

Testimony of the Education Council Consortium before the New York City Council Committees on Education on Oversight - Implementing the State Class Size Law in New York City

February 2024

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a testimony on implementing the State Class Size Law in New York City. Education Council Consortium is a grassroots organization with the mission to develop and support NYC public school parent leadership through education, networking and organizing. We work toward the vision of a New York City public school system that is equitable, inclusive, antiracist and free of all forms of oppression and that provides an appropriate and humane education for all students in New York City. Our members are parent leaders, caregivers, community members, advocates and educators who believe in our vision.

Research has shown that students in smaller classes learn better, receive fewer disciplinary actions, and have a better likelihood of graduating high school, attending college and obtaining a STEM degree. These benefits are particularly pronounced for historically marginalized students, such as students living in poverty. Small classes also allow teachers to nurture stronger emotional connection with students - something that has become even more important since the pandemic, and an essential condition for implementing culturally responsive and sustaining education.

NYC principals in a 2008 survey indicated that for students to receive a quality education, class sizes should be no more than 20 students in grades K - 3, 22 to 23 students in 4th and 5th grades, 24 to 25 students in middle school and 25 students in high schools. Surveys of teachers also indicate that teachers overwhelmingly support reducing class sizes as a way to improve public schools.

The ECC supports the recommendations of the Class Size Working Group: we support investing in constructing new schools in overcrowded communities; rezoning areas where overutilized and underutilized buildings are nearby, in consultation with communities; building the teacher pipeline and creating incentives for teachers to work in schools with the highest needs; halting colocations that may prevent existing schools in the building from lowering class size; prioritizing preservation of ICT classes; rejecting trade-offs such as the elimination of art or music rooms. We also believe the work of class size reduction should begin in districts that have been historically divested by the NYC Department of Education - those districts with the highest poverty rates and largest number of students in temporary housing and migrant students. While many of these highest needs districts already have schools with appropriate class sizes, no district has all of its schools with required class sizes. We reject the NYC Department of Education's argument that class size reduction will further exacerbate the existing resource inequities.

The ECC is deeply concerned the Mayor's budget proposal will significantly stymie any efforts to comply with the class size law. Now more than ever we need a robust capital plan, yet funding for new capacity has been reduced by over \$2 billion since the class size law passed. The new 5-year capital plan fails to identify new seats that are needed to reduce class size, seemingly to misrepresent the true needs for class size reduction. We are also alarmed by the Program to Eliminate the Gap which has been leading to a steady reduction of the teacher headcounts in the last several years. We have lost thousands of teacher positions through the PEG in a time when we need more teachers.

We remind the DOE that the increase in Foundation Aid is the result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit in which the State's highest court ruled that NYC students were deprived of a sound basic education and that reducing class size was a high priority remedy. In other words, there is State funding that is intended for reducing class size. We further ask that the Mayor and the City Council demand the State pay for Transitional Aid for NYC charter students. We are the only district in the entire state specifically prohibited from receiving this State funding, which amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars each year. The Mayor and the City Council should also demand the state to amend the charter school law that requires NYC to pay for rent for charter schools. Again, we are the only school district in the State that is required to subsidize charter schools in this manner.

We urge the City Council to hold the Mayor accountable. He is in charge of our public schools and he is required to comply with the State law. He cannot pick and choose which laws to comply with.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony.

Board of Directors
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