

# MAYOR de BLASIO'S EDUCATION REPORT CARD

NAME: **BILL de BLASIO**



DATE: **MAY 2016**

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

It has been more than two years since Bill de Blasio became Mayor, and Carmen Fariña was appointed Chancellor. NYC Kids PAC endorsed de Blasio on the basis of specific campaign promises to reverse the damaging policies of the Mayor Bloomberg, and to give parents more of a voice on how their children's schools are run. He made many of these promises in response to our detailed Kids PAC survey and at a candidate forum on June 14, 2013, including on a form he checked off and signed himself.<sup>1</sup>

Last year we released a report card which found that he had failed to live up to many of these promises.<sup>2</sup>

The good news is that the Mayor has restored the district structure, increased funding for the arts, rescinded the ban on cellphones, and had imposed a moratorium on closing schools, though the moratorium has now ended. He has also begun to reform school discipline, though without providing sufficient resources, staffing or training to ensure safety and a positive school climate.

On many other issues critical to parents, including governance, fiscal transparency and accountability, parent empowerment, co-locations, class size, overcrowding, and student privacy, the policies of this administration have been disappointing and do not differ much from past policies. In certain categories, such as testing, his record actually worsened compared to last year. The grades we are awarding the Mayor this year in each category follow along with explanations; if last year's grade differed significantly, we included it for comparison's sake.



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## ARTS EDUCATION

**A-**

The Mayor continues to make progress in achieving his four year goal of providing all K-8 students with arts instruction, by adding \$23 million in dedicated funding to hire teachers in the arts last year, and increasing this funding this year. The DOE also adopted the proposal of the “Blue Book” working group to improve the school capacity formula by providing each school at least two cluster or specialty rooms in the formula.

However, there has been little or no progress in alleviating overcrowding or halting co-locations, so many schools continue to lose access to their art and music rooms. In fact, the DOE plans to take away the performing arts rooms from a Brooklyn middle school of the performing arts next year, in order to co-locate a charter school in its building.<sup>3</sup>

## GOVERNANCE

**D**

Last year's grade: **INCOMPLETE**

The Mayor deserves credit for following through on his promise to restore the district structure, eliminate the networks, and allow superintendents to support and supervise principals.

During his campaign, he also pledged that members of the Panel for Educational Policy would have two year set terms and could not be fired, to ensure their independence. Yet most PEP members appear unaware of this promise and rarely overrule controversial decisions by the DOE, despite parent and teacher protests. There continues to be a lack of discussion and debate at most Panel meetings as regards important policy and budgetary decisions, and the rubber-stamping of questionable contracts persists.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the PEP does not operate effectively as a check and balance for what is otherwise essentially autocratic rule.

Mayor de Blasio also promised to give more power to the parent-led CECs and Citywide Councils, and provide them with more input as regards the schools in their communities. Yet to date, they remain largely disempowered. See the sections on co-location and parent engagement for more on this issue.

## CO-LOCATIONS and SPACE PLANNING

**D**

When de Blasio ran for office he said he would place a moratorium on all co-locations, yet this never occurred. In 2014, a group of education advocates and parent leaders urged him to halt any further co-locations until all students were guaranteed the space necessary for an adequate education, including smaller classes, a full complement of cluster, specialty, and resource rooms, and dedicated spaces for English language learners and students with disabilities. In the case of charter co-locations, they urged him to pay the mandated per student subsidy instead of giving them space inside DOE buildings.<sup>5</sup> Yet the letter received no response and too many school co-locations still occur, if not at the same rate as previously.

De Blasio further promised to allow CECs to cast an advisory vote on all school utilization changes, including co-locations, and if members of the PEP disagreed with their advice, they would be required to state their reasons before voting on these changes. This has never happened.

The Mayor said he would work with CECs to develop portfolio assessments within their respective communities, to help decide which schools should be expanded and/or new ones created. This too has not occurred.

## HALTING SCHOOL CLOSURES

**B**

Last year's grade: **A**

The Mayor did initially comply with his campaign promise to institute a moratorium on school closures. Now that the Chancellor has developed a plan for the struggling schools, school closures have resumed, though not as frequently as during the previous administration. The Chancellor claims her decisions to close or consolidate schools results from their unsustainably small size rather than low performance. Whether the administration's plan to improve the 94 struggling “Renewal schools” before closing them will be successful is still uncertain. De Blasio also said he would create an early warning system for schools that are falling behind, but we are not aware of any such system.

## PARENT ENGAGEMENT and INPUT

D

De Blasio promised to “raise the level of significance” of the Community Education Councils by engaging their members more meaningfully and by giving them 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 before voting on these proposals. Yet to date, there have been no significant changes to the role of the CECs and Citywide Councils. In some communities, there is collaboration between CECs and District Superintendents but in many others, there is none, indicating there are no system-wide changes to how CECs work with the DOE.

At the same time the Chancellor has taken several actions to diminish the input of parents. For example, School Leadership Teams are composed of half parents, half school staff and have the final authority over each school’s Comprehensive Education Plan, which sets the goals for each school and is supposed to help determine school-based budgets. Yet the DOE has claimed in court that SLTs have only “advisory” powers. (*See section on Transparency and Accountability.*)

Similarly, the Chancellor’s Capacity Framework 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. In many schools, parents have protested against their incompetent or abusive principals, with no response from the administration.

## BUSING

D

As a candidate for Mayor, 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.” This has not occurred. Only 2,500 of 8,500 vehicles have

climate control; limits on ride lengths are too long; families have to fight for special accommodations like porter service and bus paraprofessionals; and the previous administration’s mass layoffs of experienced attendants and drivers have not been reversed, according to parent advocates for improved transportation.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

C

Last year’s grade: **D**

The Mayor promised to provide independent monitoring to determine how many students with disabilities actually receive their services. Though there has been no independent oversight, the DOE did issue an Annual Report on Special Education (ARSE) in response to a new city mandate. This report revealed as many as forty percent of special needs students were not receiving their services in a timely fashion.<sup>6</sup> In addition, many IEP meetings continue to happen outside of the 60-day window. The ARSE found 30 percent of initial referrals that require a meeting do not happen within 60 days, 25 percent of reevaluation referrals are not held within the 60-day window, and 30 percent of three-year reevaluations do not occur within the prescribed time period.

De Blasio also promised to commission an independent report that would survey parents, administrators and educators about the implementation of the special education inclusion initiative. This hasn’t happened. Data from the Mayor’s Management Report reveals sharp increases in the number of special needs students attending non-public schools at city expense since the inclusion initiative began in the fall of 2012.<sup>7</sup> This provides evidence that the initiative may not be working, perhaps because the sizes of the inclusion and general education classes that students are assigned to are too large.

## CLASS SIZE

F

De Blasio promised during his campaign to commit to specific class size reduction goals to achieve by the end of first mayoral term and if necessary, raise funds for this purpose. He also said he would comply with the Contracts for Excellence (C4E) plan the city adopted in 2007, calling for class sizes of no

more than 20 on average in grades K-3, 23 in grades 4-8 and 25 in high school. Yet at a recent Queens Town Hall meeting, he denied making these promises.<sup>8</sup>

So here they are.

First, from the **Kids PAC Candidate Survey**:

More specifically would you:	YES	NO
• Ensure that school budgets remain stable and/or increase in the future?		X
• Set reduced class size goals to achieve by the end of your first term?	X	
• Comply with the plan the city adopted in 2007, as a response to the Contracts for Excellence state law, which calls for class size reduction in all grades?	X	

Then, there's the questionnaire that Mr. de Blasio personally filled out and signed at the Mayoral Candidate Forum held at Murry Bergtraum High School on June 18, 2013:

<p><b>C.1 Class size:</b> Reducing class size is the #1 priority of parents on the DOE's own surveys, and yet class sizes have increased every year for the past five.</p> <p>Would you a) committ to specific size reduction goals to achieve by the end of your first term, and b) if necessary, raise revenue to fund this?</p>	<p><b>CIRCLE ONE:</b></p> <p><b>YES</b></p>
	<p><b>NO</b></p>

In contrast, average class sizes remain at a near 15 year high in the early grades, and the number of children in classes of 30 or more continues to rise.<sup>9</sup> Class sizes have not decreased significantly at any grade level since de Blasio taking office, according to official DOE data.<sup>10</sup> At many town hall meetings, Chancellor Farina has expressed her view that instead, classes can be too small.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, principals in overcrowded districts continued to develop enrollment projections based on 25 Kindergarteners in each class, even after new schools come online. This indicates the DOE's lack of commitment to reducing class size for even our youngest students.

During his campaign, de Blasio also promised to reform the DOE's school capacity formula to incorporate the need for smaller classes. Though the DOE's "Blue Book" Working Group appointed by the Chancellor proposed that the formula be aligned with the reduced class sizes in the city's C4E plan, the city rejected that proposal in July 2015.<sup>12</sup>

The city's annual plan for spending more than \$500 million in state C4E funds devotes not a single dollar in its "targeted" or "citywide initiatives" specifically towards lowering class size.<sup>13</sup> Even as the DOE wrote that it would focus its class size efforts on the Renewal schools, it did not appropriate any specific funds to do so, with the result being that 38 percent of these schools failed to lower class size, and about 60 percent still feature some classes of 30 students or more.<sup>14</sup>

De Blasio said he would re-evaluate "fair student funding" to see whether the system provides incentives to principals to increase class size. This has not occurred. Next year, the formula will allocate the least amount of dollars per student funding in grades K-5, despite the fact that these are the grades where research suggests class sizes should be smallest.<sup>15</sup>

## SCHOOL OVERCROWDING

**D**

Last year's grade: **INCOMPLETE**

De Blasio pledged to support a more ambitious capital plan to provide the space necessary to eliminate overcrowding and allow for smaller classes. This hasn't happened. Though the DOE added nearly 12,000 seats to the most recent version of the five year capital plan, the plan will still provide only 59 percent of the DOE's own estimate of the need to eliminate overcrowding and address enrollment growth.<sup>16</sup> Several advocacy groups' projections have estimated the actual need for seats as greater than this.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the DOE's estimate of the need is not targeted towards smaller classes, but aligned with a school capacity formula that assumes class sizes larger than current averages in grades 4-12. (See above section on class size.)

## TRANSPARENCY and ACCOUNTABILITY



On his **Kids PAC Candidate Survey**, de Blasio said he would stop “awarding contracts to companies that have already been shown to have stolen funds or are suspected of corruption.” Yet last year, the DOE awarded an internet wiring contract originally worth \$1.1 billion to a company, Computer Consultant Specialists, implicated in a massive kickback scheme just a few years ago.<sup>18</sup> Though the city later cancelled the contract, this vendor still has many contracts with DOE, awarded after the Special Investigator found the company to have engaged in fraud.<sup>19</sup> In addition, many other contracts have been awarded to vendors who had been found to have engaged in misuse of public funds.<sup>20</sup>

The Mayor also promised to “carry out itemized, fully detailed breakdowns of education budget comparable to other city agencies.” Yet there has been no significant improvement in DOE’s financial transparency under the new administration.

School Leadership Team meetings, which help develop school based budgets, are now closed to the public, contrary to state law. Although a decision in the State Supreme Court held that SLTs were subject to Open Meetings Law, the DOE is appealing this decision while keeping these meetings closed.<sup>21</sup> 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.” A few months ago, the city did launch a new Open Portal site for Freedom of Information requests, yet so far, the DOE responses have not been any more prompt.<sup>22</sup>

## PRIVACY



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 disclose personal student data with third parties without asking parents for their permission.

The Community schools initiative poses new risks to student privacy, sharing highly sensitive personal data, including health information, with third parties, and potentially placing this information in students’ education database, where there is less privacy protection than in their medical records.

## TESTING



**Last year’s grade: 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. The influence of test scores has been reduced by the state, which passed legislation in 2014 barring the use of state test scores as the primary reason to hold back students or to make admissions decisions. De Blasio said he would “Craft a teacher evaluation system that depends as little as possible on standardized test scores.” Though there is now a state-wide moratorium on the use of 3rd - 8th grade state exams to evaluate teachers, the Chancellor has said she believes that they should count for as much as 30 percent of a teacher’s evaluation.<sup>23</sup>

De Blasio also promised to “develop a non-punitive process” to allow parents to opt their children out of standardized testing. The City Council passed a resolution that the right to opt out should be included in the Parent Bill of Rights and distributed to all parents. Yet the Chancellor has refused to make parents aware of these rights.<sup>24</sup>

While in private meetings with parents, Chancellor Farina said she would opt out her children from the state exams if they had IEPs or were English Language Learners, she has refused to make this view public.<sup>25</sup> Instead, she has consistently spoken out against parents who choose not to have their children take these exams and warned teachers not to speak freely about this issue.<sup>26</sup> In addition, many teachers and parents complain of too much time taken by standardized testing and test prep at their schools.

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.” Yet the admissions process to gifted programs in the vast majority of districts will still be based solely on the results of

two standardized exams. Next year, four districts out of 32 will consider other factors along with test results in admission to gifted programs.<sup>27</sup> For the DOE's inaction on the high-stakes admissions process of the highly selective Specialized High Schools, see the Diversity section below.

## DISCIPLINE

INCOM-  
PLETE

De Blasio promised during his campaign to “Build capacity in schools for positive discipline strategies, and expand student support services through multi-agency/service provider collaboration” and “adopt a Graduated Response Protocol to resolve student misbehavior at school level.” While the DOE has reformed the discipline code to make it more difficult to suspend students, schools have not been provided with sufficient staffing, funding or training to allow them to adopt effective, alternative procedures to address behavioral issues, such as restorative justice. Many schools also lack sufficient numbers of guidance counselors and are subjected to extreme overcrowding and excessively large class sizes, which research shows tend to increase the number of disciplinary problems.

## DIVERSITY

D-

Last year's grade: **F**

On his **Kids PAC Candidate Survey**, the de Blasio campaign responded, “first and fore-most, increasing diversity needs to be a strategic initiative by the DOE.” Yet rather than enact policy changes, the administration relies on pilots, tweaks, and expansions of existing initiatives that were initiated through grassroots efforts. Most recently, the Chancellor said that schools should improve diversity through “rebranding” and “marketing.”<sup>28</sup>

NYC is the only district in the nation with schools that base admissions solely on the basis of one standardized exam.<sup>29</sup> Only three percent of black students who took the NYC Specialized High School exam this year were admitted and about five percent of Hispanic students, compared to 34 percent of Asian students and 29 percent of white students.<sup>30</sup> The Mayor promised to “make

sure that all children, regardless of SES and race/ethnicity have access to our city's selective and specialized high schools.” Yet de Blasio has done nothing to advocate for a change in the state law that determines the admission process in three of these schools: Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Tech. Nor has he altered the use of this exam in the other five specialized schools whose admissions policies are solely under his control: the HS for Math, Science and Engineering at City College; the HS for American Studies at Lehman College; Queens HS for Sciences at York College, Brooklyn Latin and Staten Island Tech.

After much delay, the DOE announced voluntary programs in seven schools whose principals asked to give priority to high needs students, including Free and Reduced Lunch and/or English Language Learners, as a set percentage of each school's Kindergarten seats.<sup>31</sup> These pilots were launched in the midst of a community planning process in several districts that were already seeking broader district-wide solutions to address segregation.

NYC also applied for and was awarded \$10 million in federal grants to encourage socioeconomic integration at several low-performing schools across seven districts.<sup>32</sup> The jury is out on just how much support from the DOE will be forthcoming in implementation.

Federal magnet grant programs that for decades have failed to bring about much needed integration have been operating at seven elementary schools in Districts 13, 15, and 28 since 2013. There has been no public assessment by the DOE of the success of these programs.



*We welcome comments and feedback from parents, teachers, DOE officials, advocates or concerned citizens on our assessments of the Mayor's record; please email them to us at: [info@nyckidspac.org](mailto:info@nyckidspac.org)*

## NOTES

- 1 <http://nyckidspac.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/NYC-Kids-PAC-Questionnaire-Bill-de-Blasio.pdf> and <http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Bill-deBlasio.pdf>
- 2 <http://nyckidspac.org/2015/04/education-report-card-for-mayor-de-blasio/>
- 3 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/03/17/what-can-happen-when-a-neighborhood-school-is-forced-to-share-its-space-with-a-charter/>
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- 5 <https://educationalequityblog.org/2014/11/14/coalition-calls-for-co-location-moratorium-letter-to-mayor-de-blasio-and-chancellor-farina/>
- 6 <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/6035782C-F95D-4224-8372-F2B1F7E9A226/0/LocalLaw27of20152292016FINAL.pdf>
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- 12 [http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2015/07/28/city-to-tweak-how-it-calculates-school-space-needs/#.Vy5U\\_eQzxiN](http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2015/07/28/city-to-tweak-how-it-calculates-school-space-needs/#.Vy5U_eQzxiN)
- 13 <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/26881653-C4C8-4ACC-AD13-537D6B93B486/184676/2016C4EBoroughPresentation071515FINAL.pdf>
- 14 <http://www.classsizematters.org/testimony-of-leonie-haimson-before-the-nyc-council-education-committee-on-the-renewal-schools/>
- 15 [http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d\\_chanc\\_oper/budget/dbor/DFPM\\_Home\\_Page/cec\\_fsf\\_deck.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/d_chanc_oper/budget/dbor/DFPM_Home_Page/cec_fsf_deck.pdf)
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Also: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/nyregion/opt-out-pressures-open-rift-between-new-york-education-officials.html>
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- 27 <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20160414/morrisania/citys-gifted-talented-pilot-expands-admissions-criteria-beyond-tests>
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- 31 <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20151120/fort-greene/7-brooklyn-manhattan-schools-win-fight-for-diversity-based-admissions>
- 32 <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2015/10/07/will-john-kings-last-effort-to-desegregate-new-york-citys-schools-work/#.Vy9yFOQzxiM>

**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](http://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.

