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**Testimony of Ray Domanico, New York City Independent Budget Office  
To the New York City Council Committee on Education's Hearing on  
The Department of Education's Monitoring of  
Students at Closing Schools**

**January 25, 2011**

Good afternoon, Chairman Jackson, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Ray Domanico, and I am Director of Education Research at the New York City Independent Budget Office. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with your committee today about the issue of school closings.

Last year, at the request of Chairman Jackson, IBO reviewed the available data on schools that the Department of Education was proposing to close at the end of school year 2009-2010. Those closings were suspended due to legal challenge and the education department has now proposed a new list of schools to be closed beginning at the end of the current school year: 2010-2011. IBO has once again looked at the performance of the schools on the current closure list, the types of students attending those schools, and the level of resources provided to them in recent years. We will be releasing our full report tomorrow, but I can share the highlights with you today. I am joined today by Sarita Subramanian, IBO's principal analyst on this study.

Our analysis identified three critical issues related to the current set of school closure recommendations.

First, these are low performing schools. The 14 high schools on the closure list have an average graduation rate of 50 percent, compared with a citywide average of 71 percent for all high schools. These schools also have low attendance rates—an average daily attendance of 78 percent, compared with a citywide average of 87 percent. On average, students in schools proposed for closure are absent 40 days a year. Only 61 percent of the students in these 14 high schools were able to complete the expected 10 credits in their first year of high school, compared with 78 percent in the city as a whole.

At the elementary and middle school level, student achievement is also low. Only 23 percent of the students in the 14 elementary or middle schools on the closure list attained proficiency on the state English language arts assessment test, compared with a citywide rate of 44 percent.

Of course, the policy of closing schools and replacing them with newly created schools is premised on the notion that the schools themselves are responsible for low achievement and that the new schools that will replace them will attain better results with the same students or same type of students as the schools that are being closed. Our report's second and third critical points speak to these issues.

Our second major finding is that the schools on this year's closure list have, in recent years, been serving a student population with greater needs than other schools. Six percent of the students in high schools on the closure list meet the federal government's definition of *living in temporary housing* compared with 4 percent in city high schools as a whole.

Eighteen percent of the students in these high schools are classified as special education students, compared with 12 percent in the city's entire high school population. In the four years leading up to the this year's closure recommendation, the percentage of special education students in these high schools grew at a faster rate than for the city as a whole, going from 14 percent in 2005-2006 to 18 percent in 2008-2009. In those same years, the citywide rate for high schools grew from 10 percent to 12 percent.

Perhaps most significantly for high schools on the closure list, 9 percent of the students are already overage for the schools' entering grade, more than twice the citywide rate of 4 percent. Students who are overage upon entry to high school are more likely than other students to drop out. The demographic profiles of elementary and middle schools on the closure list were not dramatically different from elementary and middle schools citywide, though schools on the closure list tend to have greater percentages of black students, fewer white students and a slightly higher percentage of low-income students than citywide averages.

The third issue highlighted in our report is obvious from a simple review of the school closure list, but is important and worthy of attention. Almost a third of the schools being proposed for closure, 8 out of 25, are small schools that had been themselves created as replacements for schools previously closed. We cannot know if these schools are an anomaly, or if they are simply the first wave of new small schools to fail. Only time will tell but this is an issue worth following in future years.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work with you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.