

Letter on the need for NYC schools to reduce class size

September 22, 2014

Cc: Mayor de Blasio

Dear Chancellor Fariña:

We, the undersigned, professors and researchers, urge you to put forward an aggressive but practicable plan to reduce class size in NYC public schools. Last school year, class sizes were the largest in 15 years in grades K-3, and the largest since 2002 in grades 4-8. More than 330,000 children were sitting in classes of 30 or more, according to DOE data.

As you know, robust research shows that class size matters for all students, but particularly students at-risk of low achievement, including children of color, those in poverty, English language learners, and students with special needs. This is why class size reduction has been shown to be one of the few reforms to narrow the achievement gap.

Smaller classes have also been shown to increase student engagement, lower disciplinary referral and drop-out rates, and reduce teacher attrition. No teacher, no matter how skilled or well prepared, can be as effective in the large classes that exist in many of our city's public schools.

We believe that the benefits of many of the other positive reforms that the city is pursuing, such as increasing access to Universal prekindergarten, establishing community schools, and inclusion for students with disabilities, may be undermined unless the trend of growing class sizes is reversed and class sizes are lowered in the city's public schools.

In particular, placing students with special needs into classes of 25, 30 or more will not work to serve their individual needs, no less the needs of the other students in the class.

New York City schools have the largest classes in the state and among the largest in the nation. We believe strongly that more equitable outcomes depend on more equity in opportunity. We commend you for your commitment to expanding prekindergarten programs, but as you know, early childhood education does not begin and end at age 4.

We urge you now to focus on lowering class sizes in all grades, which will improve teaching and learning in our public schools.

Yours sincerely,

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