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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer to the New York City Council Education and Finance Committees

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I am Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and I would like to thank the Committees on Education and Finance, and Chairs Dromm and Ferreras-Copeland for allowing me to speak today on the school planning and siting process for new capacity. I am particularly concerned about both the inaccurate class sizes the Department of Education (DOE) uses to calculate current utilization in schools, and the dated process the DOE and the School Construction Authority (SCA) use to project future need.

First, the DOE's school capacity formula that determines current school utilization is flawed. I commend the Bluebook Working Group for their continued advocacy on revising this formula, but despite the Bluebook Working Group's recommendation, the DOE is still failing to use class sizes parameters dictated by the Contracts 4 Excellence (C4E) lawsuit, where the state's highest court concluded that NYC children were denied their constitutional right to an adequate education, in part because of large class sizes. Without grounding class sizes in the mandates set forth by C4E, we cannot possibly get an accurate assessment of what overcrowding in our schools looks like, or what the need for new capacity is.

Further, in my over 15 years as an elected official, first as a Council Member on the Upper West Side, and now as Borough President, I have consistently seen the DOE claim that there is no district need for additional school capacity, and time and time again, parents, school leaders and advocates have pushed back, and said these claims do not match the reality on the ground and in our classrooms. These relentless advocates have taken it upon themselves to go from classroom to classroom and residential building to residential building to personally gather data on the need for additional school seats.

As we sit here today, I see that the DOE's capital plan for FY2015-2016 yet again does not take into consideration the on the ground realities and school space needs in my borough. I'll give two key examples.

In lower Manhattan (Community School District 2) I, along with the local elected officials, co-chair the Lower Manhattan School Overcrowding Task Force. The Taskforce is comprised of parents, community members, the DOE and SCA, and was

formed to address the chronic overcrowding in lower Manhattan. The taskforce members have been integral in doing their own community-driven research on population growth in the area, and the need for additional school seats. Over the past two years Community Board 1 and NYU Professor Eric Greenleaf conducted a population study and found that since June 2013, plans for 5282 new apartments have been filed with the Department of Buildings, 80% of which are south of Fulton Street. If we apply the DOE's standard of allotting 0.12 new elementary school seats per new apartment, then these apartments create a need for 634 new elementary school seats. Yet, the latest proposed amendment to the DOE's capital plan does not indicate any need for school seats in the "Lower East" sub-district in Manhattan. This is unacceptable.

Additionally, in District 5, the Teachers College Community School (TCCS) community has imminent space needs. The St. Joseph building where TCCS is currently housed cannot accommodate the school population anymore. This year, as the 5th grade was phased in, TCCS had to move its specialty rooms and the art and music rooms into the gymnasium. This coming September TCCS will be expanding into the middle school grades. The DOE has known that TCCS will need additional space for its middle school for the past 6 years, yet again there is no acknowledgement of this in the DOE and SCA's capital plan amendment. This indicates that the DOE fully intended to co-locate TCCS into a current DOE building, instead of creating new capacity. I know that finding space is challenging, but the solution here cannot be to displace other schools, or to pit parents and students against each other to engage in turf wars. It is irresponsible to put our district schools in a position where they have to fight for access to basic resources like desks and functional, safe outdoor space. Forcing co-locations only exacerbates these resource deficiencies.

We must do better by our children. The DOE and SCA must work with the community and the Department of Buildings to proactively plan for and fund new schools as new housing is built. Then the process to site schools must be streamlined.

I conclude by thanking the Committee on Education and Finance for scheduling this hearing and look forward to working with all of you to create a smoother school planning and siting process.