

MAYOR de BLASIO'S EDUCATION REPORT CARD

NAME: BILL de BLASIO



DATE: APRIL 2015

SUBJECT	GRADE	SUBJECT	GRADE
CELL PHONES	A	SPECIAL EDUCATION	D
ARTS EDUCATION	A-	CLASS SIZE	F
GOVERNANCE	INCOMPLETE	SCHOOL OVERCROWDING	INCOMPLETE
CO-LOCATIONS & SPACE PLANNING	D	TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY	F
HALTING SCHOOL CLOSURES	A	PRIVACY	D
PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND INPUT	D	TESTING	B
BUSING	D	DISCIPLINE	INCOMPLETE
		DIVERSITY	F



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It has been more than a year since Bill de Blasio took office as Mayor, and Carmen Fariña was appointed Chancellor. NYC KidsPAC endorsed Bill de Blasio on the basis of many promises he made to reverse the damaging education policies of the previous administration, and to give parents more voice about how their children's schools are run. It is time to see how many of these promises he has lived up to, and how many have been ignored, repudiated or are still waiting to be implemented. The promises referred to were made by his campaign on [our KidsPAC survey](#), or by the candidate himself at a forum we co-sponsored at Murry Bergrtraum HS on June 14, 2013 (as evidenced by [a form checked off](#) and signed by de Blasio himself) or at other events, which we have linked to separately below.

The Mayor has kept his promise to restore the district structure, to de-emphasize testing, to restore funding for the arts, to rescind the ban on cell phones, and to hold a moratorium on closing schools. On these issues he gets good grades. He has just now begun to reform disciplinary processes, so we give him an incomplete on this issue.

On many other issues, including parent engagement and input, transparency and accountability, co-locations, class size, student privacy and diversity, he has made little or no progress. In reality, there have been few significant improvements in these areas.

We are sending this report card to the Mayor's office and the Chancellor, and will post their responses and/or corrections. We also welcome any comments that parents, teachers, school officials, or concerned citizens may have in the following sections.

CELL PHONES

A

During his campaign, Bill de Blasio promised to rescind Bloomberg's ban on prohibiting cell phones in school. After a long wait, the cell phone ban was finally revoked, and starting in March, students were able to bring their cell phones to school without having to stow them at nearby bodegas and vending trucks for \$1 per day.

ARTS EDUCATION

A-

He said he would "Establish a four year goal of providing all students K-8 with a once a week arts instruction." The Mayor made a significant move in this direction, by adding \$23 million in dedicated funding to hire teachers in the arts. However, because there has been little or no progress in alleviating overcrowding, improving the school utilization formula, or halting co-locations, schools continue to lose access to their art and music rooms.

GOVERNANCE

INCOM-
PLETE

The Mayor pledged to implement a public screening process in selecting a new Chancellor; this did not happen and instead, he appointed Carmen Fariña with no public vetting. He did however choose a chancellor who was an educator and did not require a waiver from the State Education Department, as promised.

He said he would restore the district structure, eliminate the networks, and allow superintendents to support and supervise principals, as well as provide help to parents experiencing problems with their schools. This re-organization is happening now, though many of its details and ramifications are still unclear.

He said members of the Panel for Educational Policy would have two year fixed terms and would not be fired at will by the mayor, to "ensure that PEP members who might disagree with Bill will maintain their membership." The PEP members we spoke to were not aware of this, and the Panel has rarely voted against one of the DOE's proposals.

De Blasio promised to give more power to the CECs and Citywide Councils in providing input on local issues. To date, the authority, input and role of the CECs and Citywide Council has not fundamentally changed. See Co-location and Parent Engagement for more details.

CO-LOCATIONS and SPACE PLANNING

D

When de Blasio ran for office he said he would put a moratorium on all future co-locations, and pointed out that more than half of the co-locations that Bloomberg had put forward at the end of his administration would push school buildings above 100% utilization. Here is a campaign Press Release from September 2013:

"If Mayor Bloomberg has his way... nearly half of the proposed co-location plans will put schools over 100% capacity. This means larger class sizes for our students. Bloomberg's proposals are a cynical effort to lock communities into permanent changes while ignoring community voices."

Yet after his election, the Chancellor allowed 36 of 45 of these co-location proposals to go forward, despite huge community opposition. In fifteen of them, the school buildings were pushed above 100% according to the DOE figures. If the school utilization formula was properly aligned with the real needs of children, including smaller classes, most likely all of them would have registered above 100%. Twenty-five more co-locations were proposed for a vote the following May— including a charter school co-location that would have pushed the building to 141%. (The latter proposal was voted down by the PEP.) The Chancellor continues to propose additional co-locations, with little evidence that the administration understands how much damage they do to schools, communities, and parental attitudes.

At a candidate forum in June 2013, Bill de Blasio promised to charge co-located charter schools rent for their space and services, which was what the law required at the time. The Independent Budget Office estimated that this would yield approximately \$92 million per year. After he was elected, he said he would impose a sliding scale fee, based upon each school's funding levels. Then the charter lobby financed a multi-million dollar ad campaign attacking this idea, and last spring, the Governor and the Legislature amended the language in the state law instead to require the city to provide free space for

all new and expanding charters going forward, either by giving them space in school buildings or paying for their rent in leased space. During this debacle, the Mayor and his administration were silent on this amendment while parents mounted a rally to protest the new law.

De Blasio further promised during the campaign to allow CECs to cast an advisory vote on school utilization changes, such as co-locations, and the PEP members would be obligated to state reasons why they agreed or disagreed with the relevant CEC in their votes. To date, such a system has not been implemented although many co-location proposals have been approved by the PEP. In addition, DOE officials agreed to provide co-located space in existing school buildings to ten new or expanded charter schools in the Success Academy chain in 2016— without consulting any CECs, parents, or community members. Yet according to the state law approved in 2014, they could have offered these schools subsidies to find their own leased space, as parent leaders, advocates, and civil rights attorneys suggested was a better alternative.

HALTING SCHOOL CLOSURES

A

As opposed to the moratorium on school co-locations, the Mayor has kept his promise to institute a moratorium on school closures, attempting to improve the 94 lowest-performing schools, now called “Renewal schools” by expanding teacher training, lengthening the school day, and creating wrap-around services. So far, however, there is little evidence that the administration has a real plan to fundamentally improve the opportunity to learn for students in these schools, with more than 60% of Renewal schools with class sizes of thirty or more. The Mayor also promised to create an early warning system for schools that are falling further behind. We are not aware of any such system.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT and INPUT

D

De Blasio promised to “raise the level of significance” of the parent bodies called Community Education Councils by engaging CEC members more meaningfully and by giving CECs more authority. He said he would allow CECs to cast an advisory vote on proposals for changes in school utilization and that the Panel on Education Policy would address the positions of the CECs on

proposals in their communities. He further promised that DOE officials would work with the CECs “to develop portfolio assessments within their respective communities to understand what schools need to grow, what schools have space and what schools are struggling.”

Even though many co-location proposals have been made and voted upon, none of the affected CECs and Citywide Councils has been officially asked to weigh in by the DOE. To date, there have been no significant changes to the role of the CECs and Citywide Councils. According to one CEC President:

“CECs still lack a seat at the table in planning what happens in their respective districts. The ‘new’ engagement is additional phone calls, emails, and the opportunity for walk-throughs for proposed co-locations if you’re available. The status of CECs remains the same. ...We’re still toothless lions when it comes down to any real power.”

However, a group of CEC members is now working with the DOE to develop a new district planning process. The results of this work remain to be seen.

At the same time the Chancellor has taken several actions to diminish the input of parents. For example, the DOE has claimed in court that School Leadership Teams have only advisory powers. SLTs are composed of half parents, half school staff and have the final authority over each school’s Comprehensive Education Plan, which sets goals for each school and is the roadmap for achieving them, as made clear in a State Education Commissioner decision in 2008 and in the 2010 NY State Education Law. Each SLT is also supposed to help determine the priorities for spending in each school. By claiming that SLTs have only advisory powers, the administration is signalling a lack of recognition for parent input.

Without any input from parents, the DOE redesigned their parent survey to omit what was perhaps the most important question in it: “Which of the following improvements would you MOST like your school to make?” The options included smaller class size, more effective school leadership, more hands-on learning, etc. This question had been part of the parent survey since its inception in 2007— because of the input of parent focus groups that were created by Chancellor Klein and Jim Liebman, then head of the DOE Accountability office in 2007. Before revising the survey, DOE officials did not consult parents as far as we know, and omitted this key question— yet more evidence of their lack respect for parent priorities and views.

The Capacity Framework, outlining the new approach to improving and supporting our schools, defines school leadership as solely composed of principals, with parents as resource partners to be brought in at the discretion of the principal. While principals are encouraged to work with parents, more structural parental engagement is not mandated or structurally integrated into the framework.

BUSING

D

Bill de Blasio promised that under his administration, the DOE would seek recommendations from an “independent commission on school busing, with representation from disability advocates, unions and parent groups, on standards for bidders, routes, safety, training, and fair labor practices.” We asked Amy Herren, a leader of Parents to Improve School Transportation (PIST) if this has happened, and here is her response:

“Nothing has really changed since Bloomberg at the Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT). OPT officials mentioned, more than once, that the DOE ‘had to’ put the bus contracts out for bid, but nothing about updating the very, very outdated regs. They made promises about dealing with individual complaints, but nothing about changing the way that OPT does things. They also said [they] couldn’t change things parents suggested... OPT seems very much stuck in the Bloomberg era.”

SPECIAL EDUCATION

D

Many students still are not receiving their mandated services. The Mayor promised to provide independent monitoring to determine how many students with disabilities were receiving all their services, and to commission an independent report, in consultation with Citywide Council on Special Education and the District 75 Citywide Council, on the implementation of the special education inclusion reform, including surveys of parents, students, administrators and educators at the school level. A representative of the CCSE asked DOE officials as to whether there is a plan for this to occur in the future, and as of now, the answer is no.

CLASS SIZE

F

De Blasio promised to fight for the \$3 billion in court-ordered state funding owed to NYC to reduce class sizes as a result of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Though both the Mayor and the Chancellor have cited the need for these funds in speeches and in testimony, it is unclear how hard they have fought for these funds, and whether if they received them, if the funds would be spent on reducing class size. Up to now, the DOE has increased spending substantially on preK and afterschool programs, but has provided no extra funding to schools to allow them to hire more classroom teachers, even as school budgets are still far lower than 2007 levels, and class sizes remain at a 15 year high.

De Blasio also pledged to commit to specific class size reduction goals to achieve by the end of first mayoral term and if necessary, raise revenue for this purpose. Reducing class size has been the number one priority of parents, according to the DOE’s own parent survey since it was first given in 2007— though this year the question on such an important matter to parents was omitted from the survey. In response to parent comments at Town Hall meetings about this issue, the Chancellor has repeatedly made it clear that she does not consider class sizes in NYC schools to be too large, and that reducing them is not a priority for her. More than 70 professors of education and psychology sent a letter to her last fall, pointing out the critical need for smaller class sizes but received no response. In the recent UFT contract settlement, the only opportunity that many struggling students had to receive small group instruction was eliminated in favor of more teacher professional development.

De Blasio also said during his campaign he would comply with the class size reduction plan the city adopted in 2007, in response to the Contracts for Excellence (C4E) law. This has not happened, and instead class sizes rose slightly this year. The city’s proposed plan for spending more than \$500 million in state C4E funds this year was identical to that of the previous administration, and devotes not a single dollar specifically in their targeted initiatives towards lowering class size. Instead, as before, it provided a portion of the funds to principals who could choose to use them for class size reduction, if they so wished— or to “minimize class size increases.” The DOE

also admitted that these funds were being used in many cases to fill budget gaps caused by the city's own budget cuts. In a December 2014 response to public comment to the C4E plan, posted online, the DOE said they would concentrate their focus on the 94 struggling or "renewal" schools— many of which have very high class sizes, but there is no other evidence that they intend to do this.

When he ran for office, the Mayor promised to "Audit the Contracts for Excellence budget to see how the city can re-prioritize reducing class size." Not only hasn't this happened, as far as we know, but as of the end of March 2015, the DOE officials had yet to provide to the state the legally required audits for its C4E spending for the school years 2012-2013 or 2013-2014, both long overdue.

De Blasio said he would re-evaluate "fair student funding" to discern whether it has provided more equity or, instead, incentives to principals to increase class size and/or get rid of their experienced teachers. This has not occurred.

SCHOOL OVERCROWDING

INCOMPLETE

De Blasio pledged to support a more ambitious capital plan that will provide the space necessary to eliminate overcrowding and allow for smaller classes as well as devote sufficient funds for maintenance and repair. This hasn't happened. The DOE's current capital plan as of April 1st will provide less than one half the seats necessary to alleviate existing overcrowding and address projected enrollment growth, no less allow for citywide reductions in class size. The amended version of the capital plan, due in February, is months overdue.

He said he would reform the DOE's Blue Book formula so it more accurately reflects overcrowding and incorporates the need for smaller classes. Though a Blue Book working group was appointed a year ago to improve the utilization formula, they have not yet made public their recommendations. He also promised to provide more transparent enrollment projections. This hasn't happened. For more on this, see the section on transparency and accountability.

TRANSPARENCY and ACCOUNTABILITY

F

The mayor promised to "carry out itemized, fully detailed breakdowns of education budget comparable to other city agencies." Huge, multimillion dollar DOE contracts are still voted on by the PEP with little or no information available in advance to the public or elected officials. In March, the PEP approved a contract worth up to \$1 billion to a company found to be involved in a kickback scheme that robbed the DOE of millions of dollars a few years ago— though this decision was later reversed by City Hall. In response to this controversy, the DOE has now said they would make details of contracts available to the public in advance, though this has not yet occurred.

The DOE has decided that School Leadership Team meetings, which help develop school based budgets, will now be closed to the public, prompting a lawsuit by a teacher, advocates and the Public Advocate's office. The Office of Management and Budget excludes advocates from its regular briefings, even though they were allowed to attend these meetings under Bloomberg. According to George Sweeting, Deputy Director of the Independent Budget Office, "so far, there have been no significant improvements in DOE's financial transparency under the new administration."

De Blasio said he would "Respond to FOILs in a timely and complete fashion and provide an online log which reports on which FOILs have been submitted and when they were responded to, with a link to the results" along the [model of the Illinois board of education](#). This hasn't happened.

He said he would "Require more accurate reporting of class size and overcrowding." A year ago, the Chancellor appointed a working group to improve the space utilization formula and the accuracy of the overcrowding data reported in the DOE's "Blue Book." This working group has still not made public any recommendations. The DOE continues to misrepresent the figures on how many students are sitting in trailers in its TCU reports, omitting thousands of HS students who attend classes in these substandard structures. In its capital plan, DOE hugely undercounts the actual shortage of seats if the projections made by their own consultants and estimates from increased residential development are taken into account. On class size, their reports are still highly unreliable, with at least one school reporting class sizes of

23 when there are really 46 students in the first grade class. By omitting a key question from the parent survey, asking which improvement strategies parents would most like to see in their schools, the DOE has removed a key transparency and accountability mechanism, in an apparent attempt to obscure their top priorities.

PRIVACY

D

De Blasio promised to stop DOE sharing highly sensitive information to vendors without full parental knowledge and consent. There has been no progress on this issue, and to this day, DOE continues to share personal student data with a wide variety of vendors and other third parties, without asking or informing parents this is occurring. The Mayor also promised to pull NYC student data out of the data aggregating corporation called inBloom, a promise that was never tested because inBloom was blocked by the State Legislature last year.

TESTING

B

The Mayor promised to minimize the use of high-stakes standardized tests, and to refrain from using tests to decide which schools to close and which students to be held back. He also promised not to expand testing into grades preK to 2nd, and not to create new local standardized exams. Since his election, the influence of test scores has been reduced by the city, which amended the Chancellor's Regulation on promotion decisions, as well as the state— which passed legislation last spring barring the use of state test scores as the primary reason to hold back students or to make admissions decisions.

He also promised to “develop a non-punitive process” to allow parents to opt their children out of standardized testing. The Chancellor has encouraged principals to “make every effort to arrange for another instructional activity, such as reading or completing another project or assignment” for children who are opting out of testing, though many parents are unaware of this.

Too little has been done to provide this information to parents and administrators. In addition, many teachers and parents still complain of too much standardized testing at their schools.

De Blasio said he would “Craft a teacher evaluation system that depends as little as possible on standardized test scores.” The issue of teacher evaluation has been largely taken out of the hands of the city, with a state mandated system that strongly links teacher ratings to test scores.

The Mayor promised to “Make admissions to all schools based on more holistic factors, and especially Gifted and Talented programs and the specialized high schools.” Admission to gifted programs is still based on the same two high-stakes exams. And though the Mayor has spoken critically of the admissions process of the eight specialized high schools, based solely on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), he has not moved to change the system, including for the five specialized high schools whose admissions process is completely under his control: the HS for Math, Science and Engineering at City College; HS for American Studies at Lehman College; Queens HS for Sciences at York College, Brooklyn Latin HS and Staten Island Tech HS.

For other high schools, the DOE is now in the process of requiring schools to establish a rubric that specifies the percentage of each factor— test scores, grades, attendance, etc.— in admissions decisions. But given that the state legislation was passed on March 31, 2014, those procedures should have been in place for this year's middle and high school admissions process. Many schools submitted the rubric in late 2014. However, rubrics are still not publicly available.

DISCIPLINE

INCOM-
PLETE

He promised during his campaign to “Build capacity in schools for positive discipline strategies, and expand student support services through multi-agency/service provider collaboration.” He said he would “Adopt a Graduated Response Protocol to resolve student misbehavior at school level.”

In March 2015, the Mayor created a task force to start reforming the discipline process at schools and put forward proposals to decrease the number of suspensions.

DIVERSITY

F

In March 2014, three months after Mayor Bill de Blasio took office, the Civil Rights Project at UCLA reported that New York State has the most segregated schools in the nation, in large part due to the segregation in the NYC school system. When asked on the KidsPAC survey how specifically he would address the goals of increasing diversity in NYC public schools, given the increasingly segregation, the de Blasio campaign responded:

“First and foremost, increasing diversity needs to be a strategic initiative by the DoE. Despite the Mayor’s focus on the HS choice process, we have seen lack of diversity in many of the city’s selective and specialized high schools. My administration will focus on ensuring there are quality schools in EVERY neighborhood. Additionally, I will make sure that all children, regardless of SES (Socioeconomic status) and race/ethnicity have access to our city’s selective and specialized high schools.”

And when asked how his approach would be different from Bloomberg’s, de Blasio said:

“As Mayor I will push for high achievement for ALL New York City students and will ensure that my policies are community driven and based on best practices.”

Then, once in office, at a City Council hearing on school diversity on December 11, 2014, the DoE provided the following testimony:

“Creating more diverse learning environments for our students is a top priority of Mayor de Blasio and the Chancellor. There is not a one-size fits all solution to this complex issue and diversity will look different in each community. We are committed to working with our school communities, parents, elected officials, advocates and other stakeholders to achieve this goal. To this end Chancellor Farina’s strategic planning team will partner with the Office of Student Enrollment and take a fresh look at the DoE’s admissions and enrollment policies, which are just some of the tools available to help promote diversity in our schools.”

Despite these promises before and after the election that the DOE would adopt a community-driven diversity plan, so far nothing has been done to achieve this goal. Instead of promising any new initiatives to improve diversity, the administration IN ITS TESTIMONY, cited one pilot that was initiated before de Blasio became mayor.

Even so, this pilot has limitations, in that a single school model does not solve systemic segregation. Instead, parent leaders in a number of districts have called for community-based district-wide solutions to ongoing and increasing school segregation. The de Blasio administration has not yet indicated if they will work with these districts to address the problem of school segregation.

NYC Kids PAC is a political action committee that advocates for better schools by informing the electorate and supporting candidates for office who have demonstrated a commitment to improving our city's public schools.

We submit surveys to candidates for office, distribute scorecards and host candidate forums. Our board includes parent leaders and advocates from throughout the city who care about strengthening our public schools.

Anyone who is a resident of NYC can join NYC Kids PAC as a member by donating at:
www.nyckidpac.org

These are our guiding principles:

- Improving our children's chance to learn, by reducing class size and school overcrowding;
- Strengthening the parent and community voice in decision-making at the school, district, and citywide levels;
- Opposing the privatization of public education;
- Eliminating high-stakes testing, and reducing the time spent on testing and test prep in our schools;
- Providing a well-rounded and culturally diverse education, including art, music, science and physical education;
- Supporting measures to attract and retain experienced and high-quality teachers;
- Ending systemic over-policing and the pushing out of students and promoting positive alternatives to zero-tolerance policies;
- Expanding access for students and their families to the support services and referrals that create and sustain a strong school community;
- Promoting diversity, guaranteeing the civil rights of all students and providing them with an equitable opportunity to learn, regardless of their background and needs;
- Ensuring full transparency and accountability in directing resources to the classroom;
- Advocating for a school governance system that has real checks and balances.

