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Stephanie Kranes, Senior Budget and Policy Analyst, New York City Independent Budget Office on
Expansion of the Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program
Before the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. I am Steph Kranes, Senior Education Budget and Policy Analyst at the Independent Budget Office (IBO). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today regarding Intro 0566-2024, which prioritizes the expansion of the Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program for at least 25 additional schoolyards located in environmental justice areas. My testimony focuses on all available schoolyards and builds upon IBO's recent [analysis](#) requested by Council Member Brewer. In that letter, published in January 2025, IBO summarized the cost of keeping all outdoor schoolyards open to the public after school on weekdays and for full eight-hour days on weekends based purely on the price of labor. IBO estimated this cost for schoolyards that were not already participating in the Schoolyards to Playgrounds program. IBO previously estimated this cost [in 2022](#) and found an increase by 8 buildings participating in the Playgrounds Program since then, from 260 up to 268.

The Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program

The Schoolyards to Playgrounds program, which began in 2007, is co-managed by the Department of Education, Department of Parks and Recreation and the Trust for Public Land and allows public access to playgrounds on weekends. The Mayor's Preliminary budget, [released](#) in January 2025, added \$770,000 to fiscal years 2026 and beyond. The Administration indicated these funds will support an expansion of the Schoolyards to Playgrounds program by 11 additional schoolyards, a 4% increase from the 268 buildings that currently participate.

IBO's Estimate of Additional Costs

IBO assumes the cost to keep playgrounds open on a weekend would be to pay a custodian for eight hours, and on a weekday after school for three hours, at \$44.95 (\$29.97/hour plus time and a half based on the [Prevailing Wage Schedule](#) beginning July 1, 2024). IBO's estimate did not account for other costs such as playground improvements. Based on publicly available data as of December 2024, IBO used this hourly rate to estimate the labor costs for one additional playground as follows:

- 1) One weekend day would be \$360, or \$37,440 per year for both weekend days, including summer months;

- 2) One weekday after school would be \$135 per weekday, or \$35,100 per year for all five weekdays, including summer months;
- 3) Those weekend and extended weekday costs amount to a combined total of \$72,540 per year for one playground.

Counts of School Buildings with Outdoor Yards

There are 946 buildings that have outdoor yard(s) according to the most recent Report on Physical Education Pursuant to Local Law 102 of 2015, which was released for the 2023-2024 school year. Of these, per the program's most recent Schoolyards to Playgrounds program [dataset](#) on Open Data as of December 2024, 268 buildings were participating in the program and had an open outdoor yard. Two buildings did not have an address. This leaves a total of 676 buildings that have outdoor yards but are not part of the Schoolyards to Playgrounds program and therefore are not open to the public during after-school hours. If all 676 buildings were kept opened on weekends and extended weekday hours, the total annual cost would be about \$49 million. IBO's analysis is based on program participation at the building level. In cases where a school has multiple uniquely identified campuses in different buildings, only the building with an available yard is counted.

Distance

IBO also examined the average distance that students would need to travel to the nearest City park, for schools with a yard and for schools without a yard. IBO found that for the 676 school buildings with a yard that are not currently open during non-school hours, students would need to travel 0.26 miles or 5.2 blocks on average to the nearest park. The maximum distance would be 2 miles or 40 blocks in Staten Island, and just over one mile or 21 blocks in Queens and in the Bronx. For the 431 school buildings *without* an outdoor yard, students would need to travel 0.29 miles or 5.8 blocks on average to the nearest park. The maximum distance would be 1.6 miles or 32 blocks in Queens and 1.4 miles or 28 blocks in the Bronx.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. IBO welcomes your questions.

