

# GOTHAM SCHOOLS

## New City Council bill aims to overhaul city space estimates

by Maura Walz

New legislation introduced in the City Council aims to change the way the city decides when a school is filled to capacity.

Many of the city's most heated education battles, from how to solve overcrowding to the charter school space wars, boil down to one question: whether the city has adequately planned how many students fit in each school building.

The bill, sponsored by 23 of the Council's 51 members, would require the Department of Education to break down its space capacity estimates into much more detail than the city currently reports. Instead of offering a single figure for how many students a school building can accommodate, generated by an abstruse formula, the city would have to reveal specific data points about each building, such as whether rooms such as gymnasiums, libraries or science labs have been converted to general classroom space.

The bill would also require the city to use the class size limits the state has set when planning how buildings will be used, instead of the city's own limits, which are higher. Education officials argue that the larger maximum targets give principals flexibility to schedule classes that are larger or smaller, depending on the class, while still aiming for the state-mandated class size averages.

The city [reports its space estimates annually](#) in a guide called the Blue Book. City Council Education Committee Chair Robert Jackson today argued that the new bill would create a "True Book to replace the Blue Book."

The bill's supporters in the Council argue it would result in better assessments of how schools actually use their space and would alert the DOE when schools are so cramped that they turn to hallways and closets for overflow. Councilman Daniel Dromm cited examples of schools he has visited where teachers give one-on-one tutoring to students in converted janitorial closets. The city's current space surveys do not require principals to report if they use space smaller than a certain square footage, and so advocates argue that many symptoms of overcrowding are overlooked.

City officials argued today that the council doesn't have a right to change how the city estimates school capacities and that the bill would introduce onerous reporting requirements

"The Department believes the value of the information simply isn't worth the time and labor required to obtain it," said Kathleen Grimm, the deputy chancellor who oversees the department's space planning.

City Councilman Oliver Koppell of the Bronx countered that the bill would only require extra work in its first year. After the historical data has been put together, the reporting requirements for principals in future years would not be much greater than they are now, he said.

“The resistance to this bill is excessive,” Koppell said. “There does have to be some refinement of the Blue Book.”

Doug Israel, research director for the Center for Arts Education, said that the legislation would give the city its first opportunity to track how schools convert rooms intended for things like art and music as overcrowding increases. “This is important because these rooms are disappearing,” he said.

Here is the complete text of the proposed bill, as well as background information on the bill provided by Council analysts. The Council will likely convene several more hearings on the legislation before it comes to a vote.