



New York City Comptroller
Scott M. Stringer

NEWS

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Eric Sumberg, (212) 669-3535, esumberg@comptroller.nyc.gov

June 9, 2014

COMPTROLLER SCOTT M. STRINGER AUDIT REVEALS THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT DIDN'T KNOW WHEN IT CAME TO SCHOOL OVERCROWDING

Stringer identifies New York City's 59 most over-utilized schools in 2010-2012 School Years

NEW YORK, NY – The New York City Department of Education (DOE) lacked any statistical or documentary evidence of steps it took to implement, track and act upon recommendations to ease overcrowding in the City's schools during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, according to an [audit](#) released today by New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer.

"With significant overcrowding in schools across New York City, the Department of Education simply wasn't interested in finding out what policies worked to reduce class sizes and help our children achieve their full academic potential," Comptroller Stringer said. "What gets measured gets managed and in this case, DOE didn't keep records of the remedial actions it took to reduce overcrowding, let alone what worked and what didn't. Every child deserves enough space to be able to learn. This audit found that there is much more to be done before DOE gets a passing grade on reducing overcrowding in schools."

Comptroller Stringer's audit focused on the efforts of DOE's Offices of Portfolio Management and Space Planning to alleviate conditions in school buildings identified as overcrowded in the "Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report," also known as the "Blue Book," compiled by the School Construction Authority (SCA). DOE data indicates that between Fiscal Years 2010 and 2012, over-utilization rates for primary schools increased from 31 to 33 percent and for middle schools from 9 to 12 percent, while the high school over-utilization rate decreased from 37 percent to 32 percent.

During the period examined in the audit, the Portfolio Management and Space Planning offices were responsible for assessing the utilization of space and recommending actions to alleviate overcrowding in public school buildings. To carry out its mission, Portfolio Management reportedly gathered data on over-utilized school buildings from principals and the local community. Auditors found significant weaknesses in DOE's efforts, including a failure to maintain official written policies and procedures and process flow charts. In essence, DOE did not track whether recommendations were implemented, and in instances where they were, whether they were successful in alleviating overcrowding conditions.

A school building is deemed over-utilized if its utilization rate exceeds 100 percent. According to the DOE, 36 percent of school buildings were over-utilized in 2010-11. The following year, that overall rate remained unchanged. DOE created 5,593 new seats in School Year 2011 and 10,766 in School Year 2012. However, according to the Blue Book, in FY 2012 some 33 percent of primary schools were determined to be

overcrowded by as much as 138 percent. In middle schools and high schools, these proportions were 12 percent and 32 percent, respectively.

The audit identified the 59 most over-utilized public school buildings in New York City and found that over-utilization ranged from 133 to 238 percent. The DOE was unable to provide any evidence or documentation to substantiate that the Offices of Portfolio Management and Space Planning had made recommendations to alleviate this overcrowding.

Comptroller Stringer's audit found that:

- DOE failed to maintain written policies and procedures and process flow charts for the two offices charged with recommending ways to reduce overcrowding in the schools: the Office of Portfolio Management and the Office of Space Planning.
- Specific actions taken by the Offices of Portfolio Management and Space Planning to identify, track and address overcrowding were not adequately documented. As a result, the impact of any efforts that may have been taken during the audit period could not be assessed by auditors.
- DOE did not track whether recommendations to reduce over-utilization were implemented and, if they were, whether they were successful.
- Certain statistics reported in the Blue Book were misleading, because they failed to account for enrollment in Transportable Classroom Units (TCUs) affiliated with school buildings. As a result, school building utilization rates did not accurately reflect the actual extent of overcrowding in a given facility.

"Step one in alleviating school overcrowding is providing an honest, transparent account of space that exists in our school buildings. DOE is moving in the right direction on this front with recent changes to the Blue Book. Step two is ensuring that there are coherent internal structures, policies and protocols in place to identify, track and address the school overcrowding. DOE must continue to work on these issues as it addresses the overcrowding crisis in our schools," Stringer said.

The audit urged DOE to:

1. Compile written policies and procedures detailing steps that the Office of Portfolio Management (or any successor thereto) and the Office of Space Planning are required to take to address overcrowding.
2. Ensure that the Office of Portfolio Management (or any successor thereto) and the Office of Space Planning carry out the required steps to alleviate overcrowding in school buildings and Transportable Classroom Units.
3. Maintain documentation on proposed recommendations and solutions to address overcrowding.
4. Implement a system to track over-utilized buildings and for which overcrowding solutions were recommended and addressed.
5. Assess and monitor the effectiveness of recommendations that have been implemented to alleviate overcrowding and use that information to guide future actions.
6. Request that the SCA report an additional set of combined utilization rates in the Blue Book for school buildings with associated Transportable Classroom Units.
7. Examine the feasibility of discontinuing the use of Transportable Classroom Units, particularly at the six schools identified in the report as under-utilized.

DOE agreed to largely follow the Comptroller's recommendations.

To read the full audit, please click [here](#).

*Visit www.comptroller.nyc.gov for latest news, events and initiative
Follow Comptroller Stringer on [Twitter](#). To receive Twitter updates via text message,
text "follow scottmstringer" to 40404.
View the latest Comptroller's office videos on [Youtube](#).*

###