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ABSTRACT

This report presents data collected from 43 over-capacity elementary schools in the New York City Public School system. The data give information about typical class sizes in the early grades and the cost of an initiative to reduce class size. Of the 1,722 classrooms examined, 56 percent are considered to be overcrowded, and 438 of the city's 723 elementary school buildings (61 percent) are operating at or in excess of capacity. Further, the schools possess far too few specialty rooms, including libraries, gymnasiums, staff rooms, and cafeterias. Parent rooms often are missing or inadequate. Students often are crammed into small rooms, and the schools surveyed need 15 percent more classrooms to implement the city's initiative to reduce class size. Recommendations include increasing the use of underutilized middle schools, and submitting new school bonds to voters and backing them with voter education campaigns. A third recommendation is to have the board of education consider adjusting its 5-year capital plan to take into account the initiative to reduce class size by spending a larger share of the funds on space that is faster and easier to create, such as additions and relocatable classrooms. (GR)

ED 455 669

No Room to Learn:

Crowded NYC Schools Jeopardize Smaller Class Size Plans

An investigative report by
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September 1999

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Major Findings (1)

Summary of Recommendations (5)

I. The Context

Classes are larger in New York City than in the rest of the State (5)

Students do better in smaller classes (6)

There is a class size crisis in early grades in New York City public schools (7)

Space needs far outpace the Board of Education's five-year capital program (8)

State RCSI legislation requires empty classrooms (9)

II. Methodology

EF 005 918

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Overview (9)

Elementary school utilization citywide (11)

How the study schools were chosen (12)

Documentation relied on (14)

Development of individual school profiles (15)

How schools are reported (16)

III. Findings

A. Citywide Capacity Utilization for the 1998-1999 School Year (19)

B. Results of the School Site Visits (21)

1. Most classrooms are cramped (22)

2. There are not enough cluster (specialty) rooms. Yet rising enrollment are forcing some schools to eliminate cluster rooms (24)

3. Gym facilities are inadequate (26)

4. Most schools have retained their libraries, although some are too small (27)

5. Staff rooms are likely to be missing or too small (28)

6. Approximately half of the surveyed schools lack a parents room. Parents rooms in the other schools are often inadequate (28)

7. Cafeterias are inadequate (29)

8. Special services like remedial reading are often provided in cramped and/or inappropriate spaces (29)

9. To implement RCSI (Reduced Class Size Initiative), the 43 surveyed schools will need 307 additional classrooms, yet principals could identify only 161 at most (31)

IV. Recommendations (34)

Endnotes

Appendix I.

Tables 1-18 Summarize Citywide Capacity Utilizations for the 1998-1999 School Year

Tables 19-30 Summarize Results of the School Site Visits

Appendix II. Individual School Profiles

Introduction

In 1995, while serving as "principal for a day" at PS 280 in the Bronx, I witnessed New York City's public school overcrowding first hand. While walking down a corridor at the school, I suddenly found myself breaking the line of sight between a teacher sitting on the floor on my right and students sitting on the floor on my left. When I asked the principal what was going on he commented in a nonplussed manner, "Oh, that was a class." I was surprised and dismayed because when I was going to school we of course never had classrooms in the corridors and on the floor. This study is an attempt to definitively quantify and help cure the crisis of school overcrowding I first experienced that day and that tens of thousands of elementary school students experience every day.

In March 1998, at my request, the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO) began an analysis of class sizes in the early grades and the cost of a reduced-class size initiative in the New York City Public Schools. This analysis was prompted not only by the many anecdotal stories of school overcrowding but also by average class size statistics just published by the New York State Education Department. The Department documented that the average class in grades one through six in New York City had 28 students, compared to only 24 students in classes in the entire state and only 20.4 students in New York State excluding the five largest cities.

This data was particularly disturbing in light of recent studies of class size reduction in Indiana, Tennessee and Wisconsin which indicated that, when controlling for other variables, students in relatively small early grade classes regularly outperform students in larger classes. The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study in Tennessee also found positive long-term effects from smaller class sizes in the early grades, including higher graduation rates and a higher likelihood of attending college.

Armed with such data, education advocates in New York City and across the country have lobbied effectively for class size reductions. In 1998 the New York State budget promised additional operating aid to reduce class size to 20 in kindergarten through third grade over the following three years. This September the first year of the Reduced Class Size Initiative (RCSI) phase-in will begin.

But will it succeed? The Office of the Public Advocate began this room-by-room investigation of 43 overcrowded elementary schools to document exactly how difficult it will be to meet the new smaller class size standard. Where will the new classrooms come from for our school system to go from an average of 28 to 20 students per class in kindergarten through third grade?

In conducting this study, we also noted the extreme measures now being taken by many schools to cope with current overcrowding. Yes, it is true that instruction is being given in former bathrooms and closets. And we have found numerous schools with no libraries, gyms, auditoriums or staff rooms -- schools where even the principal has no office. In interviews, we heard principal after principal bemoan having to start lunch periods at 10:00 AM because cafeterias are inadequate, of teaching 15 kids in a small converted storage room with no windows, and of making choices like converting the computer room into more classroom space.

Certainly, one of the reasons our schools are not educating as well they should is that the facilities are simply inadequate -- and it's not now clear where the new classrooms will come from. In my view, the number one goal of City government must be to find enough classes and teachers so our children are well prepared for the new century and economy.

Mark Green

Public Advocate,

City of New York

September 7, 1999

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Well over half of New York City's 723 elementary school buildings house more students than they were designed for. To find out exactly how students are being shoehorned into school buildings intended for half their registrations and the impact of grossly overcrowded schools on their education, the Office of the Public Advocate has completed an examination of school building utilization in 43 representative over-capacity elementary schools. Although the Board of Education releases capacity and registration figures, until this study there has been no systematic, room-by-room examination of how each overcrowded school actually uses its space.

Among the questions sought to be answered: How many children are really being taught in former supply closets? Do these schools have art, science, computer, or music rooms? Have they given up their libraries and gyms? And, most critically, how well are they positioned to fully implement New York State's kindergarten-to-third-grade Reduced Class Size Initiative (RCSI) which begins to be phased-in during September 1999? .

The principals were interviewed at length in each visited school. Previously undisclosed annual official building usage charts for each school were reviewed; these charts list the square footage of each room and what each room is being used for. In addition, principals shared their official class registers for each room and their school organization charts showing all personnel working in their schools. In total, we examined the 1998-99 utilization of well over 2,500 rooms including 1,722 classrooms.

To ensure that the findings would be applicable to all overcrowded schools, we equitably visited schools in all five boroughs considered to be just short of 100% capacity, only slightly overcrowded, schools that were somewhat overcrowded, and schools that were considered very overcrowded.

Major findings:

1. **438 of the City's 723 elementary school buildings (61%) are operating at or in excess of capacity**. With all of its 23 schools at or exceeding capacity, District 29 in Queens has the most crowded schools in the City. Citywide, 12% of schools are at greater than 125% of capacity. (Appendix I, Table 1.)

2. Most classrooms are overcrowded. 56% of the 1,722 classrooms in the 43 surveyed overcrowded schools have more students than the City's own formula allows and 11% of the classrooms exceed the formula by at least five students. PS 68 in District 24 (Elmhurst, Queens) has the greatest proportion of cramped classes - 33 of 36 are overcrowded - and many classrooms exceed capacity by six, seven and as many as thirteen students. In interviews, principals frequently said that cramped classrooms stymie introduction of new research-based instructional strategies such as "content centers" and "learning centers." (Appendix I, Table 27)

Since New York State Education Department classroom size guidelines are more generous than the City's,

some 75% of the 1,722 surveyed classrooms above kindergarten, 59% of kindergarten, and 94% of special education rooms fail to meet the State recommendations. (Appendix I, Table 29)

3. Schools have far too few specialty rooms. Yet rising enrollments are forcing some rooms to be eliminated. Board of Education space formulas assign schools dedicated speciality "cluster" rooms for science, art, music, and computers. Under the formula, the 43 surveyed schools are entitled to 153 cluster rooms. But they actually have only 80 and six schools have none at all. For instance, the 1,550 students of PS 13 (Elmhurst) are entitled to five cluster rooms, but have only one, for computers. Only nine schools have art rooms. Fourth-graders are expected to take a hands-on science exam, but only thirteen schools have science rooms. Several of the interviewed principals said that they are converting some cluster rooms to classrooms in September 1999 because of rising enrollments. (Appendix I, Table 24)

4. Libraries, gymnasiums, staff rooms, cafeterias and parent rooms are often missing or inadequate.

- *Libraries.* Six of the 43 schools have no library and libraries at only six schools meet the Board of Education's library space specification of 1,200 square feet. Yet some libraries may have to close due to enrollment pressures and space requirements of the Reduced Class Size Initiative (RCSI). The principal of PS 290 said she was feeling "just sick" because rising enrollment will likely force her to close the library, which was just upgraded with a $50,000 technology grant. The principal of PS 21 (Staten Island) said she is about to eliminate the library due to the RCSI. (Appendix I, Table 26)

- *Gyms.* Twelve schools lack a gym. And because many gyms are designed for much lower school registrations, in 16 schools the gyms fail to meet the Board of Education's own gym size specifications. So at PS 13 in Queens, for example, inadequate facilities mean that students attend gym only bi-weekly and only monthly if their assigned day is a holiday. In some schools, the gym is a columned area inappropriate for many physical activities and may be shared with the cafeteria. (Appendix I, Table 26)
- *Staff rooms.* Five schools have no staff room, which is where teachers are expected to spend prep periods, eat their lunch, and attend meetings with other teachers. Half the others have staff rooms that do not meet size requirements; in these schools, a hundred or more teachers are expected to cram into a space half the size of the typical classroom or smaller. The worst staff room may be at PS 89 in the northeastern Bronx, where 160 teachers are expected to share 270 square feet, smaller than many living rooms. (Appendix I, Table 26)
- *Cafeterias.* Some schools are serving twice as many students in their cafeteria than capacity. Cafeterias that are too small for school registrations forcing schools like PS 135 in District 29 (Queens Village) to start lunch at 9:40 AM and end it at 2:15. Many schools split lunch periods, giving students only 25 minutes to eat. (Appendix I, Table 22)
- *Parent rooms.* Board of Education policy requires a room half the size of a typical classroom for the parent association. But 24 of the 43 schools lack any parents room. And only two of the parent rooms in the other schools meet size requirement. In some schools, the parent room is a mere cubby hole. At PS 135 in Queens Village the parent room is the former small tiled shower room located behind the reading teachers who occupy the physical education office.

(Appendix I, Table 26)

5. Schools are cramming students into small rooms -- even a former phone booth -- for special services and "funded programs."

- *Special education services.* A speech therapist at PS 176 in District 20 (Dyker Heights) sees students in a 30 square-foot former phone booth and a Reading Recovery teacher instructs students in an oblong 3' by 21' former storage room. Numerous schools provide speech therapy in former closets.

Former bathrooms are also used. (Appendix II, Individual School Profiles)

New York State guidelines say that "Resource Rooms" for remedial reading and math must be at least 300 square feet. But many of the 28 schools for which space data was available did not meet this standard. For instance, at PS 20 (Staten Island), the bilingual resource room is 7' by 15' (102 square feet, the size of a typical bedroom) and 12 to 15 children receive instruction there together; this room has no windows, heat, or ventilation. (Appendix I, Table 23)

- ***"Funded program" rooms.*** Each school is supposed to have a full-size classroom for programs such as English-as-a-Second Language (ESL). In place of 43 full-size rooms in the 43 surveyed schools there are 101 often-minuscule spaces such as former closets, backstage dressing rooms, bathrooms, and mobile units (buses). Public Advocate staff touring PS 290 (Upper East Side) saw small bathrooms located off of landings between floors. The principal said that teachers were "begging" to have these bathrooms converted to offices where they could meet with students. (Appendix I, Table 23)
- **Guidance.** Only three of 28 guidance rooms for which space data was available meet City space requirements. (Appendix I, Table 23)

6. The 43 surveyed schools need 15% more classrooms to implement the Reduced Class Size Initiative (RCSI). The law implementing the RCSI says that the necessary funding will be provided only if empty classrooms are available. Nothwithstanding the lack of specialty rooms, adequate gyms, cafeterias, and staff rooms, our calculations conclude that the 43 surveyed schools will need another 307 classrooms on top of the current 1,722 - a 15% increase. (Appendix I, Table 25)

When principals were asked for suggestions - even distasteful or impractical ones - for finding more space, they were able to come up with only 161 more rooms, leaving a deficit of 146. Among their suggestions: convert to classrooms their libraries, gyms, auditoriums, cluster "specialty" rooms, staff rooms and parents rooms; add temporary transportables in the school yard; lease space; rezone the school to reduce registration; and transfer the fifth grade to another school. Eight principals were unable to come up with any ideas.

In interviews, principals decried the impossible space decisions they face.

The principal of PS 115 in the Washington Heights said, "Every time you take away an art or science room, you compromise a kid's education." Nonetheless, faced with a need for ten more RCSI classrooms, he would eliminate the art and science rooms.

Among examples of the principals' suggestions:

- PS 268 (Canarsie/East Flatbush) would eliminate the library and staff room, but would still need 1.5 more rooms.
- To create six more rooms, PS 176 (Bensonhurst) would eliminate the library, divide special education rooms, and convert auditorium space.
- PS 154 (Flushing) would eliminate the dance/band room, the art room, and two special education rooms..
- PS 176 (District 20, Brooklyn) would convert the library and auditorium and make the special education rooms even smaller.

Among the schools with the hardest job finding space for RCSI: PS 106 (northeastern Bronx), which needs 14.5 rooms. The principal could make no suggestions for procuring them; the school already has 10 transportable classrooms and space for no more, it lacks any cluster rooms to convert to classrooms, and the

surrounding schools are also overcrowded.

Summary of recommendations

Some of the measures that would ameliorate the space crisis in elementary schools do not involve spending more money. One such measure would be to make fuller use of middle schools, which are often underutilized even in the most crowded districts. To do this, sixth grade classes should be moved from elementary schools which still have them to the nearby middle schools. Also, some middle schools should expand to become kindergarten-to-eighth grade schools. And to make even more room in middle schools, ninth grades should be moved out of middle schools which still have them to high schools.

Still, the scope and depth of the space shortage requires more funding sources to be identified. The Board's proposal to generate $2.4 billion in funds through capitalization of State building aid should be pursued. In addition, recognizing that many suburban and even rural schools are overcrowded, a new schools bond issue should be placed before the voters, backed by a strong campaign that educates all the voters.

The Board of Education should consider adjusting its Five-Year Capital Plan to take into account the Reduced Class Size Initiative by spending a larger share of the funds on space that is faster and easier to create, including additions and transportables. The Division of School Facilities should step up its assistance to districts in finding more space within existing structures to convert and reconfigure into classrooms.

I. The Context

Classes are larger in New York City than in the rest of the State.

In August of 1998, at the request of the Public Advocate's Office, the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO) released an analysis of the current status of class sizes in early grades and the cost of a class size reduction initiative here in New York. This analysis was prompted not only by the many anecdotal stories of school overcrowding but also by the class size statistics published by the New York State Education Department. In 1998, the Department published the following data:

Public school average class size in New York

School year 1996-1997

Location of School	Kindergarten	Grades 1 to 6
NYC only	25.1	28
NYS five largest cities	22.4	24.2
NYS excluding five largest cities	22.2	20.4
Entire state	21.9	24

Clearly, New York City lags well behind the rest of the state in supporting smaller class sizes in all grades.

Students do better in smaller classes.

Studies of class size reduction in Indiana, Tennessee and Wisconsin indicate that, when controlling for other variables, students in relatively small early grade (kindergarten through third grade) classes regularly

outperform students in larger classes. The release of recent long-term data confirms that superior student performance continues beyond the early grades.

In Tennessee, the Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study followed a group of students from kindergarten through third grade beginning in the fall of 1985 in 79 schools within 42 school districts. The project began with about 6,000 students and by its conclusion had approximately 11,000 pupil records in its database. Students in STAR were tested in reading and math on the (nationally normed) Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) and the (state criterion-referenced) Tennessee Basic Skills First (BSF) test.

Key findings included:

- *Smaller classes make a difference.* Statistically significant differences were found between small classes and the two types of regular classes on every achievement measure in every year of the study.
- *The small-class advantage was greatest in the first year* that the student entered a small class, whether kindergarten or first grade, and remained stable through second and third grade.
- *Lasting benefits.* Achievement benefits of small classes in K-3 continued through at least grade eight.

At a news conference on April 29, 1999, STAR researchers released new data documenting the further longitudinal effects of early class size reduction. They found:

- *Students in small classes are more likely to pursue college.* STAR students who attended small classes--and black students in the group in particular--were more likely to take the ACT or SAT college entrance exams, according to Princeton University economist Dr. Alan B. Krueger.
- *Small classes lead to higher graduation rates.* Preliminary data from participating STAR school districts in Tennessee show that students in small classes were more likely to graduate on schedule; they were less likely to drop out of high school; and they were more likely to graduate in the top 25% of their classes, according to Dr. Jayne Boyd-Zaharias, a STAR researcher since 1986.

The educational importance of reducing class sizes has been recognized by both New York State and Federal governments through class size reduction initiatives. In 1998, the New York State budget promised additional operating aid to reduce class size to 20 students in kindergarten through third grade over the next three years and implementation of the RCSI will begin this September. Similarly, President Clinton has provided federal funding to assist school districts in hiring 100,000 new teachers with a goal of reducing class sizes to an average of 18 for early grades.

There is a class size crisis in early grades in New York City public schools.

The urgency of reducing class sizes in New York City was underscored by the August 1998 report of the New York City Budget Office. Traditionally, published data on class size has been limited to average class size by grade citywide. That is the data, for example, that is published regularly in the annual *Mayor's Management Report.* The IBO, however, was able to obtain and analyze enrollment data on a classroom-by-classroom basis for grades kindergarten through six.

This data demonstrates that the anecdotes of overcrowded classrooms that have been heard at the opening of school over the last several years are more than just isolated problems. More than 30,000 kindergarten through third grade students are being taught in classes of 30 children or more -- classes that exceed the State target class size by 50% or more. Almost 1,500 youngsters in early grades are being taught in classes with 34 children -- almost 90% higher than the goal of 18 students per class.

The IBO prepared class size distribution charts for each of the 32 community school districts. The results document wide disparities in class size among school districts and grades. While the citywide average is

23.9 students per class in kindergarten, district averages range from a low of 21 in District 1 in Manhattan to a high of 25.9 in District 17 in Brooklyn. District-by-district analysis also demonstrates that the most acute overcrowding is concentrated in five school districts -- Bronx District 10, Brooklyn District 17, and Queens Districts 24, 27, and 29 account for approximately half of the early grade students in classes with 30 or more children.

Using current enrollment data, as well as Board of Education budget and projected enrollment data, the IBO developed a model for estimating capital and operating costs associated with class size reduction initiatives. It examined different scenarios that capped class size rather than those that only achieved target class size on average. Under one scenario, caps would be achieved without moving students to underutilized space in other schools within the district. A second scenario allowed inter-school movement. The IBO also factored in projected State funds as part of the class size reduction initiative.

The bottom line is that for between $300 million (with inter-school movement) and $500 million a year (combined operating expenses and debt service cost) -- less than 2% of the current budget and slightly under a 5% increase in Board of Education spending -- New York City could achieve the President's goal of capping early grade classes at no more than 18 students.

Space needs far outpace the Board of Educations's five-year capital program.

The $11.2 billion Capital Plan released in November 1998 for Fiscal Years 2000-2004 identified four needs for new construction: addressing the present overcrowding of schools; responding to the Universal Pre-K initiative funded by the State; responding to the Reduced Class Size Initiative for Early Grades funded by both the State and Federal Governments; and addressing future expansion of school, district and citywide enrollments.

To meet the needs of present overcrowding and future enrollment increases, the Board proposed construction of new schools, construction of new additions and a modest program of leasing. The Board also proposed expansion of Queens High Schools to a 10 period day; a small year-round schooling program; and administrative solutions. The Board was definitive in stating that the Universal Pre-K initiative would be incorporated in public school buildings where there was space, but expected to outsource 75% of this initiative to community-based organizations.

While appreciating the constraints limiting the Board's plans for new construction, when the plan was released, the Office of Public Advocate expressed concern that the leasing program was too modest (leasing offers certain advantages in delivering new seats quickly) and whether the relief sought in year-round schooling was a reasonable expectation. Also, the Board's assertion that space could be provided for 75% of RCSI requirements over three-years appeared unrealistic. In a meeting at the Office of the Public Advocate, Board representatives acknowledged that 50% to 60% of all elementary schools may be at 100% or greater capacity but nevertheless expressed their confidence in implementing RCSI.

State RCSI legislation requires empty classrooms.

Notwithstanding the space crunch, the Board of Education may have had no choice but to publicly state that it could implement RCSI. The law establishing the RCSI specifically calls for districts to have available classrooms in order to get the money. The Board could have endangered State funding for this critical program if it had said otherwise.

Significantly, the RCSI was part of the budget negotiations that won Governor Pataki the STAR (School

Tax Relief) program to provide property tax relief in suburban and rural areas. The Reduced Class Size Initiative was the *quid pro quo* for the passing of the STAR program. New York City residents would not gain significant property tax relief but could benefit from an infusion of money reducing early grade class size.

Some education advocates supported the strongly-worded legislation that tied RCSI funding to actual space. Unfortunately, this may have been a misguided rallying point. The preliminary results from Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program (an early grade class size reduction initiative) indicate that adding more teachers to crowded classrooms also has a positive impact. The early results from this program indicate that there is no significant difference between student achievement in SAGE first-grade classes with two teachers and up to 30 students and student achievement in classes with one teacher and up to 15 students.

II. Methodology

Overview

In order to comprehensively assess elementary school overcrowding, two levels of analysis were performed. The first level examines the status of elementary school capacity and utilization on a district-by-district basis and summarizes this information by borough and citywide. (Appendix I, Tables 1-18.) The second level of analysis is of individual schools and is based in part on walk-throughs of 47 schools by Public Advocate staff, using as a reference each school's *Annual Facilities Survey/Turn Around Document*. In addition, in order to accurately identify all student services and all room uses, student registers for each classroom and each school's official organization sheet were also examined. (Appendix II, Individual School Profiles)

A protocol for reporting each school's utilization data was developed. This protocol includes:

- overall capacity utilization;
- an analysis of each classroom by size, function, capacity and student register;
- computation of the number of classrooms needed to implement the reduced class-size initiative for each grade and the number actually existing;
- requirements for "cluster" support services and whether rooms (speciality classrooms such as for art and science) exist to provide these educational programs;
- identification of gymnasium, library, cafeteria and parent room uses;
- identification of other rooms providing student support services;
- reported changes in space utilization for September 1999 as indicated by principals in interviews with Public Advocate staff.

The individual school profiles were then consolidated to provide a summary of all spaces reported in the study. This includes an analysis of:

- the number of classrooms violating the city's formula for classroom capacity (Appendix I, Table 27);
- the number of classrooms not meeting the New York State Education Department's guidelines for classroom capacity (Appendix I, Table 29);
- the number of classrooms needed by grade to implement RCSI and a summary of principal's suggestions for meeting the space requirements of the initiative (Appendix I, Table 25);
- the number of specialty "cluster" classrooms required by the City's formulas and whether schools have eliminated such rooms in order to ease overcrowding in regular classrooms (Appendix I, Table 24);
- the number of schools with libraries and gyms and whether they meet the State and City guidelines

(Appendix I, Table 26);
- the number of schools with staff rooms and parent rooms and whether they meet the City space formula (Appendix I, Table 26);
- the number of schools not meeting State guidelines for guidance and resource rooms (Appendix I, Table 23);
- the number of MIS (Special Education) classrooms not meeting State guidelines

Appendix I, Table 29);

- the number of rooms exceeding the City formula for funded (e.g. for English-as-Second Language, Title I reading and math) classrooms (Appendix I, Table 23);
- cafeteria utilization (Appendix I, Table 22).

School enrollment versus the capacity of each school building was also analyzed, documenting the capacity of the original building and the school's current total enrollment including minischools, transportables, and annexes. The increase in enrollments supported by the addition of these additional structures may mask undue strain on common areas like gyms, cafeterias and auditoriums that were not augmented when total school enrollment increased. (Appendix I, Table 21)

Elementary school utilization citywide

Analysis began by summarizing the number of elementary school buildings contained within each district and determining the number of elementary schools that fell within specific capacity utilization ranges. We then determined the percentages of schools contained within the ranges. Schools were placed in the following capacity utilization categories:

- the number of elementary schools at least at 99% capacity;
- the number of elementary schools between 90% and 98% capacity;
- the number of elementary schools between 110% and 125% capacity;
- the number of elementary schools between 126% and 150% capacity;
- the number of elementary schools at greater than 150% capacity.

This data was examined by district and then citywide totals were generated. (Appendix I, Table 1) Next, the districts were ranked from the greatest to the least capacity utilization percentage within each range. (Appendix I, Table 2) Data was then generated by borough and districts were ranked within their boroughs by percentage from the greatest to the least within each capacity range. (Appendix I, Tables 3-6) All elementary school buildings and annexes were included in this count. Annex enrollments range from modest figures of 125 students to substantial enrollments of 400 to 500.

We additionally generated an analysis by utilization range for school buildings designated as minischools (Appendix I, Table 7-12) and a separate district-specific analysis of buildings designated as transportables. (Appendix I, Table 13-18) Minischools are typically eight to fourteen classrooms and were not built to be permanent solutions. They became permanent during the 1980s.[1]

How the study schools were chosen

Citywide analysis determined that 438 out of 723 elementary school buildings (including annexes) were at 99% or greater capacity utilization. (Appendix I, Table 1) It was determined that tours by Public Advocate staff of between 40 and 50 of these schools -- chosen to be reasonably representative of all over-capacity schools -- would be necessary in order to draw conclusions applicable to all of the overcrowded schools.

Forty-seven schools were visited. The number of schools chosen for visits in each capacity utilization range corresponded roughly to the percentage of all schools in that category. For example, 3% of all schools fall within the 150%-plus capacity utilization range and 2% of thc visited schools are in this range. Since generally speaking Queens has the most crowded schools, more schools were visited in Queens than in other boroughs. And since Staten Island also has many overcrowded schools, a larger number of schools were visited there than the borough's share of elementary school population would have otherwise indicated. Schools in 18 of the most over-capacity of the City's 32 Community School Districts were visited.

Number of schools visited

Queens - 19

Brooklyn -- 9

Bronx - 8

Manhattan - 5

Staten Island - 4

To determine which schools to visit, a letter of contact was sent by the Office of Public Advocate to twenty Superintendents of the most crowded districts describing briefly the purpose of the project and what we expected from each school. Each Superintendent was asked to review a list of schools in their district within certain capacity utilization ranges and to choose a specified number of schools for the Public Advocate Office to visit. Chosen schools were then contacted by the Superintendency and informed that the Public Advocate's Office would be calling to set up an appointment. Eighteen of the districts responded positively, with District 22 and 26 declining to participate.

Although 47 schools were visited, four schools were deleted in the final analysis because three had incomplete data and a fourth did not house lower grade classrooms within the building we visited. Specifically, the study examined the following 43 schools:

1 in CSD 2 (Manhattan) (PS 290)

4 in CSD 6 (Manhattan) (PS 8, 98, 115, 173)

4 in CSD 10 (Bronx) (PS 20, 32, 94, 310)

4 in CSD 11 (Bronx) (PS 16, 41, 89, 106)

1 in CSD 15 (Brooklyn) (PS 172)

1 in CSD 17 (Brooklyn) (PS 241)

2 in CSD 18 (Brooklyn) (PS 268, 276)

3 in CSD 20 (Brooklyn) (PS 104, 176, 314)

1 in CSD 21 (Brooklyn) (PS 177)

5 in CSD 24 (Queens) (PS 13, 68, 91, 153, 229)

2 in CSD 25 (Queens) (PS 107, 154)

2 in CSD 27 (Queens) (PS 66, 104)

2 in CSD 28 (Queens) (PS 54, 117)

6 in CSD 29 (Queens) (PS 37, 131, 135, 138, 156, 176)

1 in CSD 30 (Queens) (PS 148)

4 in CSD 31 (Staten Island) (PS 20, 21, 32, 55)

These schools have the following characteristics:

- *Income status.* 28 schools have Title I (poverty) status (Appedix II, Individual School Profiles);[(2)]
- *Building configurations.* 22 schools have main buildings only; five have main buildings with minischools; five have main buildings with transportables; two have main buildings with minischools and transportables; four have main buildings with annex[s]; one has a main building, minischool and annex; three have main buildings with transportables and annex(s); and one has main building with minischool, transportable and annex (Appendix I, Table 20).
- *Grade levels.* One school covers grades K-4; 18 schools are K-5; eleven schools are K-6; two schools are K-8; eleven schools have Pre-Ks. (Appendix I, Table 28)
- *Capacity utilization.* Two schools are between 90% to 98% capacity; ten schools are between 99% to 109% capacity; 19 schools are between 110% to 125% capacity; eleven schools are between 126% to 150% capacity; and one school is at greater than 150% capacity. (Appendix I, Table 19)

Documentation relied on

Each chosen school was asked to copy the following documents for Public Advocate Office review:

1998-1999 Annual Facilities Survey/Turn Around Document

1998-1999 school organization chart

1998-1999 *Official Class Information List* (RACL) report accessed by ATS (Automate the Schools) system.

The *Annual Facilities Survey/Turn Around Document* is used by the School Facilities Division to help determine on an annual basis the utilization of the school buildings citywide. The document asks each school to disclose:

- Other organizations or schools which use space in the building between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM.
- Space the school may use in other buildings. If space in other buildings is used, the school is directed to designate whether it is a regular school building, a minischool, a transportable, or a lease.
- For each room in the building: the room number, length, width, area, previous year function, current function, and the organization using the room if not the main school organization.
- Any additional rooms not included in the survey that are greater than or equal to 240 square feet.

The annual organization chart prepared by each school lists all positions and rooms within the school. This chart includes official class and room numbers, cluster teachers, guidance and SBST (School Based Support Team) personnel, paraprofessionals (assisting in classrooms), school aides, other fundable and reimbursable programs. Schools were also asked to provide actual registers for each classroom. Most schools provided a Spring 1999 copy of the *Official Class Information List (RACL)* report, which is generated through the Board's ATS (Automate the Schools) system that indicates current class information including the number or students registered for each room. Other schools produced variations on this report.

Development of individual school profiles The school visits began in early June and ended in mid-July. Each visit typically lasted two to three hours and in all cases except one the principal was the interviewee. Principals were informed before the visits about the documents needed for discussion. The centerpiece of each visit's discussion was the *Annual Facilities Survey/Turn Around Document,* which is used to generate the Board of Education's annual utilization report.[3]

Each principal was asked to review every entry in the *Annual Facilities Survey/Turn Around Document* for its accuracy. To ensure that all rooms providing services to students were included, we also reviewed with the principal the school organization chart. Principals then were asked a series of questions: whether cluster teachers had their own rooms or were itinerant; what decisions they would recommend in order to meet the number of classrooms needed for reduced class size reduction; whether the school still has a gym or library; whether the school has a staff room and parents room; how they organize lunch periods; and what space utilization changes they expected for September 1999. Most principals were able to accommodate a walking tour of the building to review classrooms, lunchrooms, gyms, and other rooms supporting student services, yards and parent and staff rooms.

How schools are reported

Appendix I contains tables summarizing the citywide findings of this study. Appendix II contains data for individual schools. Appendix II data is presented as follows:

School Utilization. Data for both the 1997-1998 and the 1998-1999 school years is reported. Each school organization is identified by the official building identification number denoted in Board of Education documents. Also included is each building's enrollment and capacity, by how many students the school exceeds or falls short of capacity; and the building's overall utilization percentage. Each part of the school's physical configuration (e.g. minischool, transportable) is separately reported.

Classroom capacity. For each classroom, Appendix II reports the room number; the length, width, and area; and the 1998-1999 function for that room (e.g. first grade, science cluster room). The elementary school capacity/utilization formula (as cited in Pages E1 through E8 of the Board of Education's *Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report*) was then applied for each classroom and the results included.

For this formula, the Board of Education has determined that Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classroom areas should be divided by 35 to determine the room's capacity. So a 630 square foot classroom should be used to teach a maximum of 18 children. If capacity figured this way is less than 25 students, than that number is used for the official capacity. If it exceeds 25, than 25 is the official capacity. In first through third grades, the classroom's square footage is divided by 20 and if the resulting number is less than 25, that number is used for the capacity figure. If it is more than 25, than 25 is the capacity figure. For fourth through ninth grades, again the classroom's square footage is divided by 20 and if the resulting number is less than 29 for Title I schools and 31 for non-Title I schools, then that number is used to determine capacity. If the number is larger than 29 and 31 respectively, then 29 and 31 is used.

A calculation was then performed to determine whether actual class registers were over or under the formula's capacity figure. An additional calculation determined whether classrooms meet the New York State Education Department's guidelines for elementary school classrooms. The State recommends that no more than 27 students occupy 900 square feet in Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms (resulting in 33 square feet per student) and 27 students in 770 square foot classrooms for grades 1 through 6 (resulting in 28.5 square feet per student).

Reduced Class Size Initiative. Calculations were performed to determine how many classrooms each school would need in order to comply with RCSI. We totaled enrollments for each grade based on the registers for 1998-1999. We then divided the total grade register by 20 to determine the number of classrooms needed to meet the initiative. We then subtracted the number of existing classrooms by grade to determine the additional rooms needed by grade.

Principals were asked to suggest how they would increase the number of classrooms available to meet the initiative. We subtracted that number from the number of rooms we had determined was needed for each grade.

Cluster Support Services. A "cluster" classroom is a speciality-program room such as art, science or computer lab. Appendix II reports the number of cluster rooms each school is entitled to have and how many are actually available and in use.

The Division of School Facilities uses a complex formula to determine how many cluster classrooms a school may use and thereby delete from the official capacity figure of the entire school. Typically, a school with a registration of 1,400 will have four cluster rooms. Title I (low-income) schools are entitled to additional cluster rooms. Appendix II reflects these differences in Title I and Non-Title I schools.

We reported cluster subjects that have their own rooms, as well as the number and subject area of the itinerant teachers -- those who teach cluster subjects but do not have a dedicated room -- and clusters that utilize rooms not counted in official capacity figures like gyms and libraries.

Gymnasium. Initially, a review of gyms was included simply to identify whether schools had compromised their physical education program in accommodating their school's overcrowding. Subsequently, a count was taken of how many gyms meet both New York City and New York State space guidelines for physical education programs.

In planning for new elementary schools of at least 650 students, the Board's Capital Planning and Development unit specifies gymnasium spaces of 3,000 square feet. In addition, another 500 square feet is allotted for a Health Instructor office and a storage room. The State's recommendations for elementary schools are a 36' x 52' gym (1,872 square feet) for buildings housing two through fourteen classrooms. It also specifies that buildings with more than 14 classrooms have an additional gym space of 1,872 square feet. Most of the schools we visited have more than fourteen classrooms so would need gymnasium space totaling at least 3,744 square feet.

Library. Appendix I summarizes a count of how many schools have a separate room designated as a library. In addition, the table provides the square footage of the library rooms to determine how they measure against City and State guidelines.

In building a new 650-seat elementary school, the Board of Education's Capital Planning and Development unit specifies a 1,200 square foot complex as the space requirements for a library, including a reading and stack area of 800 square feet, a 150 square-foot media area and a 250 square-foot librarian office. The State guideline calls for any elementary school building of thirteen or more classrooms to allocate a 900 square-foot room for a library.

Cafeteria. Public Advocate staff asked principals how many lunch periods they organize on a daily basis, how long those lunch periods are, and whether the typical 50-minute period is split, limiting students to a 25-minute eating time. Principals' responses are included in Appendix II. In addition, we analyzed whether cafeterias meet the Capital Planning and Development unit's rule-of-thumb to accommodate one-third of

the school's population at each lunch period. In planning new schools, the Board has assumed 12 square feet per student as the standard minimum cafeteria space requirement.

Staff Room. In the *Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report*, the Board of Education allocates one-half of a classroom as a room for staff to eat lunch, plan their next classes, and meet with other teachers on issues such as curriculum. In planning new schools, the Board now specifies a 400 square foot teacher lunchroom and two smaller rooms for teacher planning--one of 350 square feet, the other 375 square feet.

Appendix II discloses whether a school has a separate staff room and whether staff rooms meet the minimum 400 square-foot requirement for new schools.

Parents Room. The *Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report* allocates a half classroom as a room for parents. In planning new schools, the Board now specifies a 375 square-foot parents room. Appendix II discloses whether a school has a separate parent room and whether it meets the 375 square-foot standard.

Other Rooms Providing Services to Students. Appendix II reports the utilization of every single room in each school, including smaller rooms typically used for "funded programs," special educational services, and guidance counseling.

III. Findings

Review of Board of Education data, comparison of this data with City and State space guidelines, and frank discussions by principals with Public Advocate staff produced the following findings.

A. Citywide Capacity Utilization for the 1998-1999 School Year

Overcrowding in schools compromises learning. Even the less-crowded of the over-capacity schools are experiencing difficulties in teaching because of space limitations.

Overcrowding also creates enormous logistical problems. For instance, PS 314, located in District 20 (Brooklyn), is in a relatively new building. Yet it is at 104% capacity and growing. The principal said in an interview that she is running out of student holding spaces which are used during inclement weather and to aid with dismissal. She said that dismissal, involving the discharge of 1,900 students, is a daily "nightmare."

Overcrowding causes inconveniences. At PS 16 in the northeast Bronx, the principal complained about the need for additional bathrooms. The building was originally built for 492 students and has has just over 600. Yet there is only one girls bathroom on the first floor, one boys bathroom on the second floor, and one girls bathroom on the third floor. In the basement, where the cafeteria is, there is an additional boys and girls bathrooms. Boys on the first and third floors have to go to the second floor to use bathroom facilities. The principal expressed concern about this physical configuration leading to children "wandering" around the building unattended. And he showed Public Advocate staff one of the bathrooms to demonstrate that there are only three stalls in each, which he said was inadequate to meet demand.

1. 61% of all elementary school buildings and annexes are operating at 99% or greater capacity. There are 723 elementary school buildings and annexes citywide. Of these, 438 are classified by the Board of Education as reaching capacity. District 29 in southwest Queens has the dubious ranking of number one in overcrowding; all 23 elementary school buildings are at or exceed capacity. District 24 Queens) ranks

second, with 92% of school buildings at capacity. District 11 (Bronx) and District 27 (Queens) are tied for third, with 91%; District 6 (Manhattan) ranks fourth, with 90%, and District 25 (Queens) ranks fifth, with 83%. (Appendix I, Table 1 and 2)

On a borough level, Queens leads the City with 82% of all elementary schools operating at capacity. The borough of Staten Island (comprising the 31st District) ranks second with 72% of its elementary schools operating at or above capacity.(4) The Bronx ranks third with 64% of elementary schools operating at or above capacity and Brooklyn ranks fourth with 50% of its elementary schools overcrowded. Manhattan ranks fifth with 44% of its schools at capacity. (Appendix I, Tables 3 to 6)

Within Manhattan, District 6 in the Washington Heights section ranks number one in overcrowding with 90% of all elementary school buildings at capacity. Within the Bronx, District 11 is most crowded, with 91% of elementary schools at or above capacity. In Brooklyn, District 20 ranked as the most overcrowded, with 82% of its elementary schools at capacity. In Queens, District 24 follows closely behind District 29 as most crowded, with 92% of its elementary schools at capacity. (Appendix 1, Tables 3-6)

- **15% of all elementary school buildings and annexes operate at 90% to 98% capacity**. Schools that are at 90% capacity have a handful of available seats, but these available seats do not necessarily represent unused classrooms available to implement the RCSI program. Slightly less than 100% capacity utilization can be produced simply by having one or two fewer students per classroom than the official capacity formula would allow. It could well be argued that effectively 76% of all elementary school buildings are operating near, at, or beyond capacity.

(Appendix I, Tables 1 and 2)

- **23% (168 of 723) elementary schools and annexes are operating at 110% to 125% of capacity**. District 29 (Queens) leads the city with 57% of all elementary schools operating at 110% to 125% of capacity. District 11 (the Bronx) ranks second, with 52%, District 6 (Manhattan) ranks third with 50%. On a borough level, District 6 ranks first in Manhattan with 50% of all elementary schools operating at this level of capacity utilization. In the Bronx, District 11 ranks first, with 52% of its schools at 110% to 125%. Brooklyn's District 20 ranks first in that borough, with 32% of its schools between 110% to 125% of capacity utilization. Staten Island has 23% of its schools operating at this capacity utilization level. (Appendix I, Tables 1 and 2)
- **12% (86 of 723) elementary school buildings and annexes are operating between 126% to 150% capacity**. District 24 (Queens) ranks first, with 42% of its schools operating within this range. District 27 (Queens) ranks second, with 41%; District 10 (Bronx) ranks third with 29%; District 6 (Manhattan) ranks fourth with 25%; and District 29 (Queens) ranks fifth with 22%. (Appendix I, Tables 1 and 2)

Within the boroughs, District 6 ranks first in Manhattan with 25%. In the Bronx, District 10 ranks first with 29%. District 17 in Brooklyn ranks first with 21%. Staten Island, which has one district, has 14% of its schools at this level of overcapacity. (Appendix I, Tables 3 to 6)

- **3% (21 of 723) of all elementary school buildings annexes operate at greater than 150% capacity**. District 24 in Queens ranks first with 15% of its schools operating above 150%. District 18 in Brooklyn ranks second with 13%; District 28 in Queens ranks third with 11%; District 19 in Brooklyn ranks fourth with 8%; and District 9 in the Bronx ranks fifth with 7%. (Appendix I, Tables 1 and 2)

2. 63% of all minischools are operating at 99% or greater capacity. Minischools were created as a temporary strategy for solving overcrowding issues in the 1980s. Small portable buildings, they are

delivered to playground sites and house between eight and 14 classrooms with occasional small offices. Temporary solutions turned into permanent answers. In many of the sites we visited, minischools have eaten up most of the school's original yard space. Principals are left with indoor play programs that eat into the already strained common areas like auditoriums and gyms. (Appendix I, Tables 7 to 12)

District 24 (Queens), District 30 (Queens), District 8 (Bronx), and District 19 (Brooklyn) minischools are all at capacity. There are 64 minischools throughout the city with 40 of them at capacity. District 10 (Bronx) and District 11 Bronx lead the city in utilizing this "temporary" solution to solve their overcrowding issues.

3. 79% of all transportables (two classrooms each) are operating at 99% or greater capacity. Eighty-two transportables are used in New York City schools. Transportables are delivered to school sites in pairs and range from two classrooms occupying a school's playground to eight classrooms. Most typically, four classrooms occupy a site. (Appendix I, Tables 13 to 18).

Eight school districts have transportables that are at capacity. Districts have agreed to utilize transportables as a quick solution to extraordinary space needs. District 24 (Queens) has 11 schools sites with transportables; District 28 (Queens) has nine, and Districts 27 (Queens), 18 (Brooklyn) and 29 (Queens) each have seven.

B. Results of the School Site Visits

Until this study, a room-by-room analysis has never been performed that establishes the capacity for each room and also compares the actual student registers against capacity. While the Board of Education's Division of School Facilities compares the registers for each grade against the room capacities for each grade, this can mask major discrepancies between register and capacity for individual rooms.

The visits to 43 schools[(5)] yielded data on 1,772 classrooms across 18 districts in all five boroughs broken down by the following grades (Appendix I, Table 28):

Grade	Classrooms
Pre-K	47
K	258
1st	258
2nd	266
3rd	261
4th	227
5th	198
6th	45
7th	15
8th	15

Forty bridge classes (two grades within the same classroom) and 142 Special Education rooms were also included.

Findings from the school walk-throughs and interviews follow.

1. Most classrooms are cramped.

On example of how cramped classrooms harm learning is at PS 117 in District 28 (Queens), where Public Advocate staff visited kindergarten classes in progess. Kindergarten rooms of approximately 1,000 square feet were divided by filing cabinets with up to 25 children on each side. In one class the music from the other side of the filing cabinets could be heard and was distracting the instruction. The principal said that the teachers know each others' schedule and try not to teach a serious lesson whenever there is music on the other side. Many principals said in interviews that cramped classrooms stymie them in introducing new research-based instructional strategies such as "content centers" and "learning centers." Just fitting six or more extra desks into a classroom can become a logistical nightmare. Principals also said that fourth and fifth graders - the grades with the largest class sizes - are being stuffed into rooms that are far too small, forcing desks to be crammed up against each other.[(6)]

a) 56% of the 1,772 classrooms surveyed do not meet New York City's room capacity formula. Every school in the study has classrooms that do not meet the formula. The percent of classrooms that fail to meet City guidelines ranges from 21% for PS 154 in District 25 (Queens) to 92% of all classrooms for PS 68 in District 24 (Queens). More than half of the schools visited had 50% or more of their classrooms not meeting the city's formula. (Appendix I, Table 27)

At PS 13 in District 24 (northern Queens), 47 of the school's 53 classrooms do not meet the guidelines. In Brooklyn, PS 241 in District 17 has 32 of its 38 classrooms above the guideline. In PS 94 in District 10 (Bronx) some 82% of classrooms do not meet the guidelines. At PS 8 in District 6 in Manhattan only nine of 32 classrooms meet the guideline. None of the classrooms at PS 55 in Staten Island meet the guidelines.

b) 11% of the 1,772 classrooms studied are reaching critical levels of overcrowding by exceeding the formula by more than five students. In PS 68 and PS 13 in District 24 in Queens, 42% of classrooms exceed the formula by more than five students. At PS 176 in District 29 (Queens), ten of 26 classrooms fail to meet the formula by at least five students and at PS 241 in District 17 (Brooklyn), 24% of its classrooms exceed the formula by six or more students. Only four of the 43 schools in the survey do not experience this level of overcrowding. (Appendix I, Table 27)

Operating at 152% of capacity, PS 68 in District 24 (Queens) is the most overcrowded school in the study. The good news for PS 68 is that in September 1999 a new addition will open adding 17 new classrooms. The bad news is that this will only reduce the school's overcapacity to 115%. The principal is expecting class sizes to remain high, with 33 to 34 students in fourth grade classes and 29 in kindergarten.

In such conditions, there is little chance of implementing RCSI. During an interview the principal was adamantly in favor of overlaying experienced, qualified teachers on her early grades - that is, adding an additional teacher to high-register class - as an alternative to finding additional classrooms for reduced class sizes.

However, the RCSI program prohibits funds from being used this way.

c) 75% of classrooms in grades above kindergarten do not meet New York State's guidelines for space. New York State requires 28.5 square feet per student. At PS 66 in District 27 (Queens) all 13 classrooms fail to meet these guidelines. In District 29 (Queens), PS 176 fails to meet the guideline in all 22 rooms. Only one school among the 43 surveyed actually meets the guidelines in all of its classrooms. (Appenix I, Table 29)

d) 59% of all Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms do not meet the state's guidelines for classroom space.

The State's guidelines for Pre-K and kindergarten are actually less generous than the City's. New York City allocates 35 square-feet per kindergarten child versus the State's 33 square feet per child. Nonetheless, nine schools failed to meet the State standard in any of their Pre-K or kindergarten classrooms. (Appendix I, Table 29)

e) ***94% of all Special Education classrooms classified as MIS 1 through MIS 5 (special education classifications) do not meet State space standards.*** Most of the Special Education classrooms visited by Public Advocate staff are smaller spaces previously used for offices. Principals we interviewed discussed their struggle in making these space decisions as they felt the pressure of overcrowding. Several said that they could no longer justify continuing to have small Special Education classes of 12 to15 students use regular size classrooms at a time when their registers were swelling with other students. They urgently need additional classrooms for relief in their regular education classrooms. (Appendix I, Table 29)

2. There are not enough cluster (specialty) rooms. Yet rising enrollments are forcing some schools to eliminate cluster rooms. (Appendix I, Table 24)

- ***The 43 surveyed schools have only 80 cluster rooms even though they are entitled to 153. Six schools have no cluster rooms at all. Yet 17 rooms are expected to be eliminated in September 1999.*** One concern as we began this study was whether overcrowding has compromised programming. Did schools trade art and science rooms for regular classrooms as their registers grew? The Board of Educations' space formula allocates rooms not counted as part of capacity figures to support a full educational program that includes rooms for subject areas like art and science. Most of the surveyed schools are entitled to a minimum of three cluster rooms. Cluster rooms traditionally are used for art, science and computer classes. We performed a count on whether schools had these rooms.

Of the 43 schools we studied, six have no cluster rooms. Schools with none or one or two cluster rooms have been forced to provide art and science on carts or in shopping bags as teachers move from room to room. Typically, an art or science lesson should be 45 minutes long but since teachers have to do their set up and break down within each classroom, instructional time is reduced to about 35 minutes.

Some examples of schools with inadequate cluster facilities: PS 106 in District 11 (Bronx) has 1,648 students, entitling it to five cluster rooms. With the school at 129% of capacity, it has no cluster rooms. PS 13 (Elmhurst) has 1,550 students and is entitled to five cluster rooms but has just one for computers and its library does not meet space standards. PS 68 (Ridgewood) is entitled to four rooms but has only a computer room; PS 68 also lacks a gymnasium and its library is undersized for its 1,079 students.

Principals in several schools said that they intend to or are very likely to close some cluster rooms in September 1999 because of rising enrollment. For instance, the principal of PS 290 in District 2 (Upper East Side) said that she had no choice but to convert the art room to a fifth grade classroom among other speciality room losses. The principal of PS 115 in District 6 said that a computer room would be converted to a classroom. PS 21 (Staten Island) will eliminate its science room to accommodate an additional fifth grade classroom.

Some cluster rooms are dubiously identified by the Board of Education as real rooms yet they are nevertheless included in the official count. For example, PS 173 in District 6 (Washington Heights) is entitled to five cluster rooms but has only two, one of which is a 400 square foot room (approximately two-thirds the size of a regular classroom) off a back stairway between the auditorium and the gym. And when used simultaneously for several programs, cluster rooms may become very cramped. PS 89 in District 11 (Northeast Bronx) is entitled to have five cluster rooms but has only three. One of these three is a

"Cluster Teacher Planning Room" of only 460 square feet, about two-thirds the size of a normal classroom. This one room is home to 18 teachers, some of whom are assigned to the middle school: one art. two Spanish, three math, one social studies, one home careers, one science, two writing, five Title I math, and one literacy developer. One of the school's other three cluster rooms, used to store science materials, is the former boys changing room.

- ***Only nine of the 43 schools have art rooms.*** Many studies have pointed up the loss of arts education in New York City's classrooms, and public and parent pressure has forced restoration of arts to elementary curriculums. But as this study indicates, rooms are often not available to support this effort. Instead, art teachers and outside art organizations are forced to provide itinerant services to students.
- ***Only 13 schools have designated science rooms.*** All fourth graders in New York State are required to take a hands-on science exam every spring. The expectation is that students have been experiencing regular hands-on science lessons. With teachers often having to teach from carts and shopping bags, clearly the science education being received by many New York City's school children is being compromised. While science teachers can instruct students in content, it may be difficult to provide science experiments from a bag.

- ***37 of the 43 schools have computer rooms***. When only one or two cluster rooms exist it is likely to be dedicated to computers.

3. Gym facilities are inadequate. (Appendix I, Table 26)

- ***Twelve of the 43 surveyed schools lack gymnasiums, in others the gyms are too small.*** Many of these 12 schools utilize their cafeterias during off periods for physical education. As in PS 16 in District 11 (Bronx), these areas are too small to use effectively for physical education and have columns. In some schools, holding areas or indoor yards are used as gyms; these spaces have columns and low ceilings which restrict the use of the space. For instance, PS 115 in District 6 (Northern Manhattan) uses a columned indoor yard for physical education.

Some gyms are used for other functions besides cafeterias. At PS 276 in District 18 (Canarsie) the gym is also used for music instruction. While schools also utilize parts of their yards for physical education on good weather days, some schools have inadequate schoolyards or the yards are filled with transportables.

- ***Only 15 of the 43 schools meet New York State guidelines for gyms.*** The guidelines recommend that school buildings housing two to fourteen classrooms should allocate a 36' x 52' (1,872 square foot) gym space. If they have more than fourteen classrooms, they are required to add an additional gym of the same size or increase the total gym space to 3,744 square feet. Data on 11 of the gym spaces is unavailable; the length, width and area were blank on the Annual Facilities Survey.
- ***Only 18 schools meet the NYC Board of Education's gym specifications.*** In specifications for new elementary school buildings of 650 or greater enrollment, the New York City Board of Education requires a 3,000 square foot gymnasium with an additional 500 square feet allocated for a Health Instructor's office and a gym storage room.

Gymnasiums are overused in many schools. At PS 13 in District 24 (Queens), students only attend gym cvcry other week and sometimes only once a month if a holiday falls on their assigned day. PS 13's main school building was built to accommodate 767 students. The school's total enrollment, after combining the minischool, transportables and annex is 1,538. The gym was designed only to accommodate the original building's population.

4. Most schools have retained their libraries, although some are too small. (Appendix I, Table 26)

- ***Six of the 43 schools have no libraries***. Most principals are protective of their libraries and would not consider converting them to regular classrooms. Thus, most schools still have libraries, even if they lack cluster "specialty" rooms, gyms, and auditoriums.

Nonetheless, a few principals said that enrollment pressures are forcing them to either reduce or eliminate their library space. For instance, the principal of PS 290 on the Upper East Side explained in an interview that she had just used a $50,000 grant to enhance her library with a research/technology center. She is now needs two more classrooms because of growing enrollment and is feeling "just sick" because she will probably have to dismantle the room and room and convert it into two small rooms for Special Education classes.

- ***Of the 37 schools with libraries, only 15 met the State's Guidelines for space.*** New York State specifies that an elementary school of 13 or more classrooms have a library of at least 900 square feet,. Libraries at 15 schools do not meet this standard.[7]
- ***Only six schools meet the NYC Board of Education's specifications for libraries.*** In building a new 650-seat elementary school, the NYC Board of Education specifies that an elementary school requires a library complex of 1,200 square feet. 800 square feet is dedicated to reading area and stacks, 150 square feet is a media area and an additional 250 square feet is an office for the librarian.

While some libraries easily meet State and City space standards, review of utilization reveals that multiple uses may make them cramped. For instance, PS 314 in District 20 (Sunset Park) has an ample 2,496 square feet. But it also houses a Title I math teacher who meets there with 15 students; a special ed room resource teacher who meets with five to eight students; and two learning-to-read through-the-arts teachers who meet with small groups.

5. Staff rooms are likely to be missing or too small. (Appendix I, Table 26)

- ***Five schools have no staff room***. Staff rooms are important. They aren't just lunchrooms. This is where teachers teaching the same grade meet to collaborate. It's where teachers spend preparation periods.
- ***20 of the 43 schools do not have staff rooms the size specified by the NYC Board of Education***. In planning new 650 seat elementary schools, the NYC Board of Education now specifies a 400 square-foot staff lunchroom and two smaller planning rooms of 350 and 375 square feet. Most of the schools we visited have only one staff room which doubles as lunchroom and planning room. Rooms are small and very inadequate for schools that have staffs of 100 and more.

PS 290 in District 2 has neither a staff room nor a general office. The principal occupies what had been the nurse's office. The staff uses a small anteroom and the principal's office for meetings and to eat. The principal said that it was a good thing she likes to spend so much time with her staff.

Several principals we interviewed expressed embarrassment about the inadequacy of their staff rooms considering the large size of their teaching staffs. As one principal pointed out, "Just look at this. I have 120 teachers and this room [staff room] is not even half the size of a classroom."

6. Approximately half of the surveyed schools lack a parents room. Parents rooms in the other schools are often inadequate. (Appendix I, Table 26)

- ***24 of the 43 schools have no parents room.*** In the early 1990's, schools were directed by the Board of Education to find space for the parents association. Most schools attempted to find space but more than half of the schools we visited were not able to provide a separate room for parents.
- ***Of the 19 schools with parent rooms, only two meet NYC Board of Education requirements.*** According to the *Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report*, schools should have a parents room that is half the size of a full sized classroom. In specifications for building a 650-seat elementary school, the Board now specifies a parents room of 375 square feet. (Four of the schools had no room size data.)

During a tour of PS 94 in District 10 (Bronx), the principal apologized for the "pitifully" small size of the parents room. The room consists of a "cubby" off the school kitchen. In PS 32, also in District 10, the parents use the principal's office.

7. Cafeterias are inadequate. (Appendix I, Table 22)

- Space constraints have forced 18 of the 43 surveyed schools to have four or more lunch periods. In addition, 22 of the schools run split period lunches. Split lunch periods force children to eat in only 25 minutes. PS 135 in District 29 (Queens Village) can't have split sessions because the school is so crowded that there is nowhere to put the students who are waiting to eat. PS 135 starts its lunch periods at 9:40 AM and ends them at 2:15.
- The City requires that cafeterias be able to seat one-third of their students at each lunch period. Only six schools come even near that standard by having 25 or less children over the capacity for each lunch period. Instead, 16 of the 43 schools have more than 100 students over the requirements per lunch period. PS 106 in District 11 (Northeast Bronx) has 182 additional students per lunch period. PS 268 in District 18 (Canarsie) has 252. PS 13 in District 24 (Elmhurst Queens) has 248.

8. Special services like remedial reading are often provided in cramped and/or inappropriate spaces. (Appendix I, Table 23)

a) "Funded programs." Every school is officially entitled to one full-size classroom for "funded" programs such as English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and Title I reading and math. Typically, there are 12 to 15 children in these classes. The 43 surveyed schools actually have 101 funded program rooms, but many of them are very small and virtually none are full-size rooms. These small rooms - typically 275 to 350 square feet - hold as many as 15 students, a teacher, and their desks.

In some schools, funded program services are provided in small spaces off the stage or in mobile instructional units (buses that park next to the school). For example, ESL and speech therapy services at PS 32 in District 10 (Fordham area) are provided in a mobile unit, forcing children to leave the school building. Room 205A in PS 66 in District 27 (Richmond Hill) is used for ESL, but students can access this room only by walking through Room 205, a fifth-grade class, periodically distracting the fifth graders. The ESL teachers at PS 131 in District 29 (Jamaica) don't even have a room; they have to "float" and look for empty classrooms when needed.

At PS 290 on the Upper East Side students are not being taught in former bathrooms - yet. The principal showed Public Advocate staff small bathrooms located just off the staircases in between floors and said that teachers were "begging" to have them converted into offices where they could meet students for English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) and Reading Recovery. The principal of PS 138 in Rosedale, Queens, showed Public Advocate staff a former closet that is being used by a speech therapist. PS 8 in District 6 (Washington Heights) has a minuscule 145 square foot ESL lab which hosts 12 to 15 students at a time. At PS 106 in District 11 (northeastern Bronx), two ESL teachers share a small room with the school's

photocopier; the room is also used for storage. At this same school, eight Title I reading and math teachers work with small groups of students in the corridors.

At PS 135 in District 29 (Queens Village), the principal showed the Public Advocate interviewer instructional space for ESL students. He expressed dismay that this space is not handicapped-accessible.

b) Special services. Special Education and speech therapy are generally provided in rooms that are far smaller than New York State standards. Former bathrooms are, indeed, being used for these purposes. At PS 91 in District 24 (Glendale, Queens), speech therapy is provided students in room 559, a converted bathroom. The other speech therapist is working in Room 101, a former closet. At PS 176 in District 20 (Dyker Heights) one therapist sees students in a 30 square-foot former phone booth and a Reading Recovery teacher instructs students in an oblong 3' by 21' former storage room. At PS 20 (Staten Island), the bilingual resource room is 7' by 15' (102 square feet) and is used by 12 to 15 children to receive instruction together. The room has no windows, heat, or ventilation.

Schools often have to be very creative in finding space for special services.

- At PS 173 in District 6 (Washington Heights) two Resource Room teachers and two speech therapists work out of the former gym office space, while the three SBST staff and a family worker are in a former locker room. Two Title I reading teachers and one ESL teacher work in an alcove outside of classrooms, a location where children walking by can be distracting. And two ESL teachers work out of the back of the gym.
- At PS 135 in District 29 (Queens Village) the Resource Room is a former small projection booth.
- At PS 290, the principal is planning to move the School Based Support Team (SBST) to the auditorium stage and partitions are being purchased for this to be done. A former bathroom is used at PS 89 in District 11 (northeast Bronx) for two crisis intervention team staff.
- At PS 98 in Inwood, speech therapy, a resource room with five to eight children, and four SBBT staff are located at the right side of the backstage area in what may have been small dressing rooms. Stage left has three additional staff. PS 32 also employs backstage areas for speech and resource rooms.
- PS 66 in Richmond Hill uses a former bathroom, Room 152, for its SBST teams to meet with groups of students. A guidance counselor shares this room.

A typically cramped arrangement can be seen at PS 20 in District 10 (northwest Bronx). In a 375 square-foot room - about half the size of a full classroom - are four SBST staff, one dean, and three guidance counselors. At PS 8 in Washington Heights., five to eight children squeeze into a 100 square-foot Special Education resource room. Speech therapy at PS 94 in District 10 (Norwood, Bronx) is provided in a former closet and in the hallways of the minischool. Speech therapy is also provided in a former closet at PS 89 in District 11 (northeast Bronx). Former closets are used for speech therapy in several additional schools.

c) Guidance. Forty of the 43 surveyed schools have rooms designated for guidance services. Of these 40, space data was available for only 28. Of these 28, only three meet the New York City Board of Education requirement of 500 square feet. Typically, these rooms range from 150 to 350 square feet. At PS 154 in District 25 (Flushing) a former matrons' small changing room, which included a bathroom, is being used for guidance services.

9. To implement RCSI (Reduced Class Size Initiative), the 43 surveyed schools will need 307 additional classrooms, yet principals could identify only 161 at most. (Appendix I, Table 25) In the November 1998 Five-Year Capital Plan, the Board of Education suggested that only approximately four additional classrooms would be required for most schools to reduce early grade registers to 20 as

envisioned in RCSI - so a total of 172 would be required in the 43 schools included in this study. In fact, our calculations document that 307 classrooms would be needed by these schools.

Already, some schools are cutting programs and eliminating cluster rooms in order to implement the first year of RCSI in September 1999. For instance, the principal of PS 21 (Staten Island) said in an interview that she has received RCSI funding and, to make room, will eliminate the library, a special education resource room, and her pre-kindergarten program. Several principals pointed out that the physical space crisis is being exacerbated by the Board of Education's new policy on holdovers (children held back). For instance, the principal of PS 276 (Canarsie) said that her recent review of her students' academic records indicated that enough of them could fail to require three additional classrooms. Since her 1,555 student school has just one full size cluster room, it would be nearly impossible to find enough space to convert to classrooms, she said. And she already has nearly 500 students in transportables.

Public Advocate staff asked principals to suggest ways of creating more classrooms in their buildings to fully implement RCSI over the next three years, even if not entirely realistic or extremely undesirable from an educational standpoint. The principals of the 43 surveyed schools could identify only 161 rooms, leaving a deficit of 146. Principals admitted that most of their suggestions would compromise instruction. Their suggestions included:

- *Convert library, gym and/or auditorium to classrooms - 13 principals.* Several principals would opt for what is perhaps the most drastic measure - do away with the library. For instance, the principal of PS 176, located in District 20 (Brooklyn) would consider eliminating not only the library, but also removing seats from the auditorium to convert it to classrooms because parents adamantly oppose locating transportables in the school yard.

A typical illustration of the difficult measures being taken to implement RCSI is PS 21 in District 31 (Staten Island). PS 21 is at 104% of capacity. In order to implement RCSI, the principal said in an interview that she is receiving funds to reduce class sizes in the second and third grades. In order to do this, she is eliminating the library, the Pre-K program, and a special education resource room. She states that she had no choice but to eliminate the library since she wishes to retain two cluster rooms - one for computer and one for science. Unfortunately, she pointed out, the science room is being converted to a new fifth grade classroom, leaving this school with only one speciality room -- for computers. As a stop gap, she is considering moving the library books into an undersized office.

- *Convert cluster rooms to classrooms- 12 principals.* The principal of PS 32 in District 31 (Staten Island) was adamant that giving up cluster rooms harms education. "You have to have art, you have to have science," she told an interviewer. She is particularly passionate about the school's science room, which has tanks of fish, caged animals, and an array of equipment that makes children excited about science.

But other principals, while also recognizing cluster rooms' critical role, saw no alternatives to giving up one or two. When asked how he could implement RCSI, the principal of PS 115 in District 6 said that he would not want to put the school on double session. The principal said that it was on double sessions five years ago and it ended up on the SURR (schools under registration review) list. "We don't want to do that again," he said. He also does not want to give up cluster rooms: "Every time you take away an art or science room, you compromise a kid's education." Nonetheless, faced with a need for ten classrooms for RCSI, he would eliminate the art and science rooms. The school received special Federal funding which was used to prepare the science room and to provide open access for all students and parents to the room.

To implement the first year of RCSI, some schools are eliminating cluster rooms in September 1999. For instance, PS 172, located in District 15 (Brooklyn) just eliminated a computer and art room. At PS 314 in

Sunset Park, the principal has been given funding to lower her first grade registers to 20 students. In an interview, she said the school would need four additional classrooms and that she plans to dismantle her computer lab and her orchestra/arts room. The school has already converted a former music cluster room into a small fifth grade classroom and a former storage room into a fourth grade classroom. This 1,900 student school will be left with only a science cluster room. And the principal of PS 172 in District 15 (Sunset Park) is using RCSI funds to reduce the sizes of the first grade classes. The principal said that to help obtain the three necessary new classrooms, he is converting his computer and art rooms into regular classrooms.

- *Add transportables - four principals.*
- *Lease new space - four principals.*
- *Decrease enrollment (move out certain grades or rezone) - seven principals.* The principal of PS 91 in District 24 (Queens) said that he would under no circumstances add more transportables - the school has lived with this temporary solution for four years already. He also would refuse to give up the library, the computer room, and the staff room. So the only alternative he could suggest would be to rezone the school so as to shift some students to neighboring schools as well as to bus some students to an annex that would have to be created.

The principal of PS 54 in District 28 (Queens) suggested relocating the three sixth grade classes to another location, converting his school to kindergarten fifth grade from kindergarten to sixth. He would still need an additional two or three rooms to implement RCSI.

- *Add an addition - four principals.* Some schools with large schoolyards have space to build an addition. Additions -- particularly those involving some prefabrication -- can be built quickly. Of course, there is an issue of funding.
- *Move special education classes to smaller rooms -- seven principals.* The principal of PS 290 in District 2 said, "What am I going to do with my special ed? They can't be put in little tiny rooms' She explained that special education students may require special equipment that also takes up space.
- *Convert other small rooms to regular classrooms seven principals.* This would involve squeezing say, twenty kids into half-size classrooms.
- *Convert fundable program rooms for functions such as remedial reading to push-in services - three principals.* Rather than using a dedicated room to provide special services to children, these teachers would provide the services in regular classes.
- *Eliminate staff or parents rooms - three principals.*
- *Split sessions - one principal.* With split sessions, there are two school days during the same calendar day. One session may start as early as 7:00 AM and finish by early afternoon. A second session begins in early afternoon and ends at 5:00. Principals tend to oppose this arrangement because of staffing difficulties, a desire not to dismiss children after dark in the winter, and because students may be tired very early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Many parents find split sessions inconvenient.
- *No suggestions - eight principals.* PS 106 in District 11 exemplifies a school with literally no physical space to even begin to implement RCSI. Understandably, the principal could make no suggestions for finding more space. She explained in an interview that already has six kindergartens at MS 127 and three more at PS 160. The school has ten classrooms in transportable structures sited in the school yard. There is a small parking lot, but the principal said that it appears to be too small to erect additional portables in. The school has no cluster rooms and the principal also told an interviewer that she has "unearthed" every closet. Public Advocate staff were not able to meet with the principal in her office because she doesn't have one - she converted it to a storage room once all the storage rooms were converted to other uses. Re-zoning so as to reduce her school register is also not feasible since neighboring schools are also overcrowded.

IV. Recommendations

In June of 1995, the Report of the Commission on School Facilities and Maintenance Reform, chaired by Harold O. Levy, opened its Executive Preview by saying:

"A generation of inadequate funding by the State and City of New York and flawed management by the Board of Education (the "Board") of routine maintenance have combined to bring the condition of New York City's school buildings to a state of imminent calamity. Unless a comprehensive 'Marshall Plan' for the schools is put in place immediately--including both improved management and dedicated new money--not only will the schools be essentially unrepairable, and their cost of replacement impossibly high, but children, teachers, principals, custodial workers and the public will be in danger".[(8)]

New York City schools capital funding over the past decade has fallen far short of any Marshall Plan. In 1988, the New York State Legislature created the School Construction Authority and ordered the New York City Board of Education to ". . . develop an educational facilities master plan, and revision thereto, as defined in Section 2590-o . . .". In 1989, then-Chancellor Richard Green proposed a master plan of $15 billion dollars for the Fiscal Years 1989-1994. Only $4.3 billion of that plan was ever funded. In 1994, the next Five-Year Capital Plan was proposed asking for $7.5 billion in capital funds. At one point, Mayor Giuliani cut the schools capital budget to $3.9 billion but some capital initiatives were restored, largely at the insistence of the City Council, bringing the City's total commitment up to $4.6 billion.

At its May 6, 1999 meeting, the New York City Board of Education ratified the proposed Five-Year Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2000-2004. This plan shortchanged the education of 1.1 million children. An $11.2 billion capital budget was cut to a mere $6.6 billion. The Proposed Five-Year Capital Plan for Fiscal Year 2000-2004 submitted by Chancellor Crew in November 1998 called for 75,600 new seats in order to relieve existing overcrowding, accommodate enrollment growth and provide for new educational initiatives. The plan proposed producing 44,900 new seats through new construction, 11,100 through leasing, 5,200 through the use of underutilized schools, and 14,400 through a year-round education pilot. In the revised Plan passed on May 6th, the Board now proposes to provide only 32,953 seats citywide through new construction and leasing.

Enrollment growth seems to be slowing but not at a fast enough pace to produce much relief for the City's overcrowded schools. Elementary and high schools are suffering the most, with occasional overcrowding occurring on the middle school level. The City still needs an aggressive plan to reduce its overcrowding but just as important needs a plan for taking advantage of the significant infusion of money available for the RCSI for Early Grades. This study indicates that the Board's initial projection of being able to accommodate 75% of this initiative appears to be hopeful thinking and finger crossing at best. If adopted, the following recommendations would alleviate much of the overcrowding problem and permit full implementation of the RCSI program.

Pursue Administrative Solutions

Reorganize grade levels within schools. In the last several years, many districts have been reorganizing their middle schools to meet space needs but also in response to recent research[(9)]. New York City's Board of Education is in its fourth year of a Middle School Initiative which is supported by many of the districts in the city.

- **Reconfigure through rezoning elementary schools to teach kindergarten through fifth grade**

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rather than through sixth grade. Eleven of the 43 schools we studied for this report are organized as kindergarten through sixth grade. Most middle schools in New York City, even in the most crowded districts, operate at less than full capacity and are in a better position to handle sixth graders than are the sorely overburdened elementary schools.

Reconfiguration efforts by local school boards are difficult matters with parents often expressing strong opposition to proposed changes. It is the obligation of the local boards and superintendents to inform parents of the need for this kind of reorganization. The Board also needs to seek support from the State in guaranteeing school buses for sixth-grade children where needed. This helps to ease understandable parental anxiety over their ten and eleven year-old children traveling outside their neighborhood on public transportation.

- **Consider designating some middle school buildings as kindergarten through eighth grade.** While not the same as new seats, additional early grade classes in middle school buildings could reduce the excessive pressure on the surrounding elementary schools.

- **Move all ninth grade students out of the middle schools**. Older children are better able to travel to a school outside of their district than younger ones. If the remainder of the ninth graders in middle schools were placed in High School -- which is more likely to involve travel to another district -- there would be more space in the middle schools, which in turn could absorb more elementary school students. The Board of Education High School Division has its share of overcrowding problems, but there has been a dramatic increase in the Board's commitment to smaller high schools throughout the city. These are appropriate places that can help absorb students who traditionally stay behind in middle schools. When hard choices have to be made, older students have more travel flexibility than young ones.

Quickly Acquire More Space

- **Aggressively pursue short term solutions for meeting RCSI space needs now.**. New construction will not create the space needed for this crucial initiative. The Board of Education needs a blend of fast-tracking solutions like more permanent additions in large school yards, more transportables and expansion of the leasing program.
- **Have the Board's Division of School Facilities work more closely with districts in inspecting their sites and determining alternative space solutions that can be implemented quickly.** On our school tours, we saw some space conversions done with the help of the Division of School Facilities that --while not ideal -- appeared to give schools some needed space flexibility. For instance, some older school buildings had two gym spaces and several of these schools had converted their upper gyms to classrooms. There needs to be more such collaboration. While some of the space conversions done with the Division's help were somewhat questionable == including one cited in this report where ceilings and lights in a former gym had not be lowered or walls soundproofed -- this particular conversion nonetheless did provide usable classroom space.
- **The Chancellor should work with districts in limiting their funded program needs to "push-in" models.** In pull-out programs, children are taken out of the classroom and taken to a dedicated room for services like English-as-a-Second-Language. Schools and districts that have relied on pull-out programs for years need help in supporting faculty to convert to push-in models, in which teachers come to the classroom to provide these services. In many schools, the small rooms used by funded programs might be combined to create regular classrooms.

Provide Necessary Funding

- ***The Board's proposal to generate $2.4 billion in capital money via capitalization of New York***

State building aid should proceed. The Board's proposal appears fiscally responsible and it is necessary considering the extensive capital needs. New York State should guarantee future building aid to enable the Board to bond off this projected revenue stream in a fiscally prudent manner.

- *Work with the Legislature to again offer a school construction bond issue to New York State voters. The Reduced Class Size Initiative helps students all around the State. New York City is not unique in overcrowding; some suburban and rural districts are also experiencing overcrowding. A more thoroughly developed campaign should be mounted. The last referendum failed mostly because the campaign supporting it was too short and did not reach enough voters.*
- *Consider diversion of some capital funds to fast-track space solutions. The Five--Year Capital Plan includes no short-term plan for implementing RCSI. The Board should prepare a plan that shows the cost of some of the short-term solutions recommended here. This sum needs to be weighed against the Board's present capital spending plans.*

Improve School Utilization Reporting

- *The Division of School Facilities should consider reorganizing the Capacity - Enrollment - Utilization report. Public Advocate staff had a brief discussion with the Assistant Director of Strategic Planning about how the report is organized by district. It may make more sense to report all buildings belonging to a school organization in one place. The report now lists most elementary school buildings first, then annexes, then minischools and then transportables. Occasionally, new school buildings end up on the end of the list. It would be useful to report all the buildings within a school organization together to understand the true size of managing these complexes.*
- *The Division of School Facilities needs to consider annually analyzing their register compared to capacity figures on a classroom-by-classroom basis, as has been done in this report. School and district leaders and central Board personnel need to understand individual classroom capacities. The present method by which School Facilities counts grade registers against grade capacities may mask some severe overcrowding.*
- *The Chancellor should support the Division of School Facilities by insisting that Superintendencies take more responsibility for the accuracy of the utilization surveys. The Assistant Director of Strategic Planning, in a conversation with Public Advocate staff, described earlier efforts in informing districts and schools about the importance of these surveys. While the Board of Education has given principals a tremendous paperwork burden, nevertheless it is important to accurately report each school's capacity utilization. In a conversation with the Senior Director for Capital Planning, Public Advocate staff was told this data may soon be online, permitting principals to interact with the system on a more regular basis.*
- *The Division of School Facilities should communicate with the schools to confirm the data. Public Advocate staff found that of the information in Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report is inaccurate. For purposes of this study, all entries were double-checked during meetings with principals, during school walk-throughs, and each school was sent its Appendix II chart. Only three of the interviewed principals had ever seen the Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report and several questioned the accuracy of the figures. Until the Board is able to produce an online system, it seems prudent to recommend that the Division of School Facilities return the Annual Facilities Survey/Turn Around Document input to confirm the data.*

Endnotes

1. In District 11, many buildings were designated as TCBs (temporary construction buildings). School Facilities indicated that the buildings were additions to the schools and consisted of eight classrooms and a corridor. To be consistent with the rest of the study, we included District 11's TCBs as part of the minischool counts.

2. Title I is a federally-funded program to counteract the effects of poverty on student achievement. In New York City, schools are eligible for Title I funding if 66.2% of the students are eligible for free lunch.

3. Of the 47 principals visited, only three had ever seen and knew of the existence of the School Facilities Enrollment - Capacity - Utilization Report. We questioned the Assistant Director of Strategic Planning in the Division of School Facilities, who advised us of past efforts informing principals of the purpose of the surveys they fill out every fall. School Facilities had even visited district level principal conferences to communicate the importance of accurately filing the surveys.

4. District 31 ranks 13th out of the City's 32 school districts.

5. As stated, four of the 47 schools visited were deleted from the study.

6. Some classrooms may not be cramped, but are otherwise unsuitable. For example, at one school, a gym was converted to classrooms. However, since the ceiling was not lowered, the lights are too high and classroom lighting is deficient. Furthermore, the rooms tend to be noisy because the walls are covered with ceramic tiles. The walls should have been finished with sheetrock or some other sound-absorbing material.

7. Data from the Annual Facilities Survey was not available for seven of the schools that have libraries.

8. Prior to the creation of the School Construction Authority in 1988 by the New York State Legislature, the Board of Education was treated as any other City agency and received a yearly appropriation for capital needs. The Board was included in the City's ten year capital plan but plans were not regularly reviewed for changes. A table in Appendix E of the Levy report, "Adopted Capital Budget Appropriations," showed that City funding from 1975 to 1988 ranged from $210 million in 1975 -- the peak year -- to a low of only $33 million in 1978.

9. In June of 1989, the Carnegie Corporation of New York issued a seminal report on middle schools titled Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century. The report called for schools and districts to distinguish the middle school years as having distinctive needs that are different from elementary and high school level. This report is seen as influencing the successful trend of aligning sixth through eighth grade as middle school years.

Appendices available upon request either by sending an email to mgreen@pubadvocate.nyc.gov or by calling 212-669-4188.

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