

School System Delays Plan for 7,400 New Seats for Students

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The city's newly released plan for Capital Budget spending delays the creation of more than 7,400 new seats for public school students. The delay comes in response to a decision last February to reduce all types of capital spending by 25 percent.

This is the second time in less than a year that the construction of new school seats has been slowed. Last December, after school officials announced there was a funding shortfall of \$2.4 billion, the school system's five-year capital plan was amended, deferring more than 11,000 new seats. Together, these two delays mean that more than 18,000 of the nearly 60,000 new seats originally proposed under the capital plan adopted in May 1999 will be deferred to a later date. ¹

Where the seats are, and are not. Under the latest revision of the capital plan, the school system will create 11,507 new seats between 2002 and 2004—8,000 in Queens, 1,629 in the Bronx, 1,200 in Brooklyn, and 678 in Manhattan. No new seats will be added in Staten Island.

The seats that are being delayed come from projects originally included in the five-year plan—16 new schools, four building additions, and the leasing of various sites. These projects include 11 with nearly 5,000 seats in Queens, five with nearly 4,400 seats in Brooklyn, three (plus some unspecified leases) with more than 2,700 seats in Manhattan, five with roughly 2,000 seats in the Bronx, and one with nearly 950 seats in Staten Island. Some of the leases counted as a single project likely cover multiple schools and sites within a borough.

The first scale back. In December 2001, the Department of Education first amended its five-year capital plan. The amended plan for fiscal years 2002 through 2004 covers the \$3.41 billion available to be spent over the remaining three years of the plan period.² In amending the plan, the education department allotted greater priority to its "capacity program" than to spending on repairs and other capital expenses. Of the \$3.41 billion, the department proposed committing 60 percent for new seats, 34 percent for maintenance and repair projects, and 6 percent for other miscellaneous and administrative costs.

The scaled back plan provided for the construction of 18,928 new student seats and deferred construction of 11,072 other seats. Only new school projects in the most overcrowded districts and with available sites remained in the plan. Queens, which has the greatest number of overcrowded school districts, was scheduled to receive 60 percent, or 11,250, of the new seats that remained. The deferred projects included the construction of eight new schools, two

additions to existing facilities, and various sites to be leased.

Several factors contributed to the budget shortfall in the school capital plan. A February 2002 consultant's report to the Chancellor linked the higher construction costs to the reluctance of contractors to bid on school construction work, an overheated construction market, and costly design and material requirements. An IBO report showed that the education department's cost projections for building a new school had grown by 70 percent, and the cost of repairs such as replacing windows or fixing crumbling roofs had risen by 130 percent between the adoption of the five-year capital plan in May 1999 and its amendment in December 2001.³

Scaled back again. IBO's analysis indicates that roughly \$595 million has been cut from the \$1.45 billion scheduled for capacity projects in the December revision. New school construction—the largest source of new seats—takes the brunt of the reduction. (Because of slight increases in other areas of the plan—primarily capital improvement projects—the overall reduction in the department's five-year capital plan is approximately \$400 million.) The construction costs of the deferred projects would be borne in the next five-year capital plan, which begins in 2005. (See table on Web site for detail of changes.)

With less money available, the department has deferred the construction of 7,421 additional student seats. Added to the 11,072 deferred seats as a result of the December amendment, the total number of deferred seats is now 18,493—nearly one-third of the 60,000 seats originally planned.

The recent decision to merge the School Construction Authority with the education department's Division of School Facilities is aimed at lowering the cost of school construction and ensuring the city gets the most seats possible for its funding.

Written by Ana Ventura

END NOTES

¹ This figure was arrived at by subtracting the number of deferred seats for new schools, building additions, and leased facilities from that proposed in the original plan, adopted in May 1999. Total number of seats to be delivered through the current plan was obtained from an itemized project list in the adopted plan document as opposed to the plan narrative. Temporary seats provided through transportable classroom units were not included. The total number of seats also excludes a small number of capacity projects that are being selected jointly by the Mayor and City Council.

New School Seats Delayed, 2002-2004			
Borough	December Deferrals	Additional Deferrals	Total
Manhattan			
New school	1,200	1,004	2,204
Addition	0	0	0
Lease	0	527	527
Subtotal	1,200	1,531	2,731
Bronx^a			
New school	0	650	650
Addition	0	650	650
Lease	706	0	706
Subtotal	706	1,300	2,006
Brooklyn			
New school	2,000	1,000	3,000
Addition	0	340	340
Lease	1,044	0	1,044
Subtotal	3,044	1,340	4,384
Queens			
New school	2,334	2,650	4,984
Addition	320	0	320
Lease	2,521	600	3,121
Subtotal	5,175	3,250	8,425
Staten Island			
New school	947	0	947
Addition	0	0	0
Lease	0	0	0
Subtotal	947	0	947
Citywide			
New school	6,481	5,304	11,785
Addition	320	990	1,310
Lease	4,271	1,127	5,398
Total	11,072	7,421	18,493

SOURCES: IBO; Board of Education Five-Year Capital Plan Fiscal Years 2000-2004 (amended December 14, 2001); separate plan document, released with September 2002 Capital Commitment Plan.

NOTES: Projects deferred in December include those funded only for scope/design work and leases dropped from the plan. The additional deferrals only include projects that were previously expected to provide seats by the end (or shortly thereafter) of the current plan period. (a) A new school project in the Bronx was changed to a building addition.

² The \$3.41 billion figure does not include roughly \$150 million in funding for projects selected by the Borough Presidents, the City Council, and a few capacity projects funded by the Mayor and City Council.

³ IBO, "School Construction Costs Soar More than 70 Percent Since 1999," Inside the Budget, No. 96, February 4, 2002.