

Budget Options For New York City

Community & Social Services

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Budget Option

Consolidate City Special Elections Into General Election Cycle

Savings: \$13 million over a four-year period

Currently, when a state or city elected official's position becomes vacant due to the elected official's resignation, removal, death, or permanent incapacitation, a special election is called, administered by the New York City Board of Elections. Special elections have happened on average once every year since 2015, occurring as many as three times in 2021.

The Board of Elections incurs expenditures for special elections, such as pay for poll workers, advertising, and printing ballots, among other logistical expenses. Because election cycles are four years, IBO has averaged the costs for every relevant City special election over the last two cycles (eight years), to estimate a total four-year cycle cost of \$13 million based on [NYC Board of Election Annual Reports from 2015 to 2022](#). This option would save money by eliminating the need to hold special elections. Instead, those replacement elections would be included in the general election cycle that already occurs each calendar year.

There are many ways that this option could work, including temporary appointments from other elected officials, whether the Mayor, City Council, Borough Presidents, or some combination thereof. The maximum time that any temporary appointee would serve in a position would be less than 1 year, because there is currently a regular citywide election run every year by the Board of Elections into which any special elections could be consolidated. This option would require amendments to City Charter provisions setting forth processes for filling vacancies in elected offices, which would trigger the need for a referendum.

Proponents might argue that these potential budgetary savings are reasonable considering the historically much lower turnouts for special elections compared with primaries and especially general elections. Based on [NYC Board of Election Annual Reports from 2015 to 2022](#), special elections typically have very low turnout rates. Across the eight years from 2015-2022, the average turnout rate for special elections was 8 percent of eligible voters. For comparison, over the same period, the average turnout rate for primary elections was 19 percent of eligible voters, and for general elections was 35 percent of eligible voters. They might also argue that higher turnouts for these replacement elections would be more democratic. Finally, under this option there would be less time between a position vacancy and appointment than there currently is between vacancies and special elections.

Opponents might argue that having more elections is inherently more democratic than fewer. They might also argue that having unelected officials representing them for potentially as much as 364 days at a time is problematic, even if other elected officials are responsible for making the appointments. They might finally argue that lower turnout elections allow greater influence by individuals most motivated to participate in the democratic process—those who make the effort to turn out for special elections.

Budget Option

Introduce a Tiered Payment Structure for 3-K Determined by Household Income

Revenue: \$44 million annually

In 2017, then-Mayor Bill de Blasio introduced a program that provided access to free education to 3-year-olds. 3-K For All began in two school districts for approximately 1,500 students and has since expanded to enroll nearly 40,000 students citywide in the 2022-2023 school year. Under this option, the Department of Education (DOE) would institute a tiered payment structure that would be based on individual household income. In the absence of that data, IBO used the neighborhood income level of students' residence (see IBO's measure [here](#), which uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau on median household income in a census tract), and created five tiers. The first tier would continue to pay nothing for their childcare, and there would be income-based groupings that would pay varying amounts annually above. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers childcare to be affordable when the cost is below [seven percent](#) of the family's income. This option envisions that no family would pay more than half of that, 3.5 percent.

The first tier is determined by 1.85 times the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity 2020 poverty threshold for New York City, about \$71,000 annually for a family of four. IBO uses a New York City-based poverty threshold and applies a multiplier for eligibility based on the federal government's eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch. Using actual enrollment of 3-K students in the 2021-2022 school year, IBO calculated the remaining four tiers by creating an even spread of families in each tier. The annual payments for each tier are calculated by multiplying the minimum income for each tier by 3.5 percent. It will be important to recalculate these tiers regularly to ensure it reflects the enrolled population. By IBO's calculation, the DOE pays an average of \$16,600 per pupil for 3-K students, and this would serve as reimbursement for a portion of that cost.

The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) provides annual market rates for early childhood programs. As of June 3, 2022, the weekly price for childcare for 3-year-olds was \$325, with an annual total for a typical school year of 36 weeks, and the total annual cost comes to \$11,700. Under this option, families would pay between \$2,500 and \$3,800 annually depending on their income. This means that even for families paying the most to the DOE, they would be paying \$7,900 less than the typical annual cost.

Proponents might argue that this additional funding would allow for an increase in slot options including extended day/extended year, which would make the programs more accessible to families who work longer hours and potentially address under-enrollment. Additionally, with federal stimulus funding running out soon, these funds could be used to make up for some of those lost dollars. Finally, the costs are much lower than the ACS' estimated market rates.

Opponents might argue that 3-K is a public good and even the 3.5 percent cost could prove to be a financial burden. Alternatively, the DOE could reallocate slots throughout the city to reflect the demand in each district and reverse under-enrollment. Additionally, the introduction of charges made to families may increase the administrative burden of the DOE. Finally, even though the cost is still less than the annual cost of private school tuition, families with higher incomes may leave the public schools in favor of those alternatives.