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Testimony of George Sweeting
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To the New York City Council Committee on Education
Oversight Hearing on DOE's Implementation of the New School Governance Law

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Good afternoon Chairman Jackson and members of the Education Committee. My name is George Sweeting and I am Deputy Director of the New York City Independent Budget Office. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee about the new school governance law.

As you know, the new law was signed by the Governor just six weeks ago. As a result, many of the changes required under the legislation are now in just the first phase of their implementation. Given this early stage, much of the effort to build the new governance regime is likely going on behind the scenes in ways that we cannot yet see.

But I can pull the curtain back and discuss where IBO is in the process of implementing its enhanced role under the new legislation. I am particularly pleased to discuss this at this hearing because we know that one reason we were given this broader role was the recommendations made by the Council's Working Group on Mayoral Control and School Governance, during the debate over school governance.

As suggested by Chairman Jackson and members of the working group, under the new law IBO has a mandate to review and report on all aspects of the Department of Education, from our traditional role of tracking the school system's revenue and spending to broader issues concerning student outcomes and other performance data. To put this broad new role into action, we are working on three tracks simultaneously: hiring the necessary staff, defining our oversight goals, and establishing the procedures for accessing and processing the data we will need.

IBO is well into the process of seeking the additional staff necessary to fulfill our new responsibilities. We have advertised widely and received literally hundreds of applications. We are reviewing the applications and interviews are now underway.

Given the broad mandate under the new legislation, we are also reaching out to many different stakeholders in the city's public schools to help us determine how our resources can best be

used. We began a “listening tour” to inform our understanding of the education issues that concern New Yorkers, meeting with parents, policymakers, advocates, academics and others to identify how our expanded capacity can best be used. That is another reason I am pleased to be here today: it allows IBO to extend an invitation to this committee, and the Council as a whole, to discuss with us the issues you think we should address and the data we should review.

Also underway is the development of procedures for accessing and processing that data. We have had a preliminary conversation with the Chancellor as a first step in beginning to discuss with the Department of Education how we will routinely get the student level and other data we will need in a timely manner. In a system with more than a million students and roughly 85,000 teachers, the data we will be accessing is much larger than what our information systems now handle. So we are also determining what computer hardware and software we will need for processing, storing, and protecting this data, as well as identifying staff to help us manage it all.

Thank you for the opportunity to update the committee on the steps already underway at IBO to meet our new responsibilities under the school governance legislation. I will be glad to answer any questions you have.