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Questions Rising Concerning Spending Of Funds By The Mayor And The New York City

Schools

By Patricia Hawke

Mayor Michael Bloomberg and New York City schools Chancellor Joel Klein, together, have made sweeping changes within the New York City schools. Yet, many are questioning their intentions and spending of funds.

Creating smaller class sizes, especially in the elementary grades, has long been a priority of most parents, teachers and advocates in New York City. Many states and cities have passed laws requiring smaller classrooms, such as the state of Florida.

Studies have repeatedly shown that smaller classrooms improve student achievement, reduce teacher attrition, decrease student disciplinary problems, and increase parent involvement. They have proved especially effective for the elementary grades, but smaller classrooms in high schools are believed to reduce dropout rates, as well.

Today, the New York City schools classrooms are the largest ones in the state. The Court of Appeals ruled in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case that class sizes in the New York City schools were too large to provide students their "constitutional right to an adequate education." The public is complaining that the mayor only plans to spend two percent of the money received from the lawsuit toward reducing class sizes within the New York City schools; yet, he plans to spend ten times as much on more school administrators and specialists.

According to the Gotham Gazette, the mayor and Klein are undermining the reduction of classroom size in six major ways:

·Ignoring State Law --- Since 1999, over \$500 million has been given to the New York City schools by the state to cut class size. According to an audit released in March by State Comptroller Alan Hevesi, only 20 extra classes in kindergarten through third grade were created as of last year, compared to the 1,586 classes the New York City schools officials said had been formed.

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The audit also showed that officials had sharply cut back the number of K–3 classes by almost 900 over the last four years. Classes should now be 19.1 students per class; however, they remain with 65 percent of the students in classes with 21 students or more, and 26 percent in classes with 25 students or more.

·Not Allowing Voters to Decide — Over 100,000 New Yorkers signed petitions last year to put an amendment on the ballot that would require a minimum of 25 percent of funds owed the New York City schools from the lawsuit be spent on class size reduction. New York City schools officials blocked the proposal, stating it was "improper", since the New York City schools are under the authority of the state and do not have to comply with city laws. Many voters and advocate groups are contesting.

·Fewer New Classroom Seats Are Being Created — Reporter Leonie Haimson believes the city is in danger of creating more seats in new stadiums than in New York City schools during Bloomberg's administration. The following are the number of new seats added, according to the Mayor's Management Report:

o22,267 seats in fiscal year 2003, o12,921 in 2004, o8,631 in 2005, o4,287 in 2006, and o204 thus far, this year.

Yet, all five boroughs are experiencing a development boom in their neighborhoods. In other major cities across the country, developers are being required to provide schools and other community needs as part of their development projects. New York City has no such requirement. Therefore, there are fewer seats with no expectation of more being added, even though development is increasing.

· No School Plans for Governors Island — When the mayor was elected in 2001, he pledged to put a major high school and university on the island, which has current facilities sitting vacant that once were used as classrooms. According to Gazette sources, no one is discussing a plan for a school in that location, and the Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation has been told to maximize the island's profit-making potential. A new high school on the island would have relieved a lot of overcrowding in the other secondary New York City schools.

· More Charter Schools Being Created — The mayor plans to create up to 100 new charter schools, and the New York City schools capital plan calls for 74 percent of them to be put into existing New York City schools buildings. With new charter schools taking currently used New York City schools classroom space that means more overcrowding and larger classrooms for the New York City schools.

· New Administrative Positions — The creation of new administrative positions within the New York City schools has exploded since the mayor was elected. The city comptroller found in 2005 that the New York City schools had lost over 2,000 teachers without replacement within two years, further crowding more students into each classroom. The Educational Priorities Panel recently found that the amount of money devoted to instruction had steadily declined during the first four years of the mayor's administration. Meanwhile, the number of new administrative positions has escalated, with only a slight decline in administrators at the district level.

The public's concerns over classroom size are growing, as the mayor and Klein appear to be focusing

on other concerns for the New York City schools.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on New York City schools visit

<http://www.schoolsk–12.com/new–york/new–york–city/index.html>

New York City Schools And Teachers' Union Join Forces To Attract New Teaching Talent Through Innovative Housing Support Program

By Patricia Hawke

Like many other school districts in large, metropolitan cities, New York City Schools currently have a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in the most challenging schools. Though state law requires teachers in the targeted critical subject areas of mathematics, science and special education to be certified, there are 600 positions now held by teachers without the proper credentials. This shortage, which covers all grades in the middle and high schools, demanded an innovative solution to the problem.

New York City schools and the United Federation of Teachers developed a creative method to fill the need for experienced, certified teachers — a new housing support program. It is considered one of the most concerted and generous programs aimed at recruiting teachers in subject areas with the worse shortages. The joint effort is a rare example of cooperation between the two parties.

The housing support program gives incentives worth up to \$15,000 to certified teachers in the shortage areas. The initial payment incentive is up to \$5,000 for housing–related expenses. These expenses include relocation costs, down payment on a mortgage, and rental fees and deposits. This initial payment is followed by a monthly housing stipend of \$400 for a two–year period.

Additionally, the New York City schools and teachers' union have partnered with the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development to provide home ownership assistance to these teachers. This will include home ownership counseling and access to down payment assistance for eligible teachers and their families.

To qualify for the housing support program, teachers must have at least two years teaching experience, be able to pass a rigorous selection process, and be willing to commit to teach in New York City schools for at least three years. Former New York City schools teachers with two years teaching experience, certified and have been out of the New York City schools system for at least two years also are eligible for the program. Teachers already living in the New York City schools area and wish to switch to the city schools could use the money for existing rent and mortgage payments.

The innovative program creates an opportunity for all members of the teachers union to avail themselves of these housing subsidies and defray the higher cost of housing in the New York City schools area. It is one of the most aggressive housing incentive programs in the United States. In

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comparison, Chicago schools offer a \$7,500 subsidy, while California offers up to \$20,000 but all of it must be repaid.

The New York City schools are strategically recruiting with trips to the state of California, which has comparable housing costs, as well as other states in the northwestern and southeastern areas of the United States. Additionally, an advertising campaign will promote the New York City schools program in the local and national newspapers, as well as other print and electronic media. The New York City schools are hoping to hire an extra 100 teachers for the 2006–07 school year. Teachers hired will begin work in a high–need middle or high school, where these teachers are most in demand.

The new housing support program will make a real difference to underserved students and gives a

competitive advantage to the New York City schools.

Patricia Hawke is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. Patricia has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on New York City schools visit

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