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## Class Size Matters Testimony for Oversight Hearings on Early Child Care Center Closures

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Thank you, Chair Joseph and the members of the Education Committee for holding these important hearings today.

My name is Leonie Haimson and I am the Executive Director of Class Size Matters. In 2018, Class Size Matters released a report entitled *The Impact of PreK on School Overcrowding*. The report documented how more than half of the 25,000 students who attended PreK classes in public buildings in 2016-2017 had been assigned to 352 schools that were already overcrowded, thus contributing to worse conditions for about 236,000 students.<sup>1</sup> The administration under Mayor Bill de Blasio had even installed UPK programs in 30 schools that had existing waiting lists for Kindergarten.

In the process, the DOE drew students out of Community Based Organizations, which for decades had provided publicly supported PreK programs. In that report, we cited the City Council testimony of Lisa Caswell, a senior policy analyst with the Day Care Council of New York, a federation of 91 non-profits which run childcare programs. Ms. Caswell explained that with the expansion of PreK, DOE had diverted thousands of students from CBO centers to public schools in a process of “recruitment of children directly from our [CBO] settings to fill UPK seats,” which left these providers with empty seats and less funding.<sup>2</sup>

In our report, we criticized this trend and urged the DOE to maximize the use of space in CBOs for PreK programs, rather than further overcrowd our public schools, which had led to worse overcrowding and could hamper future efforts to lower class sizes.

In June 2022, the Legislature passed a new law, requiring NYC to phase in smaller class caps in all grades over five years.<sup>3</sup> In April 2023, Chancellor Banks appointed a Working Group to develop proposals on how class size reduction could be achieved. In December 2023, the Working Group released a report offering many cost-effective and practical

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<sup>1</sup> The report is here: <https://classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/PreK-report-12.17.18-final-final.pdf>; the Daily News covered the report here: <https://www.nydailynews.com/2018/12/17/exclusive-mayor-de-blasios-pre-kindergarten-expansion-caused-public-school-overcrowding-report-says/>

<sup>2</sup> Implementation of UPK and 3K Expansion and the Transition of EarlyLearn NYC to DOE: Testimony before the Committee on Education Jointly with Committee on General Welfare, New York City Council (2018) See statement of Lisa Caswell, Senior Policy Analyst for the Day Care Council of New York), <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=6390320&GUID=C136BFEB-EB9F-44A1-84F1-DB7E680BCE72>

<sup>3</sup> <https://classsizematters.org/faq-on-ny-class-size-law-implementation-updated-for-the-2024-25-school-year/>

recommendations on how the Department of Education could phase in smaller classes in compliance with the class size law.<sup>4</sup>

As a member of this Working Group, I co-chaired the Space Committee. Sadly, very few of our recommendations to create space for smaller classes have yet been adopted by the DOE.

One of our recommendations was that the DOE should shift some PreK and 3K programs from overcrowded elementary schools to Community Based Organization programs, many of which were considered under-enrolled by DOE and were at risk of closure. This could free up as many as 1400 classrooms and more than 20,000 seats in elementary schools in public schools and save hundreds of millions of dollars in school construction costs in the process.<sup>5</sup>

In December 2024, the DOE posted a new document, entitled “Class Size Space Analysis 2024-2025”. This document contains a list of 495 NYC public schools out of 1,532 that in their estimation lack the space for smaller classes.<sup>6</sup> According to our analysis, these 495 schools enroll nearly half (46%) of the total students in these schools.

On this list, there are 266 elementary schools that do not have enough classroom space to meet the class size caps in the law, according to DOE. Of that figure, more than half -- or 54% -- offer PreK programs. Many of these programs could and should be shifted to nearby CBOs. Of the five CBOs now at risk of closure in June because the DOE claims they are under-enrolled, three of them are within a mile of elementary schools that offer PreK classes but are considered too overcrowded to be able to lower class size. For this analysis, see the chart in the Appendix below.<sup>7</sup>

Notably, the PreK programs run by CBOs are in general rated as equal in quality to those housed in public schools, according to the CLASS rating system used by DOE. According to ECERS, the other rating system used by DOE, CBO PreK programs are rated as superior in quality. This higher rating results from community based centers being more able to provide more suitable space and furnishings for young children, superior personal care routines, enhanced social interaction, and more developmentally appropriate classroom activities.<sup>8</sup>

Many school districts across the country now recognize that it is better for small children to have a learning environment specifically designed for their needs. These districts are investing in separate facilities for early childhood education, because they recognize the advantages of having a small scale setting that can provide a more personalized, intimate, and play-based environment. As a recent article points out:

*By making the investment, school leaders are trying to avoid some of the pitfalls of placing young children in buildings designed for older students, including lost learning time when tiny feet have to meander down long*

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<sup>4</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gSiFUcuLOjJ49PLCMptkroFjXBHow2b\\_/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gSiFUcuLOjJ49PLCMptkroFjXBHow2b_/view)

<sup>5</sup> DOE Fall 2023 New York City Public Schools Admissions Outcomes, at <https://auth-infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/fall-2023-new-york-city-public-schools-admissions-outcomes.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024-2025-class-size-space-analysis-publish.pdf> The document properties tab says it was created on Dec. 3, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> The three CBOs that are within a mile of elementary schools with PreK programs but without the space to lower class size are: Friends of Crown Heights at 1435 Prospect Pl. in Brooklyn, Fort Greene Council at 972 Fulton Street in Brooklyn, and All My Children Daycare and Nursery School at 117-16 Sutphin Blvd, South Jamaica, Queens.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Fuller, et.al., *Equity and Institutions: Distributing Preschool Quality in New York City*, 2020 at: [https://gse.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/nyc\\_pre-k\\_study\\_-\\_july\\_2020\\_update.pdf](https://gse.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/nyc_pre-k_study_-_july_2020_update.pdf)

*hallways to bathrooms and cafeterias. Research suggests that when designed well, buildings can contribute to better outcomes for children.* <sup>9</sup>

Another significant benefit offered by the 3Ks and PreK programs operated by CBOs is the fact that they are able to offer extended day and extended year programs to eligible families, which can be an invaluable option for working parents.

By transferring PreK and 3K programs to underutilized CBOs, the city would not only save on hundreds of millions in dollars in school construction costs, but also be better able to provide more sustainable budgets to CBOs, which are reimbursed by DOE based purely on their per-student enrollment, rather than the number of classes they offer, unlike the funding of PreK programs in public schools.

In short, shifting more programs and students to neighborhood-based centers would be a win-win-win solution for our youngest students, as well as for CBOs and our public schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

**Appendix: *List of CBOs threatened with closure that are located within one mile of public elementary schools that have PreK classes but no space to meet the caps in the class size law***

3 CBOs threatened with closure within one mile of schools that offer PreK classes but have insufficient space for class size reduction, according to DOE					
CBO	School w/ PreK and not enough space nearby	Name of School	School Address	Miles from CBO by walking via Google map	Walking time
Fort Greene Council <a href="#">972 Fulton Street</a> Brooklyn	13K011	P.S. 011 Purvis J. Behan	419 WAVERLY AVENUE	<a href="#">0.41</a>	9 minutes
Friends of Crown Heights <a href="#">1435 Prospect Pl</a> Brooklyn	23K178	P.S. 178 Saint Clair Mckelway	2163 DEAN STREET	<a href="#">0.97</a>	19 minutes
All My Children Daycare and Nursery School <a href="#">117-16 Sutphin Blvd</a> S. Jamaica, Queens	28Q160	P.S. 160 Walter Francis Bishop	109-59 INWOOD STREET	<a href="#">0.91</a>	20 minutes

<sup>9</sup> Fast Company, Feb. 18, 2025, *Why some school districts are spending big on schools tailor-made for 4-year-olds*, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91278644/why-school-districts-are-investing-in-pre-k>