

High School Overcrowding Eases, But 75 Percent of Students Still in Schools Over Capacity

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ALTHOUGH THE CITY'S PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS have become less overcrowded in recent years, they still remain the most overcrowded portion of the school system. During the 2002-2003 school year, high school buildings operated at 108 percent of capacity, down from 112 percent in 1999-2000. Despite the improvement, nearly 3 out of 4 of the city's 283,000 public high school students attended overcrowded schools.

High schools in Queens, operating at 120 percent of capacity in 2002-2003, were the most overcrowded in the city. This is an improvement from four years ago, when Queen's high schools were at 126 percent of capacity. The least crowded high schools are in Staten Island, where schools ran at just under 100 percent of capacity. But unlike Queens, Staten Island high schools are now full with utilization increasing by nearly 6 percentage points since 1999-2000.

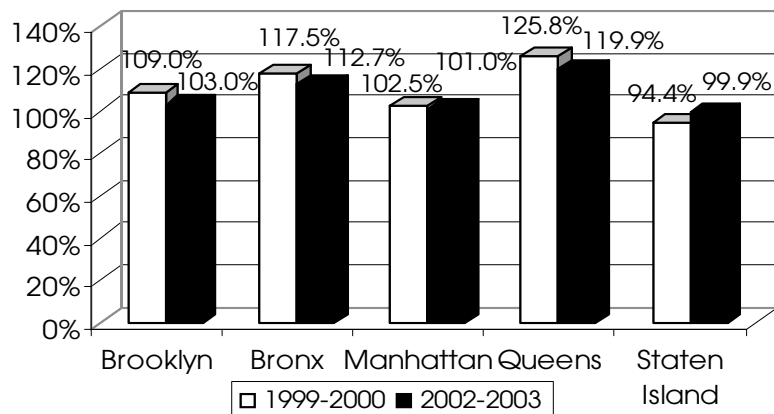
On an individual school basis Queens also had some of the most overcrowded high schools in the city in 2002-2003, including LaGuardia Community College Campus High School at 191 percent of capacity, Queens Vocational High School at 183 percent, and Long Island City High School at 171 percent. Brooklyn had the most overcrowded high school in the city—William Maxwell Vocational High School—which operated at 206 percent of capacity.

To eliminate overcrowding, the city's over-utilized high schools would have needed a total of 43,000 more seats in 2002-2003. The Department of Education is counting on the creation of new seats and declining enrollment to eliminate overcrowding in the future. Under the department's new five-year capital plan, IBO estimates roughly 20,000 seats for high school students would be created. Given the department's shaky assumption that half the plan's funding—\$6.5 billion—will come from Albany, however, fewer seats may ultimately result.

Enrollment Declines. The department's expectation of declining enrollment is consistent with recent trends. Much of the improvement in high school overcrowding since the 1999-2000 school year is due to a decline in student enrollment, although the downward trend appears to have ended for the near-term. According to the department's Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization data, student enrollment at the high school level has been declining since the 1997-1998 school year. In 1997-1998, high school enrollment was 290,347 and by 2002-2003 it had dropped by 7,434 to 282,913. The decline in public school enrollment is primarily a function of demographic changes such as rates of birth and migration in and out of the city.

Last year, there was a break in this downward high school enrollment trend. One explanation is that there was a peak in 1990 in the total number of reported births to city residents (roughly

Change in High School Building Utilization



SOURCES: IBO; Department of Education Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization data.

units (trailers usually located on school playgrounds). Conversely, building capacity can decline if schools are closed due to extreme disrepair making it unsafe for students and school staff, or because of poor student academic performance; schools closed for poor performance are generally reconstituted with new school staff, new curriculum, and usually a lower enrollment.

Conditions Vary by Borough. Despite the decline in student enrollment and the increase in building capacity, the proportion of high school students attending overcrowded schools has remained the same—roughly 74 percent. In every borough more than half of all high school students attend overcrowded buildings, although there are marked differences among the boroughs.

140,000 according to health department statistics); this cohort of children has now reached high school. According to demographic projections prepared for the education department by the Grier Partnership, total high school enrollment will continue to grow in the short-term through 2005-2006. The trend is expected to once again reverse after 2005-2006, with steady declines thereafter. The net effect is a projected decline in high school enrollment between 2002-2003 and 2012-2013 of 9.4 percent or roughly 28,000 students.

Queens continues to be the borough with the most overcrowding at the high school level, with high schools operating at 120 percent of capacity. Queens accounted for 14,691 (roughly one-third) of the 42,882 seats needed to address overcrowding at the high school level citywide in 2002-2003. While Bronx high schools continue to rank second with respect to building utilization (currently 113 percent of capacity), Brooklyn high schools rank second in terms of their share of the city shortfall of high school seats (currently over one-quarter of citywide total or 11,753 seats).

Building Capacity Grows. An increase in high school seats also contributed to the reduction in high school overcrowding. There was a net increase in building capacity of 3,016 seats to nearly 262,000 citywide between school years 1999-2000 and 2002-2003 (the latest year building data were available), with a combined increase of 5,500 seats in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens offset by declines in the Bronx and Staten Island. Building capacity can grow as a result of the construction of new schools, additions, or mini-schools (temporary buildings that can house up to 10 classrooms), through capital improvements such as the conversion of office space into classroom space, or the installation of transportable classroom

Building More Seats. Under the education department’s new capital plan for 2005-2009, approximately 41,300 additional seats for both middle school and high school students are expected to be added to the school system. The current plan does not propose constructing new, free-standing middle school buildings but instead plans a new type of school that houses students in grades 6 to 12. IBO assumes that the number of seats in the new grade 6-12 buildings will be divided equally per grade. Therefore, roughly 20,000 seats, including those in traditional high school projects already underway, are expected to be reserved for high school students. These seats will be provided within the next decade—the last project is scheduled to be completed by 2011.

Change in High School Building Enrollment

Borough	1999-2000	2002-2003	Change
Brooklyn	91,296	88,271	(3,025)
Bronx	54,923	50,408	(4,515)
Manhattan	54,299	55,331	1,032
Queens	74,481	73,169	(1,312)
Staten Island	15,348	15,734	386
Total	290,347	282,913	(7,434)

SOURCES: IBO; Department of Education Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization data.

Of the 20,000 new seats IBO estimates are reserved for high school students, Queens is slated to receive the greater part or 39 percent, consistent with its status as the borough with the greatest need. Although Brooklyn has the second greatest shortfall in high school seats, it is slated to receive 21 percent of the new high school seats while the Bronx is slated to receive 35 percent. The reason for this is that the education department expects enrollment in Bronx high schools to grow

through 2007-2008 by 11 percent or roughly 6,000 seats, while enrollment in Brooklyn is expected to decline. These projections also show a short-term increase in high school enrollment for Staten Island, while enrollment in Manhattan and Queens are expected to decrease. Looking further into the future, public high school enrollment is expected to drop by roughly 28,000 students citywide by 2012-2013 and 44 percent of this decline is accounted for by Brooklyn.

For the school year beginning next week, the department plans to provide roughly 3,500 additional high school seats. About half of the new seats will be created by converting administrative space into classrooms. Also underway are projects that will yield more than about 2,700 high school seats. These seats will not be ready for some time.

Plans Can Change. The new capital plan coupled with expected enrollment declines would create enough new seats to eliminate high school overcrowding citywide, although some overcrowding could persist at the neighborhood level. But as evidenced by the education department's capital plan for 2000-2004, the number of seats constructed can change significantly. Because of cost overruns and the city's fiscal problems, the prior plan had to be scaled back.

Seats Needed, Seats Planned		
Borough	Number of Seats Needed 2002-2003	Grades 6-12 2005-2009 Plan
Brooklyn	11,753	8,256
Bronx	8,520	16,512
Manhattan	5,978	0
Queens	14,691	14,862
Staten Island	1,940	1,652
Total	42,882	41,282

SOURCES: IBO; Department of Education Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization data, and 2005-2009 Capital Plan.
NOTE: New high schools also will serve middle school grades.

The plan originally called for 60,000 new seats systemwide, including 16,500 for high schools. But as the plan was implemented the number of seats planned changed and other means not identified in the plan such as the conversion of office space into classrooms were used to create new seats. IBO estimates that over 10,300 high school seats were created through the construction of new buildings or leased sites. The majority of these new seats were created in school year 2003-2004, and therefore are not reflected in this report. (The impact of this added capacity may not be fully recognized when the education department releases utilization data for last

Ten Most Overcrowded High School Buildings		
<i>In school year 2002-2003</i>		
Building Name	Borough	Percent Overcapacity
William Maxwell Voc. HS	Brooklyn	206
LaGuardia Comm. Coll Campus HS	Queens	191
Queens Vocational HS	Queens	183
Long Island City HS	Queens	171
James Madison HS	Brooklyn	169
Francis Lewis HS	Queens	166
Walton HS	Bronx	165
Newtown HS	Queens	164
Beacon HS	Manhattan	164
Midwood HS	Brooklyn	163

SOURCES: IBO; Department of Education Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization data.
NOTE: List excludes high school academies and mini-schools with less than 600 students.

school year because enrollment in new buildings is usually phased-in.) Roughly 8,300 planned new high school seats, or 12 high school capacity projects, originally included in the 2000-2004 plan have been eliminated. (See IBO's Web site for the status of high school projects.)

Funding also remains a major risk for the current capital plan. The city assumes that half of the financing for its \$13 billion 2005-2009 school construction plan will come from the state as part of the settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit. Resolution of the lawsuit remains uncertain and the recently enacted state budget had virtually no increase in building aid for New York City. As a result the department's ability to fully execute its current capital plan is uncertain, leaving at least some of the new high school seats at risk.

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