

July 28, 2015

Dear Mayor De Blasio and Chancellor Fariña:

Over the past year and a half, the members of the Blue Book Working Group have worked to answer the question of how to make the Blue Book (officially known as the Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization Report) a document that is a more accurate reflection of the current state of our school buildings and more accessible to families and other stakeholders.

Our Working Group, comprised of community stakeholders, including families from district schools, charter schools, principals, advocacy organizations, Community Education Councils, the United Federation of Teachers, and elected officials, met regularly over the past year and half and challenged itself to better understand the many elements that make up the Blue Book. In an effort to help achieve this, we conducted seven (7) building site visits in multiple boroughs, examining the day to day space conditions of schools representing all grade levels. This was our baseline to ensure that as a group, we were the best informed to make these recommendations.

As a Working Group, we challenged ourselves to produce a better Blue Book document and to examine each formula, assumption, and factor, including the Principal Annual Space Survey (PASS), formerly known as the Annual Facilities Survey, which informs the Blue Book. We must also acknowledge the work being done by the Instructional Footprint focus group. While separate, the re-evaluation of current practice will impact existing schools.

The Working Group members have identified and proposed changes that were implemented immediately into the 2013-14 Blue Book.

Changes include:

- Affirming our commitment to remove Transportable Classroom Units (TCUs) over the next five years by not including them in a school's capacity. With this change, the Blue Book presents a fairer representation of overcrowding in schools with TCUs. The change will help the Department and school communities better understand the steps that need to be taken to eliminate trailers while not creating more overcrowding. Total enrollment for the school reflects not only the number of students in the main building, but also those who attend class in TCUs.
- Dividing the report into two distinct sections: An organization report and a building report. The organization report details capacity, enrollment and utilization numbers for an entire school organization, which may include multiple buildings. All the buildings that are utilized by an organization are grouped together. For example, if a school has three separate buildings, total enrollment and capacity across its different locations will be listed. Families and communities now have a more accurate representation of conditions within their school organization. The building report documents the information on a certain school building, making available in one location information about all school organizations utilizing a building.

- Releasing two Blue Book versions: one with our target calculations and one with historical calculations. Previously, both calculations were included in one book.
- Enhancing the Principals Annual Space Survey (PASS): As the tool that informs the Blue Book, additions were made to the PASS Survey in an effort to ensure a greater level of information sharing. By including a column where principals can denote whether a room was formerly used for a different function and whether that function is still needed, we strove to enhance PASS as a planning tool. In addition, a comment box has been added to PASS to make it a more interactive document for our principals and ensure a greater level of engagement.
- Ensuring accuracy and providing additional building information: In an effort to lessen the workload of our principals and to ensure the accuracy of key pieces of information in PASS, the SCA has begun measuring each instructional and administrative space in every single public school that has not been previously vetted through an audit. The space measuring process will conclude in the coming months and will reach over 1,100 of our school buildings, ensuring that every building in the entire system has verifiable room measurements. In addition, the construction year and building opening date, when available, will be included in PASS in order to account for differences in our building stock.

In the past year and a half, we've had an up-close look at the Blue Book and its function. We are reminded, though, that even with the up-close look, we must acknowledge the realities that face our school system and be mindful of the school system's constraints. At the same time, we cannot offer solutions that solely live within those constraints. The recommendations set forth in the attached document are both an acknowledgement of our school system's constraints and a push to see changes that are blind to the constraints.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Grillo  
President and CEO  
School Construction Authority  
Blue Book Working Group Co-Chair

Shino Tanikawa  
President  
Community Education Council 2  
Blue Book Working Group Co-Chair

## **Recommendations of the Blue Book Working Group**

The members of the Blue Book Working Group make the following initial recommendations, which are explained in greater detail below.

- Sharing and ensuring that critical data points are available to all stakeholders is important. We recommend publishing the Place of Assembly (PA) posted capacity of any and all gymnasium, cafeteria, gymnasium, or other comparable spaces within a building in PASS;
- Ensuring adequate space for Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) allows students to be better served in their education settings, and we believe ICT classes should be programmed in a school's largest instructional space(s). Within PASS, we recommend to principals that their larger room(s) be used for this purpose;
- Providing adequate space allocations is a significant theme of the Blue Book Working Group's recommendations. As such, Special Education and English Language Learner space allocations should transition to a formula that is based on the population of the targeted students and away from the current practice of allocating space without maximum or minimum limits;
- Building on the need for critical data points to be shared and readily available, we recommend including the total enrollment population of English Language Learners (ELL) in PASS;
- To ensure a continuation of information sharing and critical data points among stakeholders, we recommend including the total enrollment population of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in PASS;
- Sufficient administrative space is needed to properly run a school. We recommend requiring a minimum number of administrative spaces within a school and a corresponding maximum number, a departure from the current practice, which provides for a maximum number of spaces at the elementary level with no corresponding minimum and no restriction at the Secondary level;
- Dedicated private counseling space for our students should be a priority. We recommend a minimum of one (1) dedicated private counseling space, which should be accommodated within the administrative space allocation;
- Accommodations should be made for a teacher's workroom to ensure the ability of teachers and staff to prepare for each day's instruction. We encourage principals to allow available space to be used as teacher workrooms, subject to repurposing at the principal's discretion;
- Specialty room allocations for Secondary level, grades 6-12 and 9-12, should transition to a formula based model with minimum and maximum spaces allowed, ensuring both adequate access and equity. Minimum spaces for all schools within these categories should be three (3) to account for physical education, science, and art;
- Cluster room allocations for the Elementary level should be adjusted to increase the minimum number of cluster rooms to two (2) for schools with an enrollment at or below 250 students. The distribution of the allocation for enrollments greater than 250 students deserves further thinking in order to ensure that all students have adequate access to cluster rooms;

- Within the Blue Book calculations for capacity and utilization, we recommend including the class size standards set forth in the City's 5-Year Class Size Reduction Plan, required under the Contracts for Excellence (C4E) legislation and approved by the State in 2007. We also recommend renaming SCA's "Target Calculations" to an alternative phrase;
- We previously recommended that all schools, regardless of grade level, be organized by geographic district - a change that was implemented in the 2013-14 Blue Book. Support for this change continues with a recommendation to add subtotals for each school level at the end of each geographic district section. Allowing parents to see total enrollment, utilization, and capacity of school buildings within a particular grade level in a geographic district will support our goal of increased access to information;
- We recommend that the Working Group continue meeting in order to monitor the progress and the results of the above recommendations and make further recommendations as needed.

### *Principals Annual Space Survey (PASS):*

The ability to deliver and present critical data points and enhanced information streams is essential to ensuring parents, school administrators, and stakeholders are able to make the best decisions for their schools.

The Blue Book Working Group recognizes that the PASS is a fundamental piece of the Blue Book. Principals are required to complete an annual survey identifying how each space within their building(s) is being used. In co-located schools, a main principal is tasked with completing the PASS, with consultation and sign off from the other principals. This survey acts as the baseline for information required to complete the Blue Book. As such, its accuracy is critical to ensuring correct utilization and capacity information.

The recommendations to increase transparency and information in PASS for public consumption will help inform a more robust and engaged process at all levels. The Blue Book Working Group believes that improving the PASS is a critical step to ensuring a high level of participation amongst the School Leadership Team (SLT) and others.

As such, we recommend incorporating the Place of Assembly (PA) posted capacity of any and all gymnasiums, cafeterias, gymatoriums, or other comparable spaces. Additionally we are recommending the inclusion of the total enrollments of both English Language Learners (ELL) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) students. The recommendations are an effort to ensure that stakeholders have the information needed to make the best decisions possible. We believe that incorporating the PA posted capacity, including ELL and IEP enrollment figures, and recommending Integrated Co-Teaching in the PASS- identified larger instructional spaces achieves the higher level of information sharing, evaluation, and planning that we desire.

### *Blue Book Formula:*

Creating a more accurate and transparent document is crucial to ensuring parents, school administrators, and other stakeholders understand and trust the Blue Book. As a result of the discussions and analysis performed by the Working Group, significant steps have already been taken toward improving the Blue Book, but we believe additional structural changes are needed. The Blue Book Working Group appreciates that a balance must be struck between available resources and an accurate depiction of needs. The Working Group also believes that the priority must always be with our students and creating space opportunities to assist our students in achieving their educational goals.

We recommend the following actions:

#### *Administrative Spaces:*

- The current process allows for programs at the Secondary level, grades 6-12 and 9-12, to assign unlimited full size classrooms to administrative functions. While this provides for maximum flexibility in scheduling, it also provides for inequities. For schools that are already overcrowded, the opportunities to leverage the current administrative space policy are hindered as administrative spaces may be quite limited in many schools. As a result, we recommend a minimum number

of spaces that serve an administrative function at all grade levels. Concurrently, we believe in maximizing space opportunities for our students and recommend ending the practice of allowing for an unlimited amount of full size classrooms to serve administrative functions. This will bring greater balance between schools, regardless of their utilization, while meeting minimum needs. Most importantly, the recommendation gives spaces back to our students.

- We feel strongly that all schools should have, at minimum, one (1) dedicated private counseling space for students. Spaces for our students to confer with counseling staff, school administrators, and the like must take priority.
- We believe that the needs of our teaching staff must be reflected in the Blue Book and recommend that space for a teacher workroom in the Secondary grade levels be accommodated. We encourage principals to allow available space to be used as teacher workrooms, subject to repurposing at the principal's discretion.

#### *Special Education and English Language Learners:*

- As with administrative spaces, we believe in ensuring adequate space needs are being met as well as equitable distribution of space for our students with special needs is accounted for. Under the current process, when identified in PASS, spaces for Special Education in all grade levels are allocated without providing for a maximum allowance. Schools with existing overcrowding may not benefit from this structure as greatly as their underutilized counterparts.
- We recommend a transition to an enrollment based space allocation system which accounts for the needs of our children.
- Similarly, at the Secondary level, grades 6-12 and 9-12, space allocations for English Language Learners (ELL) are without a maximum or minimum allowance. We recommend transitioning to an enrollment based space allocation formula.

#### *Cluster and Specialty Room Allocations:*

- Cluster and Specialty rooms are spaces designated as support rooms, beyond homerooms, required for the teaching of art, music, science, and the like. These subjects tend to be taught by a specialized cluster teacher and often require separate specialized dedicated space.
- The Blue Book formulas for cluster/specialty rooms are fundamentally different at the Elementary School level and the Secondary levels. At the Elementary level, cluster room allocation is based on student enrollment. At the Secondary levels, specialty rooms (as referred to in the Blue Book) are allocated without a prescribed minimum or maximum, so long as they are identified in PASS.
- The Blue Book Working Group recommends that for the Secondary levels, an enrollment based space allocation should be established with a minimum space allocation of three (3) rooms to accommodate physical education, science, and the arts.
- Additionally, we recommend keeping the existing cluster room allocation structure for the Elementary level with a new minimum of two (2) classrooms for schools with enrollments at or below 250 students. The distribution of the number of rooms allocated for schools with enrollment above 250 students merit

additional thought to ensure appropriate spaces are available for the various student population sizes.

*Contracts For Excellence Legislation*

- Established in 2007, the Contracts for Excellence (C4E) legislation required the New York City Department of Education to submit a 5-Year Class Size Reduction Plan to the New York State Education Department that was approved in that same year.
- The C4E program was established with the goal of providing for additional accountability for increased State Aid.
- We recommend that the class size standards set forth in the City's 5-Year Class Size Reduction Plan and required under the C4E legislation be included within the Blue Book calculations for capacity and utilization. The Blue Book Working Group also recommends using an alternative phrase for the current figures identified as SCA's "Target Calculations".

In an ideal setting, our City would not be faced with space constraints and the need to prioritize the efficient use of space. That being said, we recognize that our space challenges are real and must be addressed. With the recommendations outlined above, we acknowledge that the resulting changes will likely increase our need for additional capacity system-wide. We are willing to accept the changes that will ensue as a result of our recommendations. Furthermore, we believe that implementing the recommendations outlined above will result in a true reflection of the current conditions in our schools, the needs of well-functioning schools, and the space demands placed on our school system.

### **Next Steps**

Our students must always take priority, and we believe that the recommendations outlined above achieve the goal of improving how space is reflected and used in the Blue Book. It is the hope of the Blue Book Working Group that the administration will give serious consideration to the recommendations.

The impacts on individual schools as a result of the recommendations are unknown. We believe that continued monitoring of the effects of the recommendations, if implemented, will provide opportunities to consider additional recommendations and improvements to the Blue Book. We hope to build upon the work performed to date by continuing to advise the Mayor and Chancellor on future Blue Book recommendations.