



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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July 19, 2004

Leonie Haimson
Class Size Matters
124 Waverly Place
New York, NY 10011

Dear Ms. Haimson:

As you requested, IBO has analyzed the 2003-2004 Department of Education (DOE) class registers in order to update our measurement of the trend in average early grade class size since 1998-1999. The analysis of the 2003-2004 school registers indicate that the average class size continues to fall for first, second and third grades, however kindergarten class size seems to have increased slightly between the 2002-2003 school year and the 2003-2004 school year. IBO found that the average class size for kindergarten grew from 20.7 students in 2002-2003 to 20.9 in 2003-2004. Additionally, the decreases in class size experienced in the other early grades appear to be slowing down; the rate at which class sizes are falling has decreased, with only modest declines from 2002-2003 to 2003-2004. We have attached tables with our annual class size estimates beginning with the 1998-1999 school year, by grade and by district, as well as the distribution of class sizes by grade for the 2003-2004 school year.

Average class size is a function of both the number of students (enrollment) and the number of classes provided by the DOE. As you know, early grade enrollment has been falling steadily since 1999-2000. Beginning with the 1999-2000 school year, DOE has used funds from the State's early grade class size reduction grant to increase the number of classes in grades K-3. As we discussed in a September 2002, IBO *Inside the Budget* article, the city reported a higher number of new classes formed than IBO found in its analysis of the data. The discrepancy was largely due to the effect of the enrollment decline. The department was counting as new classes created under its initiative classrooms and teachers that were freed up because of lower enrollments.

IBO measures the number of new classes simply by comparing the number of classes to the number of classes in 1998-1999. IBO counted 12,908 K-3 classes in the 1998-1999

school year—before the state grant was available—which increased to a high of 14,059 in the 2000-2001 school year. The number of classes has been falling since then. There were 13,876 K-3 classes in the 2001-2002 school year, 13,751 in 2002-2003, and 13,448 in 2003-2004.

With lower enrollment, average class size can be maintained even as the number of classes declines. Conversely, average class sizes would fall if the number of classes is maintained while enrollment falls. We estimate that the citywide average K-3 class size in 2003-2004 would have fallen to 21.1 from 21.7 if the number of classes in 2002-2003 had been maintained.

You also asked that we summarize our methodology for estimating the average class size in the early grades in New York City. Please note that we have used the same basic methodology in each of our reports on early grade class size. In order to calculate the average class size, IBO uses the ATS-C-Form register file provided by the Department of Education every school year. The ATS-C-Form register reports the size of every class in the system as of October 31st of the school year. IBO makes several modifications to the data before calculating the average class size by grade and by district.

First, we only calculate class size for grades kindergarten through eight, therefore all pre-kindergarten classes and high school classes are eliminated from the data. Additionally, IBO eliminates all classes reporting fewer than five students or more than 50 students, and only includes those classes in districts 1-33 and district 85, formerly the Chancellor's district. Other districts that show up in the register data are generally for special categories of high school or citywide special education classes.

A more complicated adjustment is made to the data to properly account for bridge classes that occur when more than one class has been combined to create a single, larger class housed in one classroom. When a bridge class is the result of two classes in the same grade level being combined, IBO sums the enrollment in these two classes and counts it as a single class. This includes bridge classes that are a combination of a general education class and a mild special education class. If a bridge class combines two classes from different grades, IBO excludes both classes from the data. Including these entries would be problematic because our goal is to report class size by grade; it is not clear whether to classify a bridge class of first and second graders as a first grade class or a second grade class.

Once all these adjustments are made, the 2003-2004 register file was reduced from 35,450 classes to 27,168 classes. Over 3,000 classes were eliminated due to counting bridge classes as a single class instead of multiples (less than one-third of the 3,000 dropped bridge classes were eliminated because they span more than one grade). We also dropped over 4,000 classes that were either pre-kindergarten or high school classes. Finally, we also dropped over 180 classes that had fewer than five students, and three K-3 classes in the register data that had more than 50 students.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me (212-442-8642, georges@ibo.nyc.ny.us) or Matina Madrick (212-442-8618, matinam@ibo.nyc.ny.us) who analyzed the register data.

Sincerely,

George Sweeting
Deputy Director

Attachments