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**Testimony of George Sweeting, New York City Independent Budget Office  
To the New York City Council Committees on Education and  
Oversight and Investigations  
On the Education Department's Proposed School Closings**

**March 2, 2010**

Good afternoon, Chairmen Jackson and Williams and members of the education and oversight committees. 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 with your committees today about next year's school closings.

At the request of Chairman Jackson, IBO examined whether the schools slated for closure this year were in the lowest performing 10 percent of city schools on several measures. You will recall that last fall, the Mayor announced plans to close the lowest performing 10 percent of city schools within four years and replace them with new schools. Thus, there was a question whether the announced closings were consistent with that policy. Additionally, we compared the demographics and levels of overcrowding in the 20 schools to other schools in their boroughs and districts. While we took into account the Department of Education's (DOE) public explanations of the school closings when selecting the measures to use in our analysis, there are many factors in the department's school closing decision-making process that are not easily quantifiable, which we could not assess. As a result, our analysis cannot be used as a comprehensive evaluation of the DOE's school closing choices, but it does allow some useful comparisons. I will briefly summarize the results of our analysis. The [full report](#) is available on our Web site.

High schools facing closure scored relatively poorly on DOE's Progress Reports but fared better on DOE Quality Reviews. Progress Reports are a DOE measure of overall school performance and a major consideration in DOE's accountability framework. Twelve of the fifteen high schools facing closure were in the lowest 10 percent of the most recent Progress Reports. The three schools that were not in the lowest decile were Global Enterprise High

School, Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education, and Paul Robeson High School, which barely escaped the bottom 10 percent. However, 10 of the 15 schools were deemed “proficient” on their most recent Quality Review, DOE’s qualitative assessment of the school’s performance. This rating was equal to or better than the ratings of nearly 60 percent of city high schools. Less than 8 percent of city schools had ratings below proficient.

Next we examined several individual measures of school environment and academic achievement and progress. The environment measures included ratings from surveys of students, parents, and teachers, and other measures such as attendance rates. The measures of academic achievement included results on state tests, and for high schools the four-year and six-year graduation rates. IBO’s analysis found that while still among the lowest performing city schools, the high schools facing closure was more varied on these performance measures than on the Progress Reports. Only 5 of the 15 high schools were in the lowest decile for three or more of the five statistics the DOE Progress Reports use to measure school environment. For academic achievement and progress, only five schools fell in the lowest 10 percent for three or more of the six measures we selected. Only Norman Thomas High School was in the lowest 10 percent for most of the environmental and academic achievement variables.

In addition to these measures of school environment and performance, we compared the demographics of high schools proposed for closure to those of other high schools in their respective boroughs. We found that schools proposed for closure had relatively high concentrations of English Language Learners and special education students and students from economically disadvantaged households. We did not find consistent patterns of increase in these measures over the last three years. Finally, these high schools had higher concentrations of African-American students than other high schools in their boroughs.

To determine whether schools facing closure were more likely to be overcrowded, we also compared school utilization rates for closing high schools to all other high schools citywide over the last five years. These rates represent school enrollment as a percentage of school capacity. While the high schools to be closed had substantially higher utilization rates in the 2004-05 school year, this rate had decreased over time. By last school year there was little difference in utilization between the closing high schools and others citywide.

The relative performance of the five middle schools facing closure and P.S. 332, the lone K-8 school to be closed, was substantially poorer than the performance we observed for their

high school counterparts. All six schools were in the lowest 10 percent of Progress Reports. P.S. 332 and the middle schools slated to close more consistently ranked in the lowest 10 percent on school environment and academic achievement and progress measures than did the high schools being closed. In contrast, Quality Review ratings for the middle and elementary schools slated for closure were more varied with three of the six schools deemed proficient.

Let me turn to the demographics and school utilization of P.S. 332 and middle schools facing closure relative to other schools serving the same grade levels. The schools facing closure tended to have lower concentrations of English Language Learners and higher concentrations of African-American students than other schools in their districts. But differences on other demographic measures were inconsistent. For capacity utilization, we found little difference between typical utilization of middle schools being closed and other middle schools citywide. P.S. 332, however, has been substantially underutilized for the last five years. While the gap between it and the city's other K-8 schools has narrowed, P.S. 332 is still only at 55 percent capacity.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our school closing analysis with the committees, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.