



New York City Council

Planning to Learn: The School Building Challenge

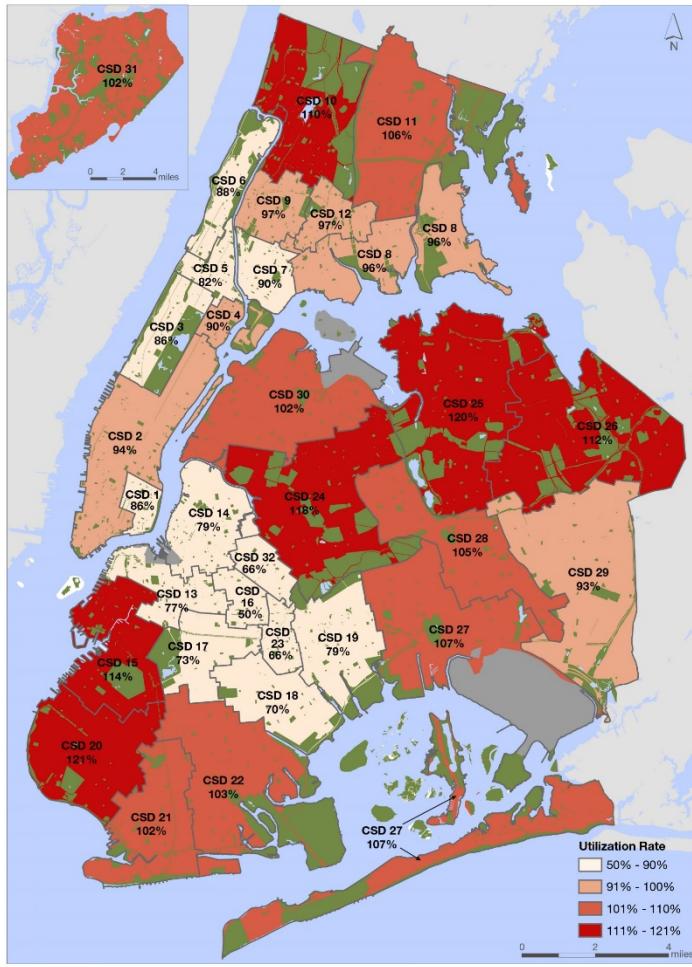
For too long City students have attended schools that are overcrowded. The greatest city in the world deserves educational facilities to match. While the City has made significant new investments in public schools, there is more to do.

Process. The City Council formed a School Planning and Siting Working Group in February 2017 to explore strategies to improve the school planning, siting, and building process. The Working Group met with education advocates; representatives of the School Construction Authority and the Department of Education; real estate experts, architects, and other professionals; and solicited input from the public.

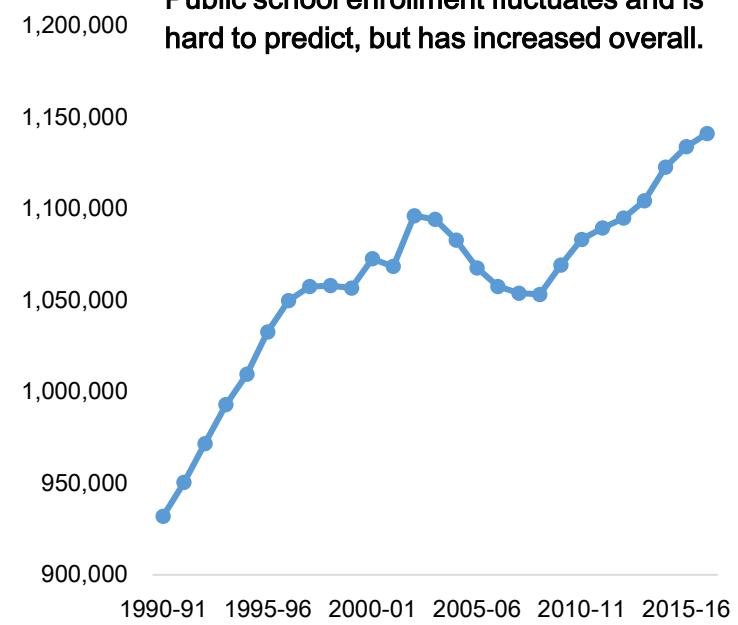
Why now? Though overcrowding in NYC schools is long-standing, there are new and growing challenges for school planning and siting:

- Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK);
- 3-K for All;
- improving graduation rates/declining dropout rates;
- increasing participating rates (portion of school-age children choosing public school);
- increasing charter school enrollment; and
- population growth.

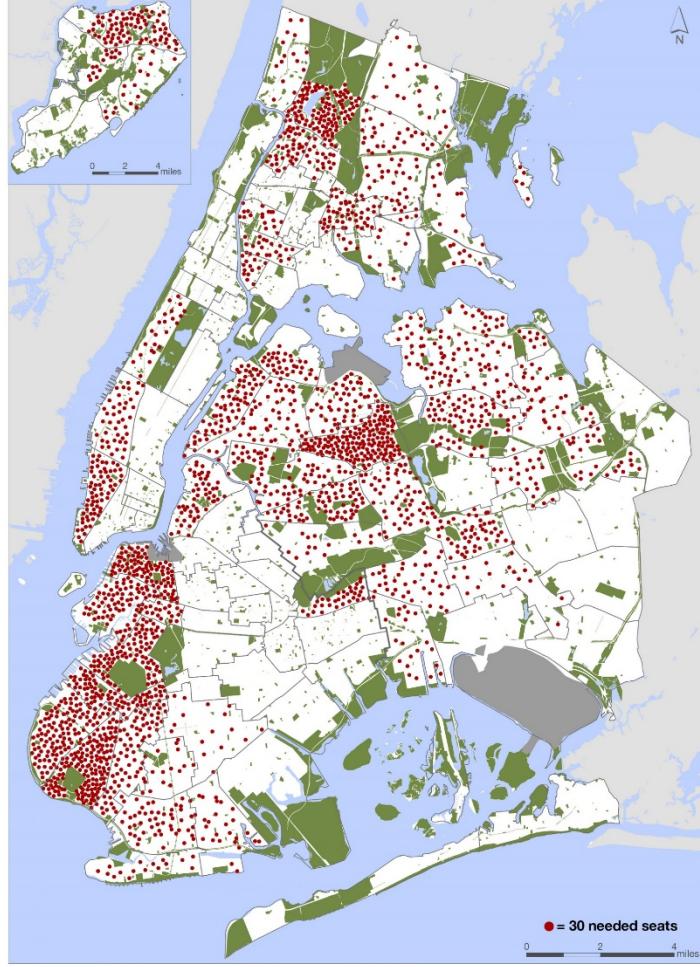
K-8 Utilization by School District, SY 2015-16



Public school enrollment fluctuates and is hard to predict, but has increased overall.



K-8 Identified Seat Need by Subdistrict

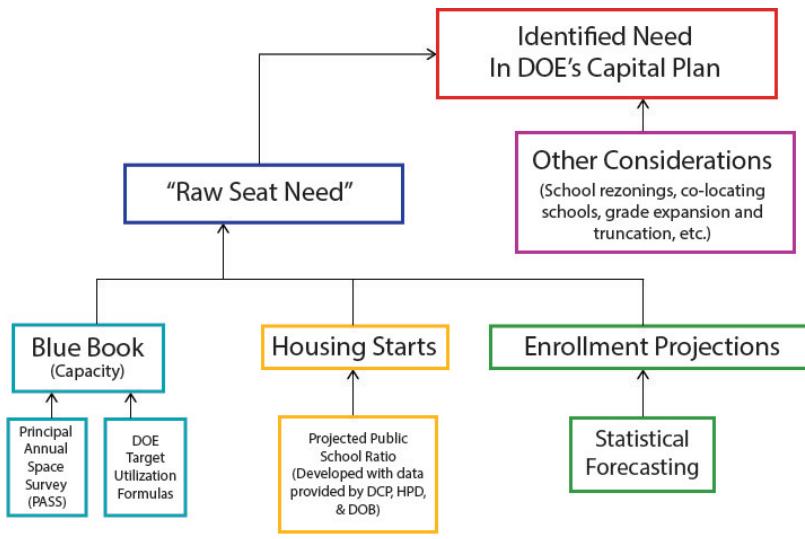


Recommendations

1. Make it easier and faster to build schools

- Pilot an RFP process for finding sites for new school construction.
- Advocate for SCA to receive Design-Build authorization from NYS.
- Expand use of eminent domain, particularly in high-need districts.
- Convene a school design working group to consider school design flexibility.
- Establish zoning incentives to encourage school construction in high-need districts.
- Continue to use the Education Construction Fund (ECF) model where appropriate.
- Lease school buildings in large-scale affordable housing projects.
- Improve coordination of City space to help SCA find school sites.
- Support or build consensus for proposed school facilities.

Identified Need Formula



Implementation. Implementing the recommendations will require close collaboration between the City Council and the administration. The majority of the report's recommendations will require leadership from the Mayor's Office and will need to be carried out by DOE and SCA.

2. Accurately describe the problem

Improve the integrity of the identified seat need formula.

- Include confidence intervals in enrollment projections.
- Implement Blue Book Working Group recommendations that have not yet been implemented, particularly regarding class size.
- Develop a housing projection model.
- Create neighborhood-based Projected Public School Ratios using up-to-date Census data.
- Extend the school capacity planning horizon.

3. Give the public and decision makers the information they need

- Provide all data related to the identified seat need in machine-readable format at the level of planning (i.e. subdistrict level).
- Provide substantive information on the adjustments SCA makes to the raw seat need that results in the identified seat need.
- Clarify how race is incorporated into enrollment projections.
- Include the planning process for pre-K seats in the Capital Plan.
- Improve communication with the public about potential new school sites.

4. Increase use of other approaches to reduce overcrowding and foster diversity

The School Diversity Advisory Group should consider school utilization; these recommendations could address both overcrowding and diversity concerns in tandem.

- Create specific school plans to alleviate overcrowding in high-need districts.
- Adjust CSD boundaries and school zone lines to reduce overcrowding.
- Expand use of special programs to attract students to underutilized facilities and ensure equity of access.

5. Secure funding for school construction

- Explore opportunities to raise funding through impact fees from new development.
- Consider changes to CEQR.

See the Council's full report "Planning to Learn: The School Building Challenge," at <https://council.nyc.gov/land-use/plans/schools-working-group>.

Sources: Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization Report, 2015-2016 School Year; DOE Fiscal 2015-2019 Five-Year Capital Plan, February 2018.