

NYC Mayoral debate on education and class size 6.12.25 ([full video here.](#))

Transcript below; [video of that section here.](#)

Katie Honan: As Mayor, you would be leading the largest public school system in the country, with more than 900,000 students, all with differing needs. Mr. Tilson, you made education your campaign's focus, one of its focuses, and have been critical of the current performance of the city's public school system. One of the new challenges the next mayor will face is a new requirement to limit the number of students in the class. How would your administration this class handle this class size bill?

Whitney Tilson: I oppose this class size mandate. It's going to balloon the already \$40 billion budget by about 1,000,000,006 a year. And this has been tried around the country, and it is one of the least effective ways. It does not move the needle on student achievement, because while, of course, all of us want smaller class sizes, everything being equal, in fact, that is that benefit is offset by the requirement to suddenly hire 1000s of teachers who are less experienced and less qualified than existing teachers. And so the benefit from lower class size is offset by less experienced, less qualified teachers. And guess who? Guess which students get those teachers? It is disproportionately low income, minority kids. This class size mandate would not only hurt our budget but hurt those children. So I've dedicated my adult life to trying to reduce the educational inequalities in our system as one of the founders of Teach For America on the board of KIPP charter schools for more than 20 years, and I will put the interest of kids first in a system that, by and large today runs for the benefit of adults.

Katie Honan: Same question. Ms. Adams, how would you handle the class size bill?

Adrienne Adams: Thank you very much. No matter how we feel about the class size mandate, it is the mandate, so it is something that we have to follow. I do believe that you know as one coming from Southeast Queens, I was education chairperson of my community board, and I can tell you that I walked into many a classroom over the past 15 years or so and have seen the effects of too many students crammed in one classroom. So that is a mandate. It is a mandate for a reason. What we need to look at, though, is the allocation of funds within the DOE. The DOE has the largest budget within New York City of all agencies, and we need to take a look at that money. And we need to make sure that our children are the recipients of the resources within the DOE. Sometimes there are contracts, there are other things going towards the DOE creating that inflated budget, but we have to make sure that our children are truly the recipients of that massive DOE budget.

Katie Honan: Thank you. Mr. Myrie, same question.

Zellnor Myrie: So as many of you probably already know, I'm a proud public school kid I went to PS 161 in Crown Heights. They are the crown jewel of this city. I would not be here without it. I think it's really important that we invest in our schools. The reduction of class sizes was something I was proud to vote for in the state legislature, because we know when the data tells us that smaller class sizes have better outcomes for the students and for the teachers.

But I'd also like to see some more investments in our mental health, for our students. We have not appreciated what has happened over COVID 19 the learning loss that is going to have impacts for many years to come. We have to support our students. We have to support our providers. And in addition to that, y'all know what I'm going to say one after school for all every kid in the city, from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade, we need it, and we need it now. That is what I'm going to do as the next Mayor. Thank you.

Katie Honan: And this is another education. Mr. Mamdani: What's one thing you would do to improve education for students with significant or complex abilities who can't be served by their neighborhood schools?

Zohran Mamdani: No, I think first and foremost, we need to ensure that they also have high quality tutoring, which we've seen some steps towards. Part of this also comes back to the ability to attract and retain teachers across the DOE. And currently, what we're seeing is that on this discussion of class size mandate, we would need to hire, estimates say close to 10,000 teachers. We're talking about paraprofessionals. We have so many vacant positions because these positions simply do not pay enough. I support legislation in the Council 1261 which would create a recurring annual bonus so that we can actually fill those positions.

Because ultimately, what every child and what every parent of that child deserves is the same high quality, excellent public education. And we need to ensure that every single dollar we spend is \$1 that goes towards that, because, as some of my fellow candidates have said, there is too much money in the DOE that is currently being spent on consulting and contracts that are duplicative, that are not standardized, and that could actually be redirected back into the classroom to ensure that every single child is receiving that education.

Katie Honan: Thank you, Mr. Stringer, the same question.

Scott Stringer: Well, look, I'm the candidate on this stage who has real skin in the game. I have two kids in middle school right now, and I see what overcrowded classrooms mean to them and to their friends. And so the bottom line is, if you want quality education, you got to have small class sizes. And I have to tell you, you go to parent-teacher night, and you talk to the teachers, they know about every child, they know about our kids and all the kids, they do an amazing job. But you know what? 40% of them leaving after five years because we're not retaining them, we're not training them, we're not uplifting them. Tier six that Andrew Cuomo did was the death knells for them leaving.

I was somebody who believed as controller, that managing their pension actually kept them in the system, and I did that well, but in terms of what I wanted to do, it is accessible contracts, secret deals, pay to play. We're gonna outbid that when I'm mayor, I know the bodies are buried there. I've been waiting to do this for a long time, but extra education is the life blood of the city, and we need to give parents the resources they need, because every kid has something, every kid needs a little extra. And the kids with parents who have resources, they get it, but the kids who don't struggle. And I want to stop in a minute.

Katie Honan: Mr. Cuomo: Over the last decade, the expansion of free pre K and free K has been used by hundreds of 1000s of New York families, but there have been issues with implementation, and even critics who say other educational initiatives should be prioritized. What would be your administration's commitment to these programs?

Andrew Cuomo: We pioneered pre K on the state side, and we're very proud of it more we can do the better. But let's be realistic about education. We all agree, and you've heard many good ideas here. We want more paraprofessionals, more teacher centers, more after school, care, smaller class size, but we also have a terrible fiscal problem, and this is before the Trump tsunami. So if the state is going to mandate a smaller class size, and we can say, Let's agree it's a good idea, the state has to pay for smaller class size. Otherwise we're just going to be savaging other parts of the budget. And part of the mayor's job is to advocate for New York City and to have state legislators say, we think it's a great idea. Here's the mandate, you must do it, but we're not going to fund it. Is disingenuous. There's an old expression, passing the buck without passing the bucks. Yes, smaller class size, please help us fund it so we don't savage other parts of education.

Katie Honan: Thank you. Mr. Lander?

Brad Lander: My mom is here, who's a lifelong public elementary school guidance counselor. Both my kids are pre K to 12 public New York City public school students. The New York Times opinion panel today specifically praised my education track record, and what's needed is clarity that lower class size, that better student teacher ratios are good and a way to get it done. Andrew was actually right that more money is needed from the state, and I've documented how much as controller and said, Here's how we're going to go about doing it. We should start in those schools that are low income and highly kids of color and get class size done there. We should do collaborative team teaching, especially to make sure we can provide extra services for students with special needs. There are some amazing models of school mergers, like Brooklyn 305 united. The next mayor can reduce class size and dramatically improve schooling for all our kids.

Transcribed by Leonie Haimson with the help of Otter.