

This petition with 570 signers was sent to the DOE on June 24, 2024, the legal deadline. You can [check it out here](#). Any questions or concerns, feel free to email us at info@classsizematters.org

To Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks,

We, the undersigned, urge the Department of Education to fundamentally revise and improve their second-year class size reduction plan. If not, it is highly questionable as to whether the city will be able to comply with the annual benchmarks in the class size law, starting next school year and beyond. The DOE “plan,” as posted, is insufficient and fails to make the necessary investments in space and staffing, which a real four-year plan should include.

Contrary to the claims made by the DOE, few if any of the proposals made by the Class Size Working Group have been adopted that would enable the city to comply with the law in a manner that does not risk unintended consequences or disruptions to other critical programs.

Instead, DOE officials continue to drag their feet, resulting in average class sizes increasing for the last two years, and schools with the largest weighted need, according to the state formula, continuing to suffer from the largest class sizes. This trend is likely to continue if you fail to implement a significantly improved and effective class size plan.

Need for more staffing

While DOE officials estimate that they will have to hire 10,000 to 12,000 more teachers to achieve the class size limits in the law, they have allocated only \$137 million to schools to hire more teachers next year. This would pay for only about 1,300 teachers, a small fraction of the number required by year four. Moreover, this funding has been spread so thinly over 1,057 schools that nearly 500 schools would receive less than \$100,000 – not enough to hire even one additional teacher.

Worse yet, these funds are being provided so that DOE can “hold harmless” school budgets -- meaning that their budgets will be cut in other categories by the same amount. For example, more than 100 schools receiving class size funds are seeing cuts to their Fair Student Funding averaging \$129,931, greater than the funding they are slated to receive to lower class size, averaging \$103,985.

Instead, we urge the DOE to allocate at least \$300 million next year, so that schools can pay for one-fourth of the teachers that will be necessary over the next four years, while ensuring that their budgets for staffing are not reduced elsewhere. The longer the DOE prevents schools from hiring sufficient numbers of teachers now, the more challenging it will be for them to ensure the quality and certification of the teachers they will need to hire in years three to five.

Need to create more space

We also demand that you accelerate and expand upon efforts to create more space. As the DOE admits in their “plan,” 650 principals who responded to their survey stated that they do not currently have enough classroom space to lower class size to the mandated levels. Unfortunately, principals were told by DOE that they could not cap their enrollments at lower levels, even when underutilized schools were sitting nearby. The DOE has also refused to shift any of 3K or PreK programs in overcrowded elementary schools to half-empty CBOs nearby, which could provide the benefits of extended day and year services to more working parents.

Most critically, you must expand and accelerate the capital plan, so that sufficient numbers of schools are built in overcrowded communities. Instead, DOE and SCA have cut funding for new school

construction by \$1.5 billion since the class size law was enacted. They have also not moved to add the \$2 billion to the capital plan for more classroom space, as required by the state budget adopted in April. Since it can take four years or more years to site and build new schools, this jeopardizes the ability of your or any future administration to be able to comply with the timeline in the law.

The unacceptable steps the DOE has proposed instead

Rather than ensure schools are provided with the requisite staffing and space, DOE has instead told Superintendents that in each district, schools should increase compliance with the law by 3% next year. This risks forcing principals to re-assign existing teachers and sacrifice classrooms currently used for other critical programs. Moreover, this sort of haphazard citywide approach violates the provision in the law that the highest need schools should reduce class size first.

Another potentially harmful proposal you have made is to ask principals to expand their use of online learning. Given the negative effects of remote instruction on student learning and mental health during the pandemic, when many students felt disengaged, fell behind academically, and suffered serious emotional challenges, this expansion could undermine any positive effects from lowering class size.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge you to produce an actual four-year plan that describes in detail what staffing and space will be added each year, and in which schools and districts, to meet the benchmarks in the law, so that 100% of classes will achieve the new class size caps by the end of the 2027-2028 school year. Only then will all NYC students receive the smaller classes they need and deserve.

If you refuse to make these changes, we will ask the State Education Department to require a corrective action plan be produced.

Yours sincerely,