

Advocates for lower class sizes demanding new plan from City Hall

BY MADINA TOURÉ | 07/22/2024 05:15 PM EDT



The city anticipates a price tag of up to \$1.9 billion to recruit 10,000 to 12,000 educators to fulfill state requirements, according to schools Chancellor David Banks, who warned the city will face challenges in achieving the caps in future years. | Anna MoneyMaker/Getty Images

NEW YORK — A group advocating for smaller classes in city schools is calling on the state Education Department to force the Adams administration to develop a “real plan.”

Details: The city Department of Education (DOE) is entering the second year of a five-year state mandate to shrink class sizes by September 2028. But the agency failed to deliver a multi-year strategy to ensure schools have enough teachers, funding and space to meet the requirements, Leonie Haimson, executive director of Class Size Matters, charged [in a 23-page letter](#) to state education Commissioner Betty Rosa Monday.

Haimson also said the average class size in most schools has increased over the last two years, which she blamed on the DOE’s longstanding handling of the issue.

“The document submitted to the state does not constitute an actual plan in the proper sense of the word, since none of the feeble measures taken so far or outlined in the document would give anyone confidence that DOE intends to follow through or even make a good faith effort to comply with the law,” Haimson said in a statement.

Education officials, she said, also appear to assume they can negotiate exemptions for schools [in the plan they submitted to Rosa](#) earlier this month. Haimson requested an updated plan that includes the staffing and space to be added each year of the mandate, as well as enrollment and class size projections.

DOE spokesperson Nathaniel Styer said the agency is providing an additional \$45 million through Foundation Aid — a state formula that distributes money to school districts and is in part linked to lowering class size — and \$137 million for high-need schools with the space to reduce class sizes.

“We are in compliance with the law, and we will continue to work with our union partners on implementing the plan for continued compliance in the coming year, a plan we collaborated on and jointly approved,” Styer said in a statement.

State leaders are reviewing the letter and the city’s latest plan “remains under review,” spokesperson JP O’Hare told POLITICO.

Class Size Matters projected that the \$137 million will only cover 1,300 teachers, despite the DOE receiving \$1.8 billion more in Foundation Aid. The city anticipates a price tag of up to \$1.9 billion to recruit 10,000 to 12,000 educators to fulfill the requirements, according to schools Chancellor David Banks, who warned the city will face challenges in achieving the caps in future years.

Haimson accused officials of putting the onus on individual school districts to obey the statute.

In its July plan, the agency acknowledged the state granted the city \$2 billion in expanded financing capacity to build classrooms. But officials did not elaborate on the number of extra seats that will be built in school districts, she added.

The organization also took issue with the DOE’s refusal to limit enrollment at overcrowded schools, one of the proposals by a working group Banks formed to shape his approach. Officials expressed concerns about limiting families’ access to high-performing schools.

Additionally, Haimson, who sat on the working group, blasted the DOE’s recommendation that principals employ remote learning to decrease class sizes, citing the negative impact of online instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Why this matters: The latest escalation puts pressure on the Adams administration as it grapples with how to satisfy the costly edict.

In April, in a win for the city’s powerful teachers union — for whom the class size statute [is a priority](#) — Hochul and state lawmakers reached an agreement to permit Mayor Eric Adams to continue running the school system that requires the city to give every school money so they can trim their class sizes.

At a Police Athletic League luncheon last week, Banks contended that [parents “don’t care”](#) if classes are overcrowded — a remark that drew backlash from advocates for smaller class sizes. Shortly after, he [testified at a hearing](#) for the state’s \$2 million study of Foundation Aid where he asked for more dollars to support the directive.

“We’re the only district in the state required to meet a new class size mandate,” he said during the hearing. “Yet we receive no additional funds to account for it.”