

Leonie Haimson, Class Size Matters

124 Waverly Pl., New York, NY 10011 leonie@att.net www.classsizematters.org

The NY Times article below details the struggle by two different schools to keep charter schools out of their buildings, to prevent overcrowding and increase in class sizes that would result. CPAC and other parent groups decided to oppose the lifting of the cap on charter schools because of this very threat - - that they would take resources and precious space away from existing public schools.

With the rush to create new charter schools, there are clear indications that the administration has learned nothing from their mistakes with the small schools initiative— as they press ahead, rapidly creating large numbers of new schools, without sufficient quality control or any clear plan to ensure that they do not negatively impact existing schools and students, and the system as a whole.

In his testimony before the City Council a few weeks ago, Chancellor Klein reassured Councilmembers who were concerned about this issue, by claiming that charter schools do not require disproportionate spending since “the funding follows the child.” But in his budget for next year, there are clear indications that this is not the case. There are only three programmatic areas in which DOE called for increased spending for next year: more school safety agents, private schools for special ed students, and more charter schools.

Spending on charter schools has already increased dramatically and would rise sharply next year to over \$100 million per year. Meanwhile, spending for general education for current schools would fall slightly or remain flat – which represents a decline in real terms because of inflation etc.

If the funding simply followed the child, there would not have to be a separate budget line for charters – and/or spending for general education would fall by an equal amount. But as the Independent Budget Office pointed out, it costs the system at least three times as much to educate a student in a new charter school than enroll them in an existing public school. <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/march2006.pdf> <<http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/march2006.pdf>>

This in part is because a whole new administrative apparatus has to be created for every new school, including principals, secretaries, business managers, etc. Also, while charter schools ostensibly only receive the same per pupil funding, not all of this funding goes directly to the school in the case of existing traditional public schools, since central and regional administration takes a substantial bite. Charter schools get the whole amount.

Charter schools also receive direct subsidies in the form of start up funds from the Center for Charter Excellence, a private organization established in part with city funds, as well as start up funds directly from the city and sometimes the state. Some charters, including the Ross school mentioned below, also expect to receive substantial per pupil annual subsidies from the city, over the average per pupil amount of \$10,000.

A very revealing summary of six NYC charter school applications, with more financial details, is posted at the NY State Regents website at <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2006Meetings/January2006/106emscvesida4.htm>

The Achievement First Endeavor Charter School expects receiving “\$85,000 in start-up funds from the New York City Center for Charter School Excellence and an additional \$70,000 in year 1.”

The Hyde Leadership Charter School expects to receive “a \$90,000 start-up grant as well as additional \$40,000 in supplemental funding from the City of New York in year 1.

The International Leadership Charter School says it will receive: “\$90,000 in City of New York start-up fund-

ing and an additional \$475 per student from this source thereafter.”

The Ross school, mentioned below in the NY Times article, reports “a New York State stimulus grant of \$50,000 for the first three years.... a \$90,000 start-up grant as well as additional supplemental funding from the City of New York at \$391 per elementary school pupil and \$443 per middle school pupil, and \$475 per high school pupil ...”

The Harlem Success School, the other school mentioned in the article, included the following information in its application: “HSCS anticipates a \$90,000 start-up grant as well as additional supplemental funding from the City of New York at \$391 per elementary school pupil and \$443 per middle school pupil enrolled.”
<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2005Meetings/December2005/1205emscvesida5.htm>

(I suggest that people who are interested take a look at these applications, for they include information about who have written letters of support, including local elected officials, in many cases.)

One can well envision that the creation of up to 100 more charter schools, as the Mayor is proposing, could create real strain on the funding of existing public schools as well as increased inequities. The irony is that conservatives often cite the success of charter schools, when they are successful, to counter the need for more funding for education – even though in cases like this, charters often appear to be receiving more than their fair share

Most of these charter applications, including those for the Ross and Harlem Success Schools, also mention that they expect to use existing public school facilities, with rent of \$1 per year. And in NYC, of course, space is the most precious resource of all.

During the recent budget hearings, Councilmember Maria Arroyo expressed concern that there would not be room for all the new charter schools, as those that already existed were sharing space with existing public schools, and were experiencing pressures and difficulty in expanding. In response, Klein assured that he would not allow a single new charter school to be established in NYC that didn’t have an appropriate home. He didn’t mention, of course, that according to the capital plan, DOE plans to put 75% of the 70 or more additional charter schools into existing public school buildings, where they will likely overcrowd these schools, preventing their ability to reduce class size and/ or keep classes small.

As a proponent of smaller classes, I must admit a great deal of ambivalence about charter schools, as they usually offer smaller classes and this is their most attractive (and widely advertised) quality for parents and students. Yet it would be terrible if the rapid and heedless spread of charters deprived smaller classes from those NYC public school children who are lucky enough to have them now.

I would feel better if DOE had a plan to provide more space and smaller classes to all of our public school students eventually, but it doesn’t. Indeed, as the audit shows, the administration is taking state money supposed to be used to reduce class size and using it for other purposes.

Thanks,

Leonie Haimson
Executive Director
Class Size Matters
www.classsizematters.org