



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1573-2008, **Version:** A

Proposed Res. No. 1573-A

Resolution calling upon the Department of Education and the School Construction Authority to implement changes to reform city school planning to better address the problem of overcrowding.

By Council Members Lappin, Jackson, Avella, Brewer, Comrie, Dickens, Liu, Mark-Viverito, Palma, Recchia Jr., Sanders Jr., Weprin, Sears, Garodnick, Katz and DeBlasio (By request of the Manhattan Borough President)

Whereas, This Fall, the Department of Education (DOE) and the School Construction Authority (SCA) will propose a new five-year capital plan for new school construction, which will chart the future course of the City's public education system; and

Whereas, Analysis of data from the SCA shows that even now, 38 percent of New York City public school students attend schools in buildings that are overcrowded -47 percent of elementary grade students, 19 percent of middle school students, and 51 percent of high school students citywide; and

Whereas, In 2007, the City adopted a state-mandated class size reduction plan that requires the DOE to reduce class size in general education and Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) classes to 20 in grades K-3 and 23 on average in all other grades by the 2011-2012 school year; and

Whereas, According to the most recent DOE data for 2007-08, last year 60-63% of K-3rd graders were in classes of 21 or more - that is, classes that exceeded the City's class size goals - consisting of more than 160,000 children in all; and

Whereas, DOE data also indicates that during the same year, 59% of 4th graders, 66% of 5th graders, 76% of 6th graders, 82% of 7th graders, 84% of 8th graders, and as much as 81% of high school students were in classes that exceeded class size goals - that is, were placed in classes of 24 or more - consisting of more than half a million students overall; and

Whereas, Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer's April 2008 report, "Crowded Out," the first study to compare residential building permits with new school construction, demonstrates that residential development is far outpacing new school construction in many Manhattan neighborhoods, which points to serious problems with the City's school planning processes; and

Whereas, The "Crowded Out" report determined that, in four Manhattan neighborhoods at particularly high risk for neighborhood-wide overcrowding (Community Boards 1, 2, 5, and 8), the City approved enough new residential buildings between 2000 and 2007 to add 1,600 - 2,300 new K-8 public school students to neighborhood schools, while adding only 143 school seats to these neighborhoods over the same period; and

Whereas, The "Crowded Out" report notes that Manhattan's overcrowded elementary and middle schools were, in total, 3,900 students over capacity last school year, and notes that the SCA's current plan for new seats in Manhattan - 4,300 over the next five years - is therefore barely enough to relieve *existing* overcrowding, with little to no seats remaining to accommodate ongoing growth and realize the class size reductions our students and educators desperately need; and

Whereas, While the "Crowded Out" report focuses specifically on data for Manhattan, a May 2008 report by Comptroller William C. Thompson entitled "Growing Pains" found that the number of housing units authorized by permit throughout the City nearly doubled between 2002 and 2005, reaching a record in 2007, indicating that rapid residential growth and its effect on school overcrowding is not limited to Manhattan, but is a citywide problem; and

Whereas, These findings indicate that the City's current school planning process fails to anticipate growth before it occurs, and must be fundamentally reformed to ensure that parents - and their employers - will continue investing their futures in New York City; and

Whereas, To better address the problem of school overcrowding, these findings have led the Campaign for A Better Capital Plan, consisting of elected officials, advocates and other stakeholders, to develop "A, B, C" recommendations to reform the next school capital plan; and

Whereas, Recommendation “A” is to “Address existing overcrowding and reduce class size,” by proposing enough new seats to ensure that all public schools will operate at or below their actual capacity and meet the targets in the City’s own state-mandated class size reduction plan -- 20 students in grades K-3, and 23 in all other grades -- while providing adequate “cluster room” space for the arts, sciences and other subject areas; and

Whereas, Recommendation “B” is to “Be ready for growth,” by establishing a clear, transparent procedure for projecting and estimating the amount and location of expected new housing development, formulated in consultation with the City’s planning experts, elected officials, Community Education Councils, Community Boards, education advocates, and public school parents, and ensuring that planning occurs at the neighborhood level, and even at the level of individual school catchment areas, rather than solely through the lens of Community School Districts; and

Whereas, Recommendation “C” is to “Correct the faulty capacity estimates,” which many principals, teachers, parents and advocates believe actually understate the true level of school overcrowding, by ensuring that the City work closely with educators, parents, and others to revise the City’s official estimates and better reflect the conversion of “cluster rooms” - spaces that should be used for art and music rooms, science laboratories, special education services, libraries, auditoriums and gymnasiums - into academic classrooms; and

Whereas, With the Department of City Planning’s projections that New York City’s population will increase by nearly a million people over the coming decades, overcrowding in the public school system is a problem that cannot wait for a solution; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the Department of Education and the School Construction Authority to implement changes to reform city school planning to better address the problem of overcrowding.

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