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Class Size Matters testimony on the preliminary education budget for FY 2027

March 23, 2026

Thank you for holding these hearings today. My name is Leonie Haimson, and I am the Executive Director of Class Size Matters. At this point, it is unlikely that without the DOE and SCA accelerating school construction and aligning enrollment to smaller classes, it is unlikely that NYC schools will be able to meet the 80%-100% benchmarks in the class size law in Fiscal Years 2027 and 2028 because the Department of Education has failed to produce space for the 500 or so schools that do not have the space at their current enrollment to meet the caps. These schools enroll nearly half of all students and more than a quarter million students in poverty.

Contrary to DOE claims, NYC schools with the highest number and percentage of high-need students are the least likely to have smaller classes. There are twice as many Black students, five times the number of Hispanic students, eight times the number of English Language Learners, and more than five times the number of students in poverty this fall in schools with the lowest compliance levels.

Weighted Need Quartiles (From SED)	Number of Schools	% of Classes Complying (2025-2026)	Enrollment (2024-2025)	% of All Enrollment Citywide	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Multi-Racial Students	Native American Students	Students with Disabilities	English Language Learner Students	Students in Poverty (Minimum)
1 - Lowest Need	379	73.6%	91,379	11.35%	23,414	32,016	3,868	734	20,951	9,618	57,509
2 - Moderate Need	382	69.1%	142,296	17.68%	38,271	59,508	3,508	1,723	31,566	19,462	104,075
3 - High Need	382	65.5%	183,869	22.85%	42,110	88,794	3,223	2,514	40,579	34,362	147,195
4 - Highest Need	383	49.3%	387,229	48.12%	47,185	166,439	5,460	5,042	71,012	80,618	307,222
Grand Total	1526	59.5%	804,773	100.00%	150,980	346,757	16,059	10,013	164,108	144,060	616,001

The lack of space to lower class size will likely hamper efforts to reach the benchmarks in the law for years to come .

Background: On June 2, 2022, the NY State Legislature passed a law requiring a five-year phase in of smaller classes in NYC schools to no more than 20 students per class in grades K-3, 23 students per class in grades 4th-8th, and 25 students per class in high school.

Each year starting in September 2023, 20% of all public school classes were required to achieve these caps, with an additional 20% added each year, until all classes achieved these caps by the end of Sept. 2028. Some exemptions are allowed but only with UFT/CSA agreement. The city had a headstart because the schools were already more than 40% in compliance when the law passed, and the Governor insisted on adding a planning year before the process was to begin.

Rather than developing an actual multi-year plan as required by the law, Mayor Adams cut funding to schools in 2023, leading to class sizes to increase in most schools and slashed the capital plan by over \$2B. Even though he

later restored \$2B in July 2024 due to a provision in the state budget, these cuts created a lag in school construction that has not been reversed.

We are now in the third year of the phase-in. Last year, principals were told they could apply for funds to hire teachers to lower class but only if they already had space for smaller classes at their current enrollment. Schools achieved the 60% benchmark this fall but only by exempting 10,535 classes in 123 schools from their calculations.

Cost of staffing and space

The city has allocated \$543 million to hire more teachers in next year's budget to lower class size and nearly a \$1 billion for the following year. Yet a recent report from the Independent Budget Office estimates it would cost \$700 million over the next two years to hire sufficient teachers. In any case, no matter how many teachers are hired, the biggest obstacle will likely be the lack of space in many schools or any actual plan to provide it.

The School Construction Authority testified to the City Council in March 2025 that 70,000 more school seats would be needed to comply with law. Yet the February 2026 five-year capital plan for 2025-2029 funds less than half that many, at only 33,417 seats.

Moreover, 57% of these seats have no sites; and 39% are unspecified as to district/subdistrict/grade level. Only 12,426 seats are projected to be completed by the September 2028 deadline for full compliance.

The lack of sufficient space and transparency violate the class size law, which requires a detailed capital plan showing where additional space will be created to allow which schools to reach the goals in the law.

The lack of transparency also violates Local Law 167 of 2018, which required SCA to provide a transparent needs assessment, showing how many seats are needed by district, subdistrict and grade level to eliminate overcrowding.

Other measures to create more space: DOE has adopted none of the [recommendations](#) to facilitate and accelerate the acquisition of more school space made by the Class Size Working Group (CSWG) appointed by Chancellor Banks in 2023.

These recommendations included re-starting School Siting Task force with more public input, reviving the Educational Construction Fund, and requiring that schools be considered for inclusion in new proposed housing proposals as "anchor tenants." High rises are going up quickly in many communities where the schools are already overcrowded and likely to become more so in the future.

The CSWG proposed that the DOE should align their admissions policies towards achieving the class size goals in the law, by balancing enrollment between nearby overcrowded and underenrolled schools. This would likely save billions of dollars in funding for space and staffing, and years of time. The savings could then be allocated towards other critical educational needs.

This adjustment would also help currently underenrolled schools, providing them with a more adequate budget that would enable them to provide more programming, extracurricular activities and services.

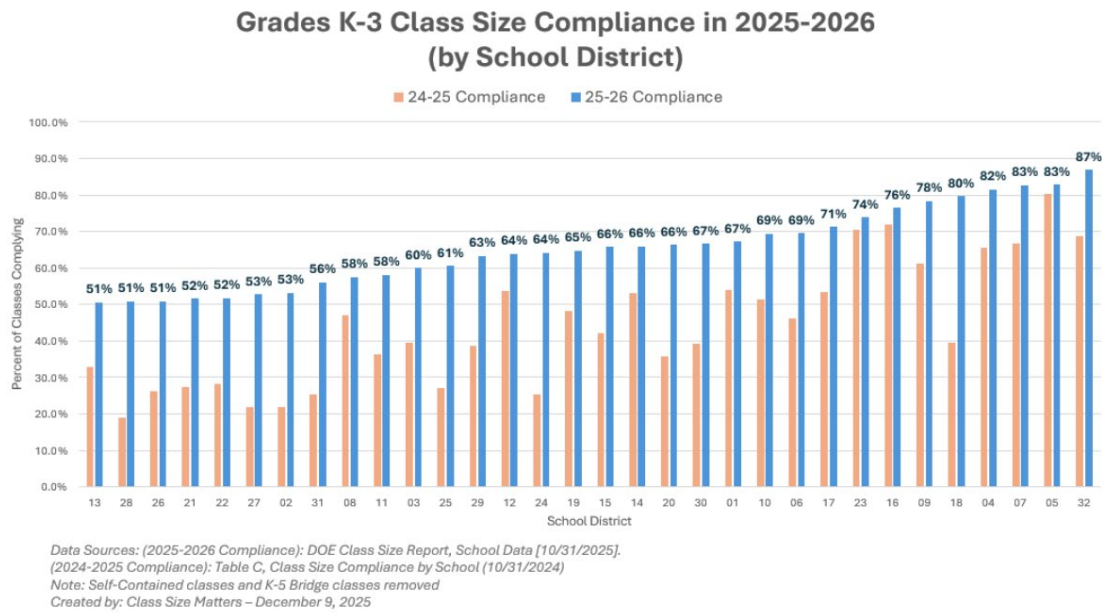
While the DOE claims that this could cause parents to flee from our schools, the evidence points to the opposite. When CA public schools lowered class size, research shows that this reform attracted thousands more families to the

system.¹ Last year, DOE surveyed parents who took their kids out of the public schools, to ask them what contributed to their decision. ² 82% said class size was a factor, and 58% said it contributed “a lot” to their decision.

Another recommendation made by the CSWG was to shift some PreK and 3K classes from overcrowded elementary schools to nearby CBOs or Early Childhood Centers. Three quarters of the elementary schools currently too overcrowded to achieve the legal caps have 3K and/or PreK classes, while CBOs and ECCs have thousands of empty seats. CBO PreK programs also rate higher in quality on average and are able to offer extended day and extended year, valuable for working parents. This shift alone could create as many as 450 additional classrooms for class size reduction and save as much as to \$1.8 Billion in school construction costs.

More data, including class size compliance levels by Council district are below.

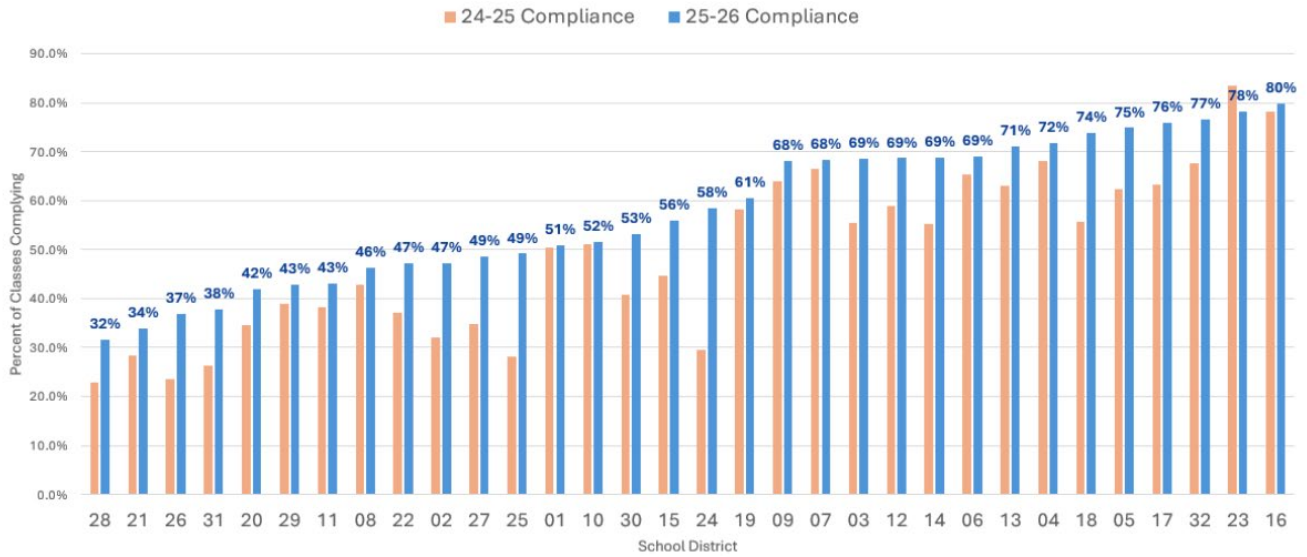
Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



¹ <https://classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Gilraine-et-al-Education-reform-in-general-equilibrium-evidence-from-CA-class-size-reduction.pdf>

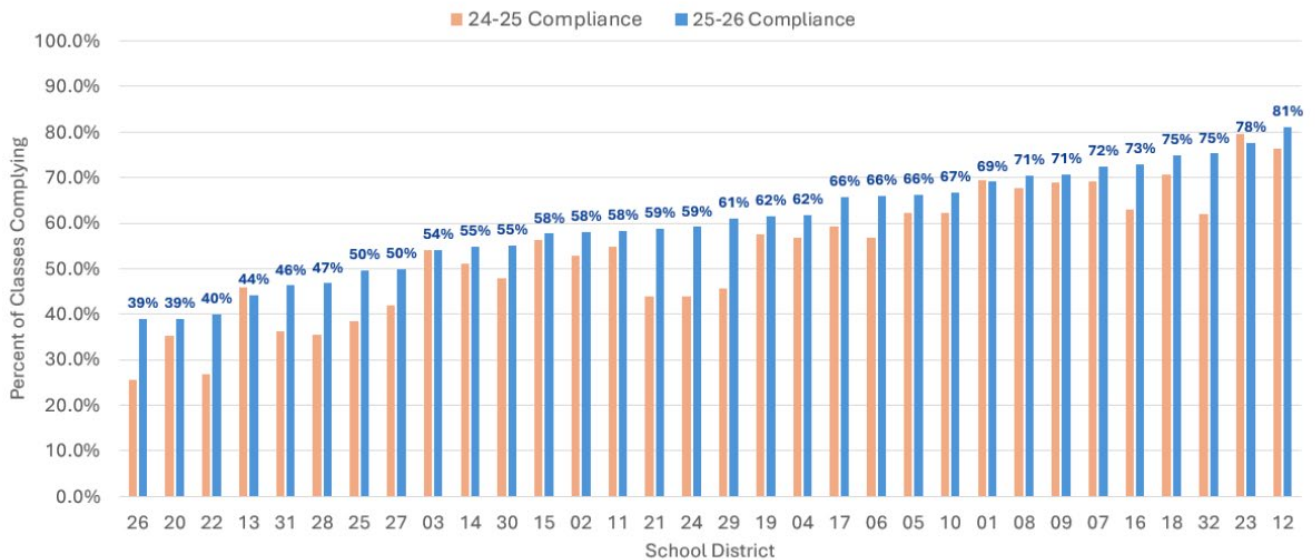
² <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/enrollment-survey-deck---april-2025---public-deck.pdf>

Grades 4-8 Class Size Compliance in 2025-2026 (by School District)



Data Sources: (2025-2026 Compliance): DOE Class Size Report, School Data [10/31/2025].
 (2024-2025 Compliance): Table C, Class Size Compliance by School (10/31/2024)
 Note: Self-Contained classes and K-5 Bridge classes removed
 Created by: Class Size Matters – December 9, 2025

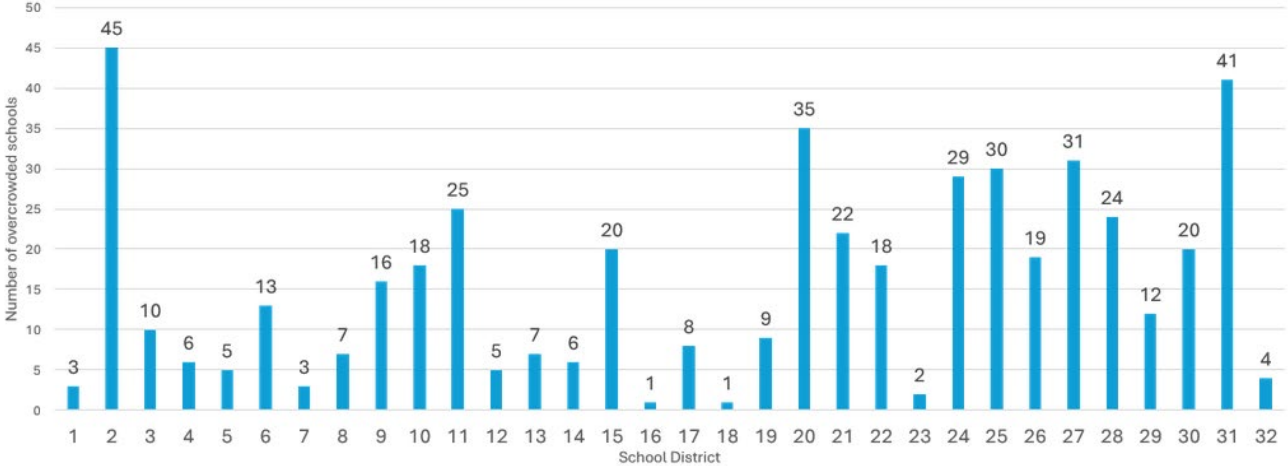
Grades HS Class Size Compliance in 2025-2026 (by School District)



Data Sources: (2025-2026 Compliance): DOE Class Size Report, School Data [10/31/2025].
 (2024-2025 Compliance): Table C, Class Size Compliance by School (10/31/2024)
 Note: Self-Contained classes and K-5 Bridge classes removed
 Created by: Class Size Matters – December 9, 2025

495 schools have insufficient space to lower class size at current enrollment, according to DOE

(by school district)



Data Sources: [DOE Class Size Space Analysis 2024-2025](#)
[NYC DOE School Locations Data \(as of 12/16/24\)](#).