

Problems with school planning and siting
*Testimony before City Council Education &
Finance Committees*

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Scope of the school overcrowding problem enormous

--42% of NYC schools were overcrowded according to latest available data in 2015-16 (at or over 100% target utilization)

-- 580,000 students (62% of total) were enrolled in these schools – about 40,000 more than year before.

Data: SCA “Blue Book” 2015-16

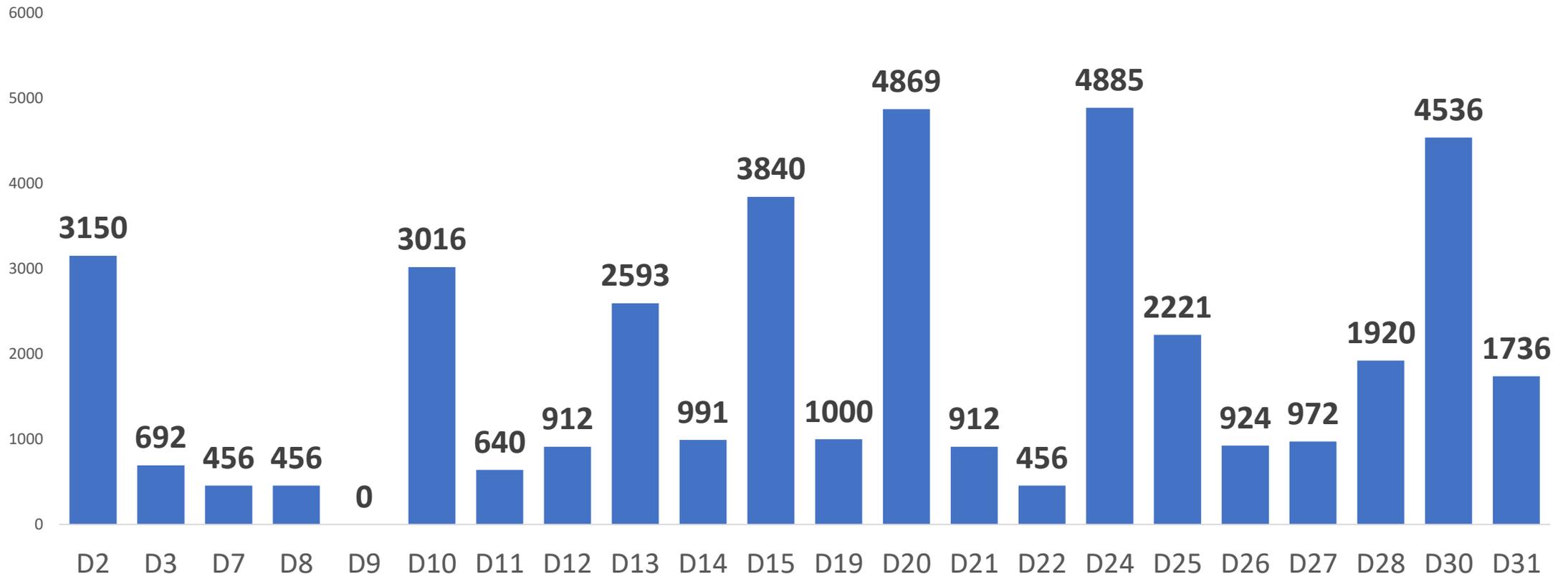
Yet February 2017 capital plan still very underfunded

- Funds fewer than 45,000 seats citywide – about half (54%) necessary to alleviate current overcrowding and accommodate enrollment growth, ***according to DOE estimates.***
- Only 29% of seats compared to DOE's analysis of need have sites and are in process of scope and design.
- There is a huge variation across districts and boroughs in the number and percent of seats funded compared to DOE's estimate of need.

3150 K-8 funded school seats for D2

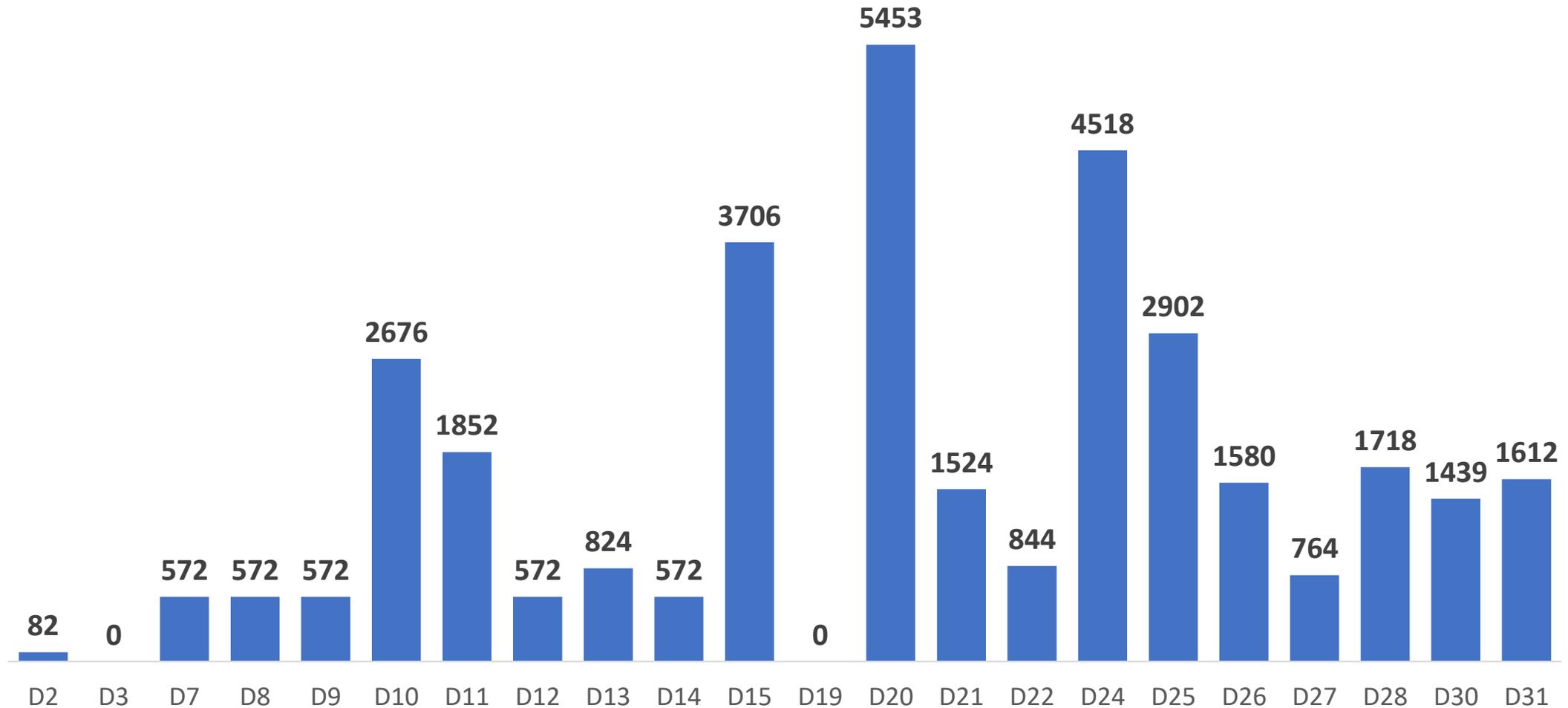
41,177 citywide

(Feb. 2017 capital plan)



Districts not included above have NO need for new seats according to DOE

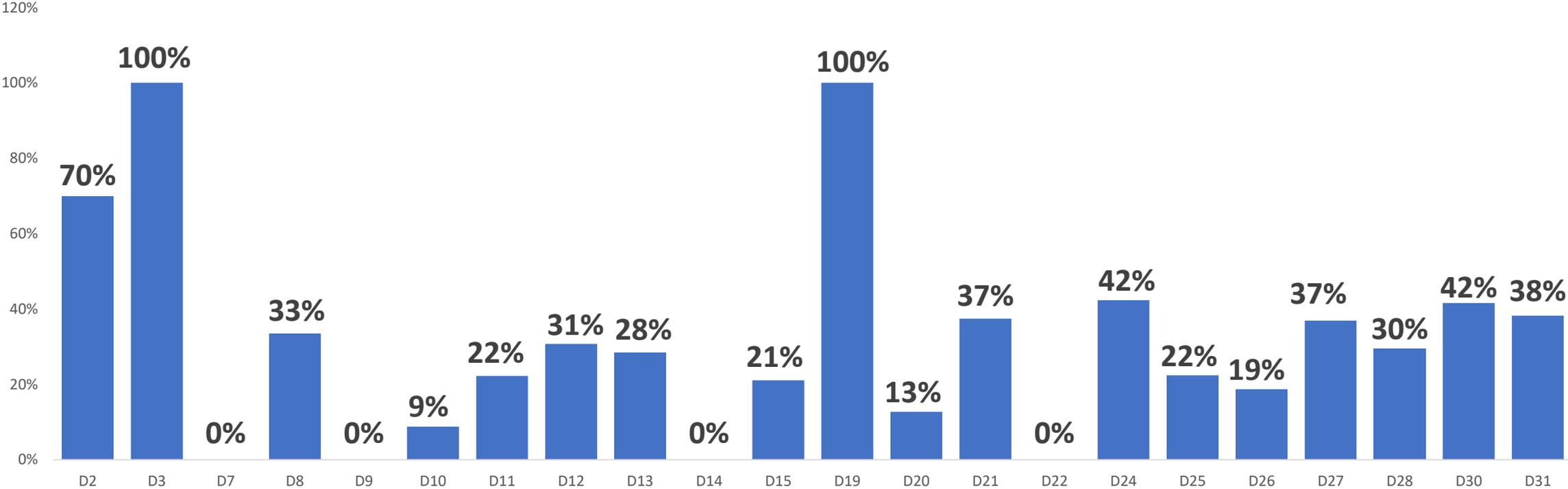
34,354 unfunded K-8 seats compared to DOE's analysis of need – (Feb. 2017 capital plan)



Districts not included above have NO need for new seats according to DOE

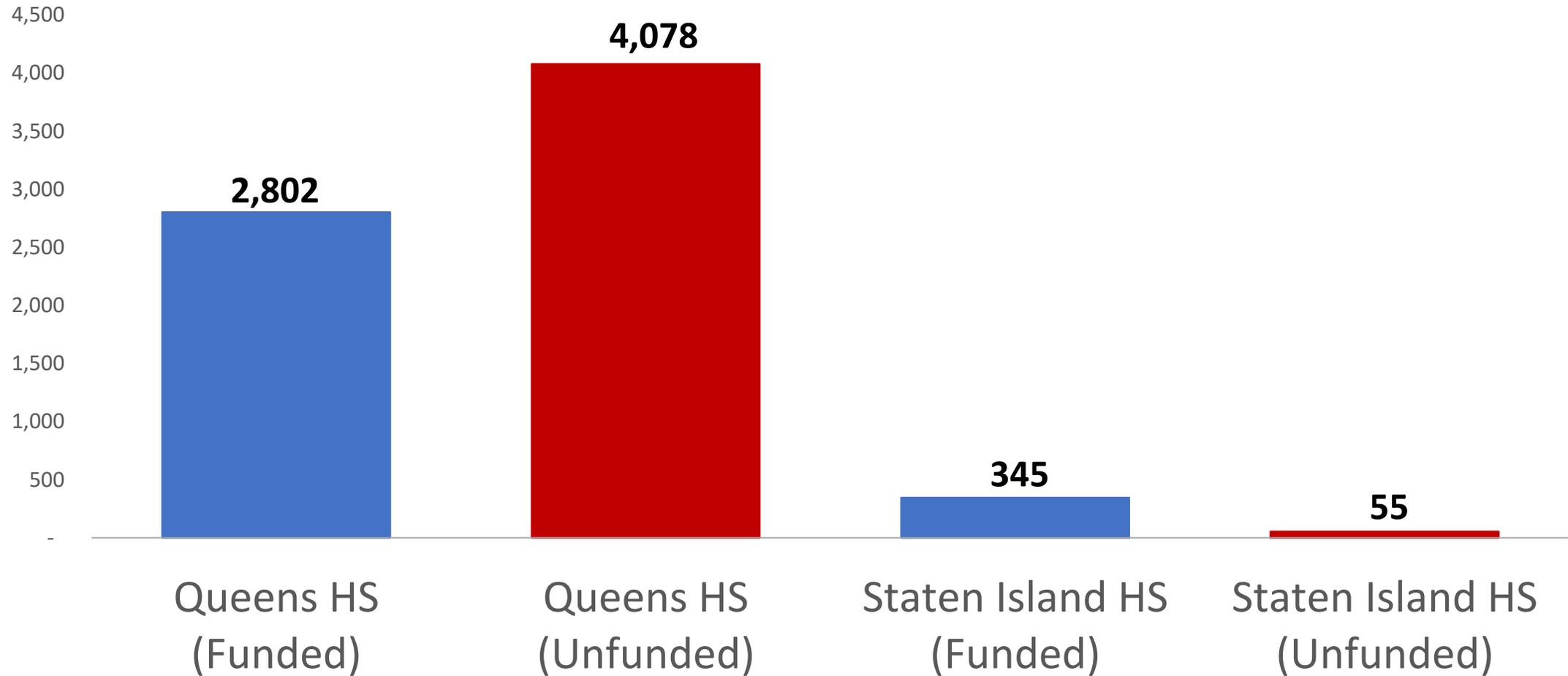
Citywide only 29% of needed K-8 seats have sites & in the design process according to DOE

(Feb. 2017 capital plan)



Districts not included above have NO need for new seats according to DOE

Funded vs. unfunded high school seats by borough



DOE claims no more HS seats needed in Manhattan, Bronx or Brooklyn

Yet we don't trust DOE's need estimates

- They are based upon an unreliable school capacity formula
- They are based upon unreliable estimates from housing starts using a CEQR formula that hasn't been updated in nearly 20 years
- They are based upon widely divergent enrollment projections from two consulting companies
- The methodology DOE uses to incorporate all these unreliable components is non-transparent
- DOE says they “overlay” projections from housing starts over consultant enrollment projections but unclear what this means

DOE Capacity formula assumes overly large class sizes

- Relies on school capacity formula that assumes class sizes larger than currently exist on average in NYC schools in grades 4-12 (28 students in 4-8th grades; 30 in HS)
- Thus the formula would tend to force class sizes even higher
- Blue Book working group co-chaired by SCA President Grillo and CEC 2 President Tanikawa urged in Dec. 2014 that school capacity formula be aligned with smaller classes in DOE's C4E plan
- Mayor's office rejected that recommendation in July 2015

DOE enrollment projections inconsistent and vary widely from year to year

- DOE consultants Grier Partnership project a **decrease of 59,000 students** between 2014 and 2024 -- 57,000 fewer K-8 students and nearly 2,000 fewer in HS.
- Statistical Forecasting projects over this same time period a **decrease of 28,000 students** --- 23,000 fewer K-8 students and about 5,000 fewer in HS.
- Yet by using the housing start data applying the City Planning ratio, there will be **more than 63,000 additional students in 2024**— about 27,000 more students in K-8 and about 17,000 in HS.
- All these different forecasts also vary wildly from year to year.
- For example, just two years ago Statistical Forecasting projected an increase of about 60,000 students over next decade instead of decrease of 28,000.

District 2: another example of widely divergent projections & needs estimate

- District 2 in Manhattan has 3150 K8 seats funded in capital plan
- DOE claims 97% of the D2 need is funded, with unmet need only 82 seats.
- Latest projections from Grier Partnership consultants project that by 2024, D2 enrollment will have **decreased** by about 2000 students.
- At same time, Statistical Forecasting consultants project that by 2024, D2 enrollment will have **increased** by 1000 students
- Yet housing starts data also used to project enrollment with CEQR formula **projects more than 7,500 additional K-8 students in D2 by 2024**

Numerous problems with City Planning CEQR ratio

- *City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR)* ratio used by City Planning to project future enrollment from housing starts is borough-based rather than based on districts, neighborhoods or school zones
- CEQR ratio hasn't been revised since 2008 and relies on Census data more than 16 years old.
- Mayor has vastly expanded PreK but CEQR ratio has not changed to account for thousands of new preK students
- CEQR ratio estimates each Bronx housing unit will add nearly 4X students than Manhattan, though birth rate & enrollment increasing faster there than in Bronx
- Housing start data uses 10 year projections almost equal to 5 year figures
- Housing start data has NO difference between 5 yr and 10 yr figures in 13 out of 32 districts

Problems with school planning process

- Thresholds in city planning process very high
- A new project has to be projected to increase school overcrowding by at least 5% to even consider need for new school --even in communities where schools are already overcrowded
- In Manhattan would take a residential project of at least 310 units to trigger consideration of new school – no matter how overcrowded schools already are in the neighborhood
- Planning process does not take into account cumulative residential development – only considers each project separately.

Other problems with DOE Needs assessments

- Enrollment projections and DOE needs assessment don't account for rapidly expanding charter school population though most charter students attend schools co-located in public school buildings
- DOE needs assessment claims to be neighborhood-based but defines neighborhoods with extremely large areas
- DOE needs assessments do not differentiate ES and MS seat needs
- DOE needs assessments are infrequently updated (ie Feb. 2017 capital plan includes needs assessment from Jan. 2016)

School siting dysfunctional and inefficient

- There are overcrowded neighborhoods like Sunset Park where schools have been funded *for more than ten years without a single school sited or built* ;
- School Construction Authority only has one person on staff per borough looking for sites for schools;
- The SCA never uses eminent domain to acquire sites unless the property has recently been on the market;
- They never “cold call” meaning identify and inquire sites before they’re put on the market;
- There have been more than 4,000 seats funded for 3 years in the “class size reduction” category with only three small projects identified

We need a new planning process for schools

-- So that schools are built along with new housing and not lagging the process by years afterwards

-----In most large states and districts, developers have to pay an “impact fee” to help fund new infrastructure including schools, *but not in NYC*

--- With rapid pace of development and rezonings, without significant reforms we are falling further and further behind.

What is being done about this?

--Public Advocate Tish James, 22 Council Members, Class Size Matters and parent leaders pointed out many of the problems with school planning and siting [in a letter to the Chancellor in June 2015](#).

--Last week, Speaker Mark-Viverito announced that Council would form [an internal working group](#) to come up with proposals to reform the process.

--We hope that this process will be open and transparent and elicit ideas for improvement from experts, parents, and members of the public.

Suggestions on how to elicit ideas for reform

- Reach out to Community Boards, Community Education Councils, advocates, parents and CBOs
- Elicit ideas and information from professional organizations of architects and planners about what is done elsewhere
- Hold forums and invite experts, activists and parents to speak
- Create a website with info on how to submit and post ideas
- As parent David Rosenberg wrote: DOE and the Council should *“LISTEN to communities, teachers and administrators. It’s not that we don’t know what the problem is and what to do about it. WE DO. We need a vehicle for involvement in the decision making process regarding siting and planning. We need to be seated at the table. It needs to be a partnership.”*