. My name is Shino Tanikawa and I serve on the Citywide Council on High Schools as the Public Advocate appointee. I also co-chair the Education Council Consortium, a citywide organization of parents, caregivers, advocates and community members advocating for an equitable school system in NYC and am a member of the Steering Committee of the New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools. Although my perspectives are informed by the positions I serve, the opinions shared in this testimony are my own.

Class size must be reduced across all schools. Period.

The NYC Department of Education and the School Construction Authority must be held accountable and must commit to reducing class size, which is an effective mechanism for improving educational outcomes for all students, but particularly those who are historically marginalized.

Granted, it will take us a long time and billions of dollars. But those must not be reasons to reject this bill. The attitude of this administration, commemorated by the Mayor who famously claimed he cannot undo 400 years of history, is defeatist, cowardly, and unfit to serve the million plus students.

I know that this bill, if enacted into law, will clearly show us how many of our classrooms have too many students for a sound basic education. But if we do not have a clear grasp of the magnitude of the problem, how do we expect to fix the problem? It is not as if the problem will go away if we do not acknowledge it. (That is how we got into the climate crisis, by the way.)

We are in a tumultuous time in public education. Culturally responsive sustaining education (CRSE) is under attack. Efforts to make our schools anti-racist, more equitable, and less segregated (such as overhauling Gifted & Talented programs, high school admissions policy changes, etc.) are under attack. I believe reducing class size is a necessary ingredient in advancing these equity efforts. CRSE will be more effective in smaller classes because teachers will be able to form deeper connections with each student. Teachers can truly differentiate instruction in smaller classes, making the concept of G&T obsolete. The benefits of classrooms with diverse learners can be fully realized in small classes.

Let us not underestimate the necessity of small class size in our children's social emotional well being. This week I have heard from parents who were deeply concerned about the DESSA screener for assessing students' social emotional state. The screener is a standardized checklist with 40 questions for K - 8 students and 43 questions for high school students. The evaluators, who are classroom teachers, must answer each question along the 5-point scale (never, rarely, sometimes,

often, and almost always). The efficacy of such a screening method aside (I urge the City Council to hold a separate hearing on that), do we actually believe a teacher can assess 30+ students meaningfully? Some middle and high school teachers may have to evaluate more than 100 students. All this must happen two months into the school year, with many disruptions because of the pandemic.

Parents asked for prioritizing social emotional needs of our students. But this is not what we envisioned. I believe with small classes, teachers would be able to evaluate the social emotional needs of students without using a fill in the bubble assessment sheet.

Class size reduction IS an equity issue. None of the other equity measures will be as successful, if they succeed at all, if we continue to refuse to acknowledge the need to reduce class size. We know class size will not be reduced tomorrow or next year. But acknowledging the magnitude of the problem is a good and necessary start. Please pass this bill. Our students need it more than ever.

Respectfully submitted,
Shino Tanikawa