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## HOW TEACHER LAYOFFS COULD SET BACK SCHOOLS FOR YEARS TO COME

The Administration's plan to balance the budget by eliminating thousands of New York City teachers risks setting the school system back for many years to come. Beyond the immediate effects of teacher cuts are long-term consequences, including persistently higher class sizes, a dwindling pool of experienced teachers, and impediments to the future recruitment of qualified new teachers. Historical research demonstrates these problems can persist for years after economic recovery has allowed rehiring to begin.<sup>1</sup>

Massive teacher layoffs during New York City's 1970s budget crisis hobbled our educational system throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leaving an indelible lesson: it is much easier to dismantle an educational system than to rebuild one. One week remains before New York City will adopt its next budget. It is not too late to prevent another painful era of long-term academic decline.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: NEW YORK CITY'S 1970S EDUCATION CUTS**

Between 1976 and 1977, New York City cut 15,000 city teachers, guidance councilors and paraprofessionals. Their impact offers powerful insights into the unintended consequences of emergency budget cuts to vital services.<sup>2</sup> Class sizes shot up, supply budgets shrank, schools became less safe and specialized education crumbled.<sup>3</sup> Truancy rates increased and

<sup>1</sup> AP, 3/6/2011, available at: [http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/local/new\\_york&id=7997576](http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/local/new_york&id=7997576)

<sup>2</sup> AP, 6/2/77, AP 3/6/2011, available at: [http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/local/new\\_york&id=7997576](http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/local/new_york&id=7997576)

<sup>3</sup> New York Times, June 22, 1976

academic enrichment—including extracurricular activities, music instruction, school libraries, and class trips—was curtailed.<sup>4</sup> And most importantly, these negative developments persisted for years after the initial cuts were enacted.

## **SLIDING BACKWARDS: THE RISK OF A NEW LONG-TERM EDUCATION RECESSION**

History shows that New York City’s strides toward class size reduction, increased offerings for bilingual education, and improved special education services are not permanent. Returning to a 1970s-style budget could reverse much of this progress. Already, observers predict elementary school class sizes could reach an average of 26 children per classroom – well above the Administration’s projected “Contract for Excellence” targets.<sup>5</sup> For middle school students, the projected class size of 27 students would be five pupils above the suggested target. Specialized programs in arts, music, athletics and after-school activities would almost certainly be diminished, if not eliminated.<sup>6</sup> Still more, many of the City’s best teachers could leave the profession or relocate to more stable localities.

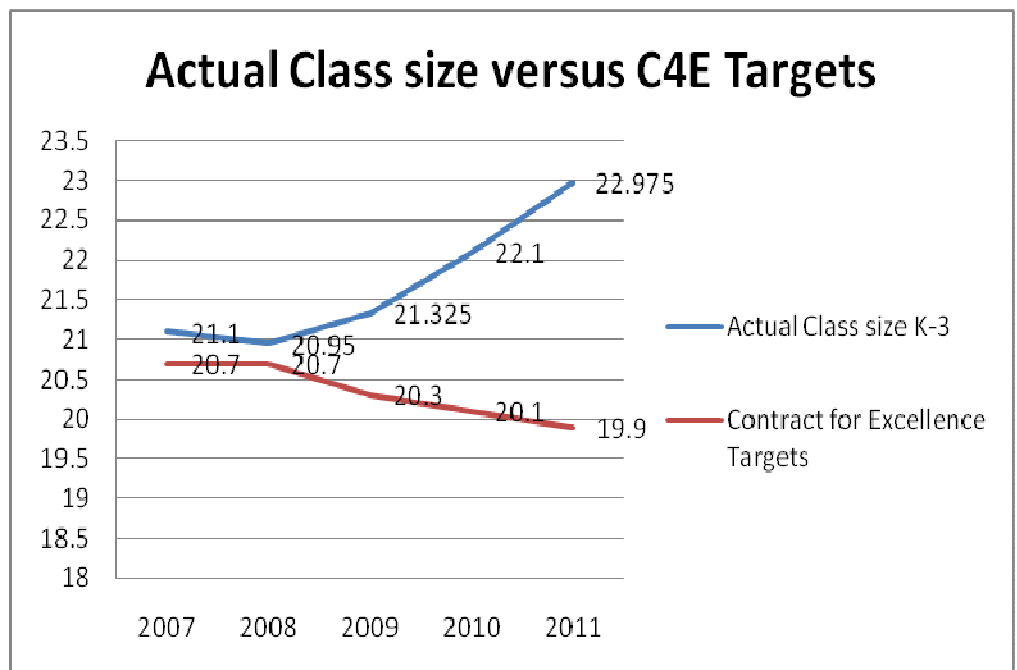
### **BASED ON NEW YORK CITY’S 1970S EXPERIENCE, LIKELY EFFECTS OF THE ADMINISTRATION’S CUTS WOULD INCLUDE:**

#### **1** *Larger Class Sizes Become the New Normal*

Before the 1976 and 1977 cuts, pupil-to-teacher ratios in New York City schools were substantially lower than in the rest of the state. Even though the City began recalling teachers in 1978, it took more than five years for relative class sizes to return to pre-1976 numbers.<sup>7</sup> If the current cuts are adopted class sizes could take a similar amount of time to go back down.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Our City’s Future:**

Experts agree that small class sizes are beneficial for students. Studies from states across the country have demonstrated that



<sup>4</sup> New York Times, November 16, 1975

<sup>5</sup> AP, 3/6/2011, available at: [http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/local/new\\_york&id=7997576](http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/story?section=news/local/new_york&id=7997576)

<sup>6</sup> Center for Arts Education, June 2011, <http://www.caenyc.org/sites/default/files/docs/Research-Brief-Accelerating-Arts-Education-Cuts-June-2011.pdf>

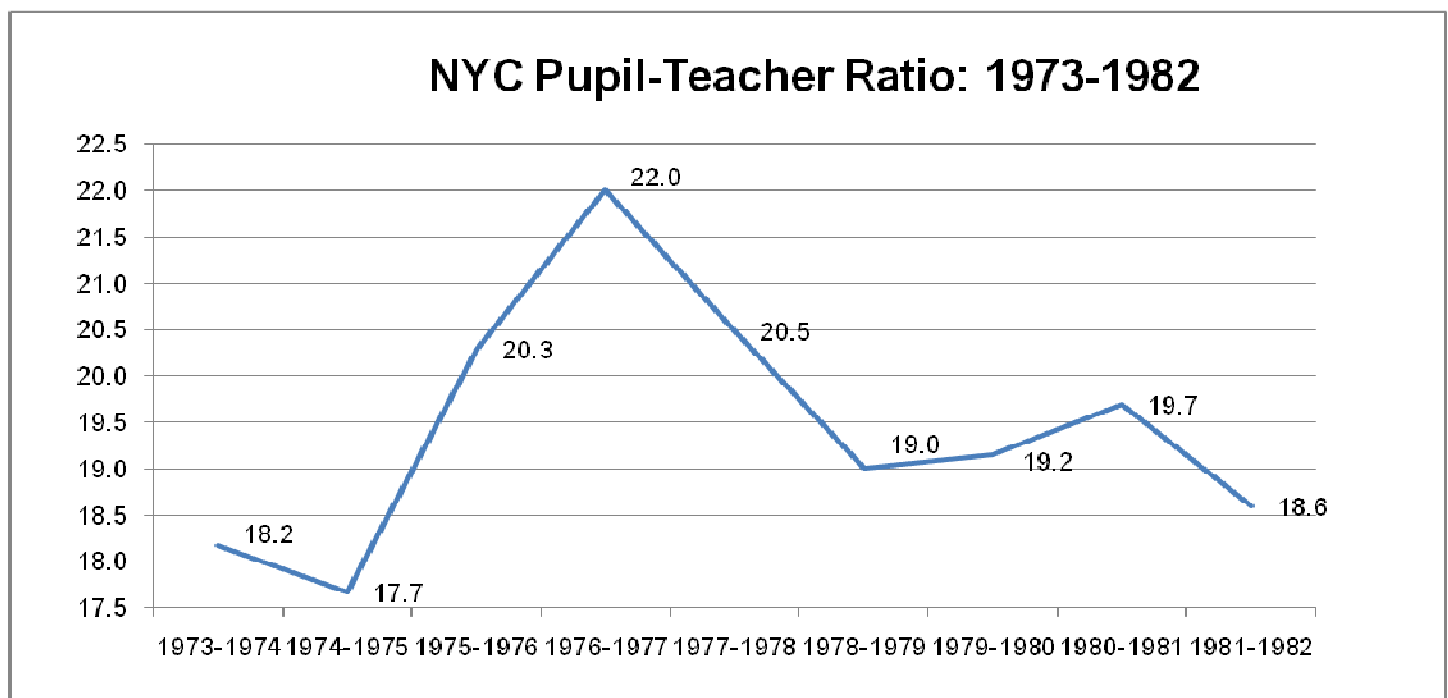
<sup>7</sup> Cutback Budgeting: The Long Term Consequences, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 1993 available at: <http://wagner.nyu.edu/publications/stiefel/cutbackbudgeting-thelongterm...pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Cutback Budgeting: The Long Term Consequences, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 1993 available at: <http://wagner.nyu.edu/publications/stiefel/cutbackbudgeting-thelongterm...pdf>

students who are assigned to smaller classes in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade perform better in every measurable way.<sup>9</sup> They earn higher test scores and better grades and exhibit improved attendance. Subsequent studies have shown that those effects continue throughout the students' education.

Smaller class sizes are also linked to improved teacher performance. National surveys of educators believe that class size reduction is the most effective method to improve the quality of teaching. In a 2008 survey, 76% of first year teachers said that reducing class size would be "a very effective" way of improving teacher quality, and 21% responding that it would be an "effective" method -- for a total of 97% -- far outstripping every other reform.<sup>10</sup> The Administration's approach would forfeit these benefits entirely.

The State of New York recognized the importance of class size by allocating funds through its "Contracts for Excellence" (C4E) program. As the title indicates, these funds are targeted at specific initiatives designed to improve available programming; the first among those initiatives is class size reduction. The Administration submitted a Five-Year Class Size Reduction Plan that was approved by the State in November of 2007, and New York City began receiving those funds in the 2007-2008 school years.<sup>11</sup> The chart on the right based on Department of Education data illustrates the City's lack of compliance with the Contract for Excellence goals.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>9</sup> Foundational research on the relationship between small class sizes and increased student performance was conducted as part of the Project STAR Class Size Study, Commissioned by the Tennessee Department of Education between 1984 and 1989. (A summary of the findings can be accessed through the California Research Bureau's aggregation of information on class size, available here: <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/classz/#RTFToC4>) More recently, the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance identified small class size as one of only four evidence-based ways to improve student performance. (Published in 2003, this federal best practices guide is accessible here: [http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/rigorous\\_evidence\\_guide\\_IES\\_3\\_1.pdf](http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/rigorous_evidence_guide_IES_3_1.pdf)).

<sup>10</sup> Public Agenda, "Lessons Learned, Issue No. 3: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans," May 26, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Contracts for Excellence" Background, available at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/funding/c4e/default.htm>.

<sup>12</sup>Data retrieved from the New York City Department of Education's website, <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/A5AD79E1-D5C4-4094-A360-4D5B4DF602A3/0/20102011UpdatedClassSizeReport.pdf> and the adjusted class size projections plan from

<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/F7180477-8D44-4EF6-B72B-BAE03F15001F/66528/5FY09C4ESchoolListClassSizeprojectionsSummary.pdf>

Yet, the dramatic proposed cuts to the teaching corps will necessarily result in increased class sizes. As demonstrated by the research cited above, such cuts are likely to result in weakened academic performance. And as in the 1970s, these diminished outcomes may be accompanied by increased rates of truancy.<sup>13</sup> Most fundamentally, these effects won't be time-bound: educational quality will suffer for many years to come. The above graph illustrates the pupil- teacher ratio from 1973 to 1982.<sup>14</sup>

## **2** *Once Teachers are Forced out of the System, a Vast Brain Drain Ensues as Many Leave the City or the Teaching Profession*

**When New York City eventually recalled 9,000 teachers in the late 1970s hoping to save money and resources by rehiring trained, experienced teachers, it found that only 2,360 actually signed up to return.<sup>15</sup> During the interim, many of the laid off teachers had moved to other professions, left the City in search of higher paying suburban positions or simply given up on their academic aspirations.**

### Our City's Future:

As evidenced by the departure of quality teachers from city schools after the cuts of the 1970s, the anticipated teacher layoffs will usher in a loss of human capital as highly qualified professionals seek employment in other systems. And as seen in Los Angeles' recent teacher layoffs, the loss will likely be worst in disadvantaged districts.<sup>16</sup> This will ultimately necessitate increased spending on teacher recruitment and training to replace those professionals.



Eventual rehiring is typically authorized at lower salary rates. New York City remained unable to match fast-growing suburban teaching salaries until the mid-1980s.<sup>17</sup> As the shifting market reveals, the proposed dramatic cuts to the teacher corps threatens the City's ability to maintain high-quality teachers in the long-term. According to analysis by the New York Times, the Administration's planned cuts could affect as many as 6 percent of the active teachers in the system, would spare virtually no academic subject or neighborhood, and they would affect 80 percent of the approximately 1,600 public schools in the city.<sup>18</sup> Most would lose one to five teachers; nine would lose half of the teachers they have. If, as the 1970s experience suggests, reversing this damage takes a decade or more, the educational losses will be dramatic.

<sup>13</sup> New York Times, June 22, 1976

<sup>14</sup> Data calculated by Public Advocate Bill de Blasio's office from New York State Education Department historical data.

<sup>15</sup> New York Times, October 10, 1977

<sup>16</sup> Sharing the Proposed Burden? The Impact of Proposed Teacher Layoffs Across LAUSD, available at: <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/files/Layoffs-LAUSD.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Cutback Budgeting: The Long Term Consequences, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 1993 available at: <http://wagner.nyu.edu/publications/stiefel/cutbackbudgeting-thelongterm...pdf>

<sup>18</sup> New York Times, 2/27/2011 available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/28/nyregion/28layoffs.html>

### **3** *Potential Teachers are Discouraged from Seeking Employment in NYC*

After the 1970s teacher cuts, a period of nearly 15 years ensued in which New York City schools found it increasingly difficult to recruit new teachers. Fears about job security, relatively low salaries and an abundance of opportunities in nearby suburbs made teaching in the City too risky an option for those who would normally have been good candidates for entering the New York City school system. It was not until the mid-1990s when memories of the financial crisis had sufficiently dissipated and salary levels had begun to reach parity with surrounding areas that teacher recruitment again became competitive.<sup>19</sup>

#### Our City's Future:

The proposed cuts undermine the notion of job security, creating a disincentive for qualified applicants. One new teacher, Audrey Day, recently explained to the Wall Street Journal, "Ultimately I worked far too hard through an undergrad degree, credential [program] and masters not to know month to month if I'll have a position."<sup>20</sup> Ms. Day taught fourth and fifth grades for three years before abandoning education for law school. During that time, she was informed that she might be forced to change schools five times, and was formally notified she might be laid off once. Ms. Day never lost her job, but she explained that the process was extremely stressful, and made her wary of bonding with her students.

The proposed cuts would similarly discourage tomorrow's generation of New York City teachers, diminishing not only the recruitment of talented young professionals, but also the quality of instruction as teachers increasingly limit substantive connections with, and overall investment in their students. Given the recent finding that only 21 percent of New York City students who started high school in 2006 graduated last year with state test scores indicating readiness for higher education or well-paying careers, New York City cannot afford to sacrifice the quality and motivation of future generations of educators.<sup>21</sup>

#### **CONCLUSION:**

In today's ever-evolving global marketplace, it is imperative that New York City prepare its students for competitive post-secondary education and employment opportunities. To reach this goal, our students require well-rounded experiences that introduce them to the wealth of professional and technical careers available.

We cannot trade long-term educational quality for short-term savings. The estimated 4,100 teacher layoffs will result in significant social and economic costs to our educational system and the students it serves.

During a budget fight that has highlighted the negative consequences of teacher cuts for current New York City students, it is essential to remember how difficult it will be to shield future students from the damage of those cuts, even well after the onset of a strong economic recovery. The impacts of these proposed cuts will be felt for years to come, and in ways not yet fully imagined.

New York City has been here before. We know what could happen if we go down this path. If we hope to avoid another prolonged crisis for New York City students, the City must reverse the proposed teacher lay-offs and chart a new course.

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<sup>19</sup> Cutback Budgeting: The Long Term Consequences, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 1993 available at: <http://wagner.nyu.edu/publications/stiefel/cutbackbudgeting-thelongterm...pdf>

<sup>20</sup> The Wall Street Journal, 8/11/2009, available at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203612504574342530405184284.html>

<sup>21</sup> New York Times, 6/14/2011 accessed at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/15/nyregion/37-of-new-york-graduates-meet-college-readiness-standard.html>