
Oversight Hearing on Class Size Reduction

Testimony Esther Brunner, 2/28/2020

Good morning, my name is Esther Brunner and I am the mother of a 5.5 year old boy who attends Kindergarten in Public School 770, which is located at the border of East Flatbush and Crown Heights in Brooklyn. I am here to testify about my class size observations.

I first would like to thank the Council Committee on Education for dedicating time to this important matter.

Second, I would like to thank Leonie Haimson from Class Size Matters for her work on this issue.

Third, I would like to express my gratitude to the deBlasio administration for what I think is their number one achievement: 3-K and Pre-K for all. During the last school year, our family was a beneficiary of this enormous city effort. This Pre-K program instills a curiosity for lifelong learning and supports 3 and 4 year olds in developing social and emotional skills that will allow them to succeed in an increasingly diverse and complex world. I am convinced that this successful program is possible because of the student-teacher ratio and class size requirements.

DOE policy caps Pre-K classes at 18 students and requires one teacher and one para professional per class. In contrast, Kindergarten classes are capped at 25 students with one teacher. This increases by three times the student-teacher ratio. Given the support and attention 5 year olds need this increase is entirely inappropriate. Anecdotally, I hear from educators and parents alike, and know from my own experience, how hard children's transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten is. Given DOE's current class size policy I am not surprised.

A NYC Teaching Fellows ad said: "you remember your first teacher's name – who will remember yours?" I remember my first teacher's name, in fact I remember all my teachers' names.

Teachers are key adults in children's relationship networks. For young children teachers are among the first adults with whom they build a trust relationship. In Kindergarten students spend 7-hour days in school. Possibly more time than a student spends with his or her parents.

I believe that every child will show curiosity, like to learn, and be able to succeed if the school environment allows for constructive relationship building. For this to work a teacher must know each student well enough to identify if and how he or she feels safe, heard, understood, and supported. But a teacher's capacity is not unlimited.

When class size is too large such a nurturing environment is impossible. Large class size denies students sufficient attention and the space to establish a relationship of trust with their teacher. This has the most severe effects on children who need the most support.

The DOE must embark on an appropriately funded effort to reduce class size.

I thank you for your attention.