

# Finding Space For A Sound Basic Education

A Working Paper  
Prepared as Support for  
“Can New York Get an A  
in School Finance Reform?”  
A Report by  
the Citizens Budget  
Commission  
November 2004



## FOREWORD

Founded in 1932, the Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan civic organization devoted to influencing constructive change in the finances and services of New York State and New York City governments.

This Working Paper was prepared under the auspices of CBC's Education Finance Committee, which we co-chair. The other members of the Committee are: Paul R. Alter, Richard H. Bagger, Stephen Berger, Deborah A. Buresh, Lawrence B. Bittenwieser, Evan A. Davis, Stephen F. DeGroat, Kenneth D. Gibbs, Bud H. Gibbs, H. Dale Hemmerdinger, Bill Lambert, James L. Lipscomb, Stanley Litow, Robinson Markel, Joel H. Moser, David I. Moskowitz, Lester Pollack, Hector P. Prud'homme, Alfredo S. Quintero, Edward L. Sadowsky, William G. Salter, and Howard Wilson.

The CBC created this ad hoc Committee in the wake of the 2003 New York State Court of Appeals decision in the Campaign for Fiscal equity case. Initially, we believed the scope of the Committee's work would be confined to helping public officials identify the most economically effective sources of revenue to fund the Court's decision. However, as the Committee explored the issues, and as the Governor and State Legislature failed to reach an agreement on the amount required, we broadened the scope of our work. The Committee recognized that in order for the goal of the Court's ruling to be achieved - for student's to obtain a sound basic education - changes were needed beyond the allocation of more money.

The Committee prepared its final report, *Can New York Get An "A" In School Finance Reform*, with two goals in mind. The first is to provide the responsible public officials – judges, legislators and others – with sound advice on how to craft a remedy that will be effective and efficient. But the CBC also recognizes that shaping policy affecting so many lives, and costing so many billions of dollars, should involve an informed citizenry who support the eventual outcome. Accordingly, the CBC seeks also to use the Committee's final report, and a companion conference scheduled for December 2-3, 2004, to stimulate informed debate about the options available to New Yorkers for providing their children a sound basic education.

In order to prepare the final report, the Committee met nine times between January and November of 2004. Its meetings were focused on research conducted by the staff and expert consultants. This background research has been organized into six working papers, of which this is one. This working paper was prepared by Charles Brecher, Research Director at the Citizens Budget Commission. Joseph Andreano, a former Research Associate at the Commission, provided research support. All six working papers and the final report are available at the Commission's website, [www.cbcny.org](http://www.cbcny.org).

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Paul E. Francis  
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## INTRODUCTION

One key component of a sound basic education is adequate classroom space. Public schools in New York City fall short of this standard because classrooms in some schools now are over capacity, some classrooms are in temporary structures that are substandard, and space is not readily available for expanded enrollment for pre-kindergarten classes.

As part of its “costing out” study, the CFE examined the capital needs of the New York City public schools. They found that \$14.7 billion (in 2003 dollars) was needed to provide New York City students with the facilities needed for a “sound basic education” as defined by their panel of experts.<sup>1</sup> Table 1 summarizes the needs.

Of the total, \$12.3 billion is for new construction. This includes \$3.9 billion to build new capacity to accommodate 68,200 students projected to be in overcrowded classrooms, and \$2.7 billion as part of a five-year program to provide space for classes smaller than current sizes, but still less than the CFE’s requirements for a “sound basic education”. Another \$5.7 billion is for new capacity to accommodate more than 93,900 students who would require new classrooms for pre-kindergarten classes and new classrooms in order to allow a maximum class size of 16 in grades K through 5. The CFE does not recommend that the latter \$5.7 billion investment be made until after the other projects are funded, a delay of at least five years.

The CFE’s analysis is reasonable in assessing the needs relative to its standards, but its two-stage recommended capital program is deficient in two ways. First, it delays achieving the conditions for sound basic education too long. Its program would not begin to establish some standards for at least five years. It is unlikely there would be adequate space for pre-kindergarten classes and smaller elementary school classes until another decade has passed. Second, it is far more expensive than is necessary. There are more efficient ways to provide the needed space, and these options should be part of any court approved plan.

The two options are redistricting schools and operating schools on year-round schedules. As explained below, rezoning would permit more complete use of existing capacity and provide classroom space for about 136,000 students. Changes in the school calendar in order to use school buildings 12 months per year would generate space for another 135,000 students, even after closing down 17,000 seats in transportable buildings. Together these strategies more than address the long-term shortage of 216,000 seats identified by the CFE, and would do so in a more timely manner and at less cost. These strategies deserve careful attention, even if social or political barriers make full implementation difficult.

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<sup>1</sup> Campaign for Fiscal Equity, *Making the Right to a Sound Basic Education a Reality: Final Report of the Sound Basic Education Task Force*, “Part II: Building Aid Reform, Adequate Facilities for All,” April 13, 2004.

**Table 1**  
**CFE Estimate of New York City**  
**Public School Capital Needs**  
*(Cost in millions of 2003 dollars)*

	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Estimated Cost</u>
<b>Overcrowding</b>	<b>68,200</b>	<b>\$3,935.8</b>
New capacity	66,000	\$3,810.0
Eliminating 15-20 year old mini-buildings	2,200	\$125.8
<b>Short-term Class Size Reduction</b>	<b>52,789</b>	<b>\$2,723.8</b>
K-3 class size reduction to 20	included in new capacity total	
4-5 class size reduction to 20	1,897	\$108.9
6-8 class size reduction to 23	230	\$14.9
9-12 class size reduction to 24	50,662	\$2,600.0
<b>Avoiding Imminent Additional Overcrowding</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>\$976.9</b>
Exterior Modernizations (58 schools)		\$351.1
Windows (179 schools)		\$367.8
Roofs (119 schools)		\$115.7
Exterior Masonry (19 schools)		\$34.9
Climate Controls (175 schools)		\$59.7
Heating plant upgrades (43 schools)		\$47.7
<b>Access to Specialized Spaces</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>\$823.1</b>
Restoring specialized spaces from overcrowding*	1,000	\$70.4
Creating libraries at schools without one (125 schools)		\$169.3
Creating auditoriums at schools without one (363 schools)		\$204.1
Ensuring functional labs in all high schools (64 schools)		\$168.3
Ensuring functional labs in all middle schools (179 schools)		\$211.0
<b>Instrumentalities of Learning</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>\$452.2</b>
Wiring the final 20% of unwired classrooms		\$176.0
Purchase of new computers		125.7
Library upgrades (350 schools)		150.5
<b>Subtotal - Short-term BRICKS Plan</b>	<b>121,989</b>	<b>\$8,911.8</b>
<b>Longer-term Needs</b>	<b>93,906</b>	<b>\$5,749.1</b>
Class size of 16 in K-5	66,906	\$4,172.0
Pre-K for four-year-olds	17,000	992.6
Pre-K for three-year-olds	10,000	584.5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>215,895</b>	<b>\$14,660.9</b>

\*Replacing capacity at gymnasiums and auditoriums now used for classes.

Source: Campaign for Fiscal Equity, *Making the Right To A Sound Basic Education a Reality: Final Report of CFE's Sound Basic Education Task Force, Part II. Building Aid Reform, Adequate Facilities for All, April, 13, 2004.*

## The Case for Rezoning

Crowding, defined as having more students than the school's capacity, existed at 469 schools in the 2002-03 school year. (See Table 2.) However, most of the remaining 839 schools had enrollments below their capacity. In fact, citywide there was a *surplus* capacity of more than 72,000.

The simultaneous existence of crowded and under-used school buildings arises partly from the City Department of Education policies and partly from provisions of State law. Under these policies and laws, most schools are “zoned,” meaning that they draw students from designated areas. As populations shift among zones, it is necessary to rezone in order to keep capacity and demand in balance. However, this often does not happen.

Zoning takes place at two levels. First, the city since 1969 has been divided into more than 30 school districts.<sup>2</sup> Elementary schools and middle schools are assigned to a district. The districts have boundary lines, and schools accept students outside their district lines only under special circumstances. The 1969 legislation envisioned periodic redrawing of district lines to reflect demographic changes, but this has not happened.<sup>3</sup> Districts now vary much more widely in population size than they did at the time of their creation.

Within districts, individual schools are assigned geographic zones.<sup>4</sup> Until 2003, the zones were set by elected district school boards and these boundaries, too, have rarely been revised. With the recent changes in school governance, each district has been assigned into one of ten regions. The new governance law reserves the power to re-zone to the new bodies that replace the community school boards; there is still little attempt at central control of zoning.

New zoning policies should be adopted. As shown in Table 2, the unused capacity at the under-utilized schools (136,430 seats) far exceeds the excess enrollment (64,231 students) at the crowded schools. Thus the problem of crowding could be alleviated, and additional capacity to accommodate smaller class sizes could be created, by rezoning.

To achieve this outcome, rezoning would have to be accompanied by some reconfiguration of grades within schools. The crowding is most prevalent in high schools, and even citywide high school enrollment exceeds the capacity of the high schools. However, this can be overcome by shifting some ninth grade students now in high schools to middle schools (which have a large surplus capacity citywide). Such reconfiguration of grades across schools is relatively common, and several new schools are planned to accommodate grades six through 12.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2003 legislation reorganizing school governance retained the 32 districts then in existence, although the elected boards governing the districts were eliminated.

<sup>3</sup> District boundaries have been changed just once, in the 1970s, to create the new District 32.

<sup>4</sup> There are exceptions to the zoning rules. Many high schools serve citywide populations on a competitive basis, some districts have unzoned middle schools, and parents are given a choice of where to send their children under certain circumstances.

**Table 2**  
**New Capacity Available from Rezoning**

	<u>Number of Schools</u>	<u>Seats Relative to Capacity</u>
Schools Above Capacity		
Elementary Schools	298	(13,295)
Middle Schools	63	(9,043)
High Schools	108	(41,893)
<b>Total</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>(64,231)</b>
Schools At or Below Capacity		
Elementary Schools	612	59,225
Middle Schools	145	55,885
High Schools	<u>82</u>	<u>21,320</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>136,430</b>
Surplus Capacity after Rezoning		
Elementary Schools	910	45,930
Middle Schools	208	46,842
High Schools	<u>190</u>	<u>(20,573)</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,308</b>	<b>72,199</b>

Source: 2002-2003 New York City Department of Education School Construction Authority Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report, September 2003.

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The feasibility of reducing crowding by rezoning is illustrated in Table 3, which shows capacity in each of the regions created under the school reorganization implemented by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2003. This reorganization created ten regions, with each having schools from more than one of the 32 districts. The regions are geographic units that contain schools with some physical proximity. Table 3 reveals that seven of the ten regions have more than enough capacity to accommodate all their students. Within region rezoning would thus overcome the crowding at 234 of the 469 crowded schools. In the three other regions, a combined total of about 6,000 students would have to be assigned to schools outside the region in order to eliminate all overcrowding.

**Table 3**  
**New York City Public School Enrollment and Capacity by Region, 2002-2003**

	<u>Number of</u> <u>Buildings</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Over/(Under)</u>
<b>Region 1</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>98,541</b>	<b>96,332</b>	<b>2,209</b>
Above Capacity	72	21,145	17,197	3,948
At or Below Capacity	66	77,396	79,135	(1,739)
<b>Region 2</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>94,759</b>	<b>114,964</b>	<b>(20,205)</b>
Above Capacity	21	16,002	12,244	3,758
At or Below Capacity	99	78,757	102,720	(23,963)
<b>Region 3</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>148,074</b>	<b>146,744</b>	<b>1,330</b>
Above Capacity	78	32,821	26,078	6,743
At or Below Capacity	93	115,253	120,666	(5,413)
<b>Region 4</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>118,725</b>	<b>116,436</b>	<b>2,289</b>
Above Capacity	69	23,448	17,612	5,836
At or Below Capacity	60	95,277	98,824	(3,547)
<b>Region 5</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>92,503</b>	<b>100,557</b>	<b>(8,054)</b>
Above Capacity	35	13,380	10,485	2,895
At or Below Capacity	88	79,123	90,072	(10,949)
<b>Region 6</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>101,176</b>	<b>105,675</b>	<b>(4,499)</b>
Above Capacity	42	19,561	14,865	4,696
At or Below Capacity	71	81,615	90,810	(9,195)
<b>Region 7</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>138,477</b>	<b>138,938</b>	<b>(461)</b>
Above Capacity	60	32,195	25,449	6,746
At or Below Capacity	89	106,282	113,489	(7,207)
<b>Region 8</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>81,358</b>	<b>104,779</b>	<b>(23,421)</b>
Above Capacity	19	2,695	2,450	245
At or Below Capacity	97	78,663	102,329	(23,666)
<b>Region 9</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>107,066</b>	<b>120,206</b>	<b>(13,140)</b>
Above Capacity	33	31,839	28,076	3,763
At or Below Capacity	96	75,227	92,130	(16,903)
<b>Region 10</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>68,863</b>	<b>77,277</b>	<b>(8,414)</b>
Above Capacity	24	5,805	4,182	1,623
At or Below Capacity	62	63,058	73,095	(10,037)
<b>Alt. Region</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11,905</b>	<b>11,738</b>	<b>167</b>
Above Capacity	16	8,055	6,415	1,640
At or Below Capacity	18	3,850	5,323	(1,473)
<b>Total - Region</b>	<b>1,308</b>	<b>1,061,447</b>	<b>1,133,646</b>	<b>(72,199)</b>
<b>Total - Above Capacity</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>206,946</b>	<b>165,053</b>	<b>41,893</b>
<b>Total - At or Below Capacity</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>854,501</b>	<b>968,593</b>	<b>(114,092)</b>

Source: See Table 2.

## The Case for Year-Round Education

The current school calendar in New York City, and many other public schools nationwide, schedules classes for about 180 days per year between Labor Day and late June. During this "school year" there are several holidays of varying length and no regular classes are scheduled during July and August. In the summer months some schools are used for remedial instruction.

Deviations from this conventional model of several types have been implemented in school districts around the country. One variation increases the number of school days to as many as 240 annually, requiring students to attend these additional days. Such models are often called "extended" school years.

Another variation keeps the number of required school days at about 180, but spreads them over the entire calendar year and eliminates the conventional summer vacation. This model is often combined with staggered calendars in which all students do not attend the same specific 180 days. Instead, four different cohorts of students are scheduled, with only three of the four attending school on any particular day. This combination of staggered schedules among different groups of students spread over all 12 months is referred to here as "year-round education" (YRE).

YRE can be structured in a variety of ways, but a common schedule, known as the 45/15 plan, is illustrated in Figure 1. Students attend school for 45 days (9 weeks of five days) followed by a three week break. In the illustration, 1,000 students are enrolled in the school. They are divided into four cohorts of 250 each. Each cohort follows a staggered 45/15 schedule, so only 750 students are using the school on any given day. In this way, YRE increases the capacity of the school by one-third (from 750 to 1,000). YRE is a more efficient way to use school capacity than the conventional school calendar.

Although YRE is most often initiated as a way to cope with crowding in rapidly expanding districts, it has other benefits. One of the main educational reasons for YRE is the widely held assumption that students with shorter breaks between grades (that is, the 15 day vacation rather than the full two summer months) retain more of the learning from the previous grade and require less review time at the start of the school year.<sup>5</sup>

YRE is not simply a hypothetical model. In the 2002-03 school year, YRE was in effect for 2.3 million students at 3,181 schools in 565 districts and 46 states. In the last decade, the number of students in YRE has grown nearly 50 percent.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Norman Ballinger, Charles E. Kirschenbaum, and Rita Pokol Poimbeauf, *The Year Round School: Where Learning Never Stops*, Bloomington, IN, Phi Delta Kappan Educational Foundation, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nayre.org/statistics.html>

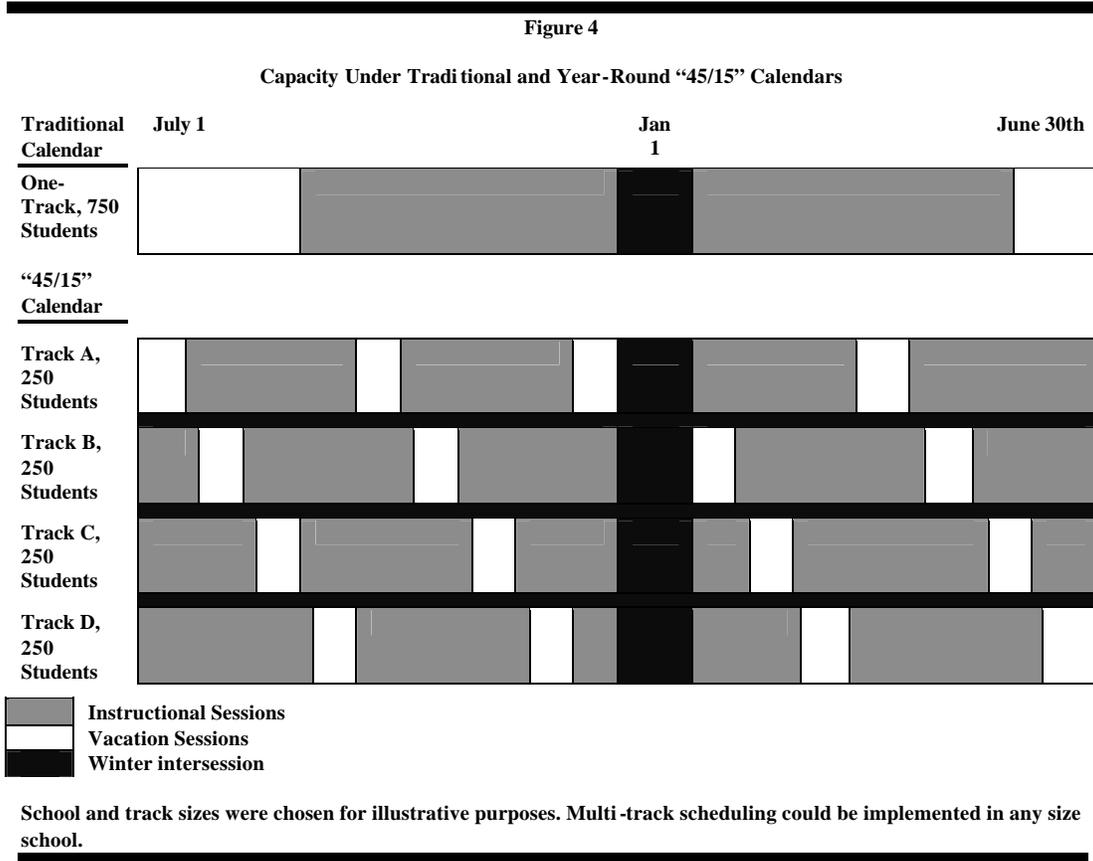


Table 4 shows the extent to which YRE in combination with rezoning could increase the number of students accommodated in New York City public schools. The gross increase in capacity from YRE is simply one-third, but it is important to make two adjustments. First, a portion of the current capacity is temporary buildings that would not be suitable for more intensive, permanent use. Second, some capacity is needed for remedial instruction that now takes place in the summer; some classrooms would just not be available for YRE. Once these adjustments are made, YRE would increase capacity for regular enrollment by 134,928 from the current 1,133,646 (after rezoning) to 1,268,574.

**Table 5**  
**New Capacity Available from Year-Round Education**

	<u>Elementary Schools</u>	<u>Middle Schools</u>	<u>High Schools</u>	<u>Total</u>
Current Enrollment				1,061,497
Current Capacity given Rezoning	577,878	293,977	261,791	1,133,646
Elimination of Transportable Buildings	(14,930)	(2,023)	0	(16,953)
Permanent Current Capacity	562,948	291,954	261,791	1,116,693
Gross New Capacity from YRE	187,649	97,318	87,264	372,231
Adjustment for Summer Programs	(80,127)	(60,095)	(80,127)	(220,350)
Net New Capacity	107,522	37,223	7,136	151,881
<b>Current and New Capacity Available for Enrollment</b>	<b>670,470</b>	<b>329,177</b>	<b>268,927</b>	<b>1,268,574</b>

Source: 2002-2003 New York City Department of Education School Construction Authority Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report, September 2003; New York Daily News, "Summer School Not for Everybody", May 14, 2004.

The expanded capacity from YRE and rezoning is more than sufficient to accommodate the expansion needs identified by the CFE. (See Table 5.) These include space for all current students in permanent facilities, space for reduced class sizes required for a "sound basic education" as specified in the CFE's initial five-year program (called the BRICKS program) and its longer run program, and the added space for pre-kindergarten programs in the CFE's longer run program. The total capacity required to meet all these needs, space for an estimated 1,225,145 students, is less than the capacity available from YRE and full use of capacity through rezoning (space for 1,268,574 students).

**Table 6**  
**Capacity Versus Need**

<b>Need</b>	<b>1,225,145</b>
Current enrollment	1,061,497
Elimination of transportable buildings	16,953
Short-term class size reductions (BRICKS)	52,789
Longer-term needs	
Class size of 16 in K-5	66,906
Pre-kindergarten enrollment	27,000
<b>Current Capacity with YRE and rezoning</b>	<b>1,268,574</b>

Compared to new construction, the savings that these strategies offer - in time and in money - are compelling. But neither is without practical difficulties.

Implementing the schedule changes necessary for YRE would place significant demands on school administrators, families, and social service institutions. Air conditioning would be required throughout the school system if instruction is extended through the summer months. The calendar for teachers and other personnel must be adjusted to reflect the schedule changes. Parents, whose schedules and child care arrangements now are designed to accommodate a conventional school schedule, would have to alter those arrangements. Families and administrators would have to collaborate to coordinate the schedules of siblings in different schools in order to avoid unnecessary difficulties in arranging child care, vacation and recreational activities. After-school programs, conducted both in the schools and by outside agencies, may need to be augmented to assist parents in their adjustment to the new calendars.

These concerns are not inconsequential. However, schools on year-round schedules have developed strategies to address the social impact of changing from the traditional calendar. Implementing schedule changes on a district-wide basis reduces the difficulties in coordinating vacation and child care faced by families with children in different schools. Converting the entire school system to the same calendar also provides an incentive for other social institutions (day camps, employers, etc.) to alter their operations to accommodate the change. Allowing teachers to opt to teach sessions when they are off-track permits them to augment their pay by serving as substitute teachers in their field and often is seen by them as an improvement over the practice of temporary summer employment.

Concerns about rezoning also are serious and should be responded to seriously. Rezoning affects people on a visceral level; some may perceive change as a threat to the character of their neighborhood. It may be necessary to impose tighter limits on the number of students that can enroll in desirable, "good" schools; this issue, particularly important at high schools that enroll competitively, will ultimately solve itself as motivated students who do not get their first choice help transform the schools they attend – but the process may be uncomfortable.

The political and administrative complexities of implementing YRE and rezoning are formidable, but should not prevent their adoption. The alternative is to spend billions that could be used effectively elsewhere on avoidable new construction and to delay for perhaps ten years providing a substantial share of the more than one million school children the space necessary for a sound basic education. The Court should not dismiss policy options that use existing facilities wisely, thereby promptly providing children a seat in a structurally sound and well-equipped school – without the delays or costs that accompany new construction.