



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

SCOTT M. STRINGER
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
OVERSIGHT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S
CONTRACT FOR EXCELLENCE SUBMISSION**

July 24, 2007

Good morning, I am Patrick Sullivan, Manhattan member of the Panel for Educational Policy. I am presenting testimony on behalf of Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer. Thank you Chairman Jackson and members of the committee for holding this oversight hearing concerning the Department of Education's Contract for Excellence plan to the New York State Education Department. While I share in the excitement about the pending arrival of vital new funding, I have serious concerns about the current Contract for Excellence.

There are serious issues regarding the Fair Student Funding formula and class size reduction as laid out in the plan. One true weakness of the plan is its reliance on an unproven funding mechanism. The Contract for Excellence is intended to focus on students with the greatest educational need. An original finding of the CFE judgment was that the city's schools were deficient in class size, retention of teachers and instrumentalities of learning. While Fair Student Funding will place new money as well as decision-making authority into some schools, it does nothing for about half of the city's schools. In Manhattan Districts 4 (East Harlem) and 5 (Central Harlem) the proportion is actually much higher -- 2 of 3 schools are considered "unfairly over-funded" by DOE. For these students, the DOE offers simply "accountability" -- more testing -- yet no substantive educational programs. Fair Student Funding is a new and unproven approach to budgeting. Its effects are still unclear and poorly understood. Reliance on it for allocating the new state money is inappropriate. There must be a more tangible dividend from Campaign for Fiscal Equity for all our schools.

In place of tangible benefits, the DOE offers "accountability initiatives" such as the McGraw Hill contract for interim tests, new staff positions called Senior Achievement Facilitators, Data Inquiry Teams and the like. Excessive standardized testing, supercomputers and bureaucratic staff positions will not help teachers provide differentiated instruction as DOE claims. Our teachers need smaller classes to better focus on the needs of each student.

The law requires class size reduction to specifically target "low performing and overcrowded schools." In drafting the law, the state legislature reflected common sense – resolve overcrowding by focusing on the weakest schools first. The DoE's allocation formula, Fair Student Funding (FSF), considers neither overcrowding nor poor performance in determining the allocation of funds to schools. While the state has identified 380 city schools in need of improvement or restructuring, 47% of the identified schools will not receive new funding under the FSF and therefore will have no class size reduction plan.

Most important, the plan offers no alignment of physical capacity or capital budget for new seats with the class size reduction plan. Principals may be given more funds under FSF but in most cases will not have space to add classes. DOE has provided a document purporting to show alignment of the capital budget with class size reduction but there is nothing more than “placeholders” of number of seats plugged in at the district level and no investment to reduce class size beyond the third grade.

The absence of a coherent plan demonstrates a lack of willingness to be held accountable for overcrowding. No one wants the Mayor and Chancellor to fail in their efforts to improve our schools. However, if they continue their refusal to plan for and spend new state funding as intended, the state must hold them accountable. I look forward to working with the committee and the Department of Education on using new funding to improve our schools.