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What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

Issue
Brief

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Introduction

In Chicago, one public school now has more staff than students. Frederick Douglass Academy High School, originally built to serve 1,008 students, now enrolls just 27 students, along with 28 full-time employees.¹

The School District of Philadelphia recently approved the closure of 17 schools after experiencing a decline of 12% in enrollment between the 2014–15 and 2024–25 school years.²

But the problem of empty schools is not limited to Chicago or Philadelphia. Mayors and school boards across America will increasingly have to deal with empty public schools. Districts across the nation are experiencing peak public-school enrollment,³ with forecasts indicating a decline in enrollment in nearly every large school district. Demographic changes and the expansion of school choice, which allows families to leave underperforming schools, are driving this trend. How cities and school boards respond to empty school buildings will significantly affect district finances and student learning outcomes.

This brief aims to inform the public and policymakers about under-enrolled schools and explore potential solutions. It provides descriptive statistics on enrollment trends, particularly focusing on New York City, including which of the city's schools are losing the most enrollment, which are underperforming, and which are now too small to be financially viable.

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Empty School Buildings Across America

The National Center for Education Statistics projected that enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools would decrease by 6% between 2020 and 2030.⁴ This decline will not be uniform across the country; 39 states are expected to see at least some decrease in enrollment between 2025 and 2031. New York is expected to have the ninth-highest decline, as shown in **Table 1**.

TABLE 1

Projected Public-School Enrollment Decline by Fall 2031

State	Fall 1990 Enrollment	Fall 2020 Enrollment	Projected Fall 2025 Enrollment	Projected Fall 2031 Enrollment	% change 2025–31
Hawaii	122,840	124,242	113,300	96,800	-14.56%
District of Columbia	61,282	70,501	68,300	61,400	-10.10%
California	3,613,734	4,094,008	3,700,900	3,391,300	-8.37%
New Mexico	208,087	216,891	196,300	181,400	-7.59%
West Virginia	224,097	176,744	161,600	151,100	-6.50%
Illinois	1,309,516	1,280,694	1,224,600	1,149,900	-6.10%
Vermont	70,860	57,904	57,400	53,900	-6.10%
Alaska	85,297	92,101	89,500	84,500	-5.59%
New York	1,827,418	1,793,572	1,618,200	1,532,200	-5.31%
Michigan	1,144,878	971,179	950,500	901,500	-5.16%
Oregon	340,243	397,400	371,300	353,700	-4.74%
Connecticut	347,396	345,480	331,500	316,000	-4.68%
Mississippi	371,641	313,028	290,500	277,000	-4.65%
Maryland	526,744	614,539	587,100	559,900	-4.63%
New Hampshire	126,301	113,559	111,300	106,200	-4.58%
Pennsylvania	1,172,164	1,156,394	1,107,400	1,066,500	-3.69%
Ohio	1,257,580	1,142,181	1,117,900	1,076,800	-3.68%
New Jersey	783,422	949,696	908,300	875,200	-3.64%
Delaware	72,606	95,141	91,200	87,900	-3.62%
Kansas	319,648	337,208	326,000	314,400	-3.56%
Louisiana	586,202	492,008	468,700	454,500	-3.03%
Minnesota	545,556	594,472	587,900	570,800	-2.91%
Virginia	728,280	857,282	823,100	805,200	-2.17%
Washington	612,597	744,195	710,200	695,000	-2.14%
Massachusetts	604,234	627,604	604,100	591,700	-2.05%
Oklahoma	424,899	497,546	497,000	487,900	-1.83%
Rhode Island	101,797	94,006	89,900	88,300	-1.78%
Maine	155,203	116,965	114,100	112,300	-1.58%



What to Do About NYC’s Empty Schools

Nebraska	198,080	226,920	228,900	225,500	-1.49%
Wisconsin	565,457	568,960	549,600	541,800	-1.42%
Missouri	588,070	613,960	604,200	597,300	-1.14%
Arizona	479,046	757,853	768,200	762,500	-0.74%
Wyoming	70,941	64,476	62,300	61,900	-0.64%
Colorado	419,910	604,662	568,700	566,300	-0.42%
Kentucky	459,200	458,169	438,100	436,500	-0.37%
South Dakota	95,165	99,036	99,000	98,700	-0.30%
Nevada	149,881	334,843	329,700	328,800	-0.27%
Texas	2,510,955	3,761,597	3,777,300	3,768,600	-0.23%
Indiana	675,804	710,467	709,300	708,700	-0.08%
Montana	111,169	102,705	106,000	106,100	0.09%
Georgia	849,082	1,199,416	1,184,600	1,185,900	0.11%
Iowa	344,804	354,841	355,400	355,800	0.11%
North Dakota	84,943	82,276	86,000	86,200	0.23%
South Carolina	452,033	538,037	546,100	548,800	0.49%
Arkansas	313,505	342,357	341,000	342,700	0.50%
Alabama	527,097	518,011	534,400	539,800	1.01%
North Carolina	783,132	1,049,660	1,036,300	1,047,200	1.05%
Florida	1,369,934	1,930,465	1,980,300	2,021,000	2.06%
Utah	324,982	473,101	479,700	490,200	2.19%
Tennessee	598,111	690,465	705,800	721,800	2.27%
Idaho	160,091	212,424	228,400	240,100	5.12%

Since the pandemic, nine out of the 10 largest school districts have experienced declines in enrollment, with New York, Los Angeles, and Houston suffering the most significant decreases. Each district projects its enrollment differently; **Table 2** shows some publicly available projections.

TABLE 2

Enrollment Predictions for Top 10 Largest School Districts

District	Fall 2024 Enrollment	Projection
New York City	845,500	765,000 in 2030
Los Angeles	419,900	309,000 in 2030
Miami-Dade	335,500	N/A
Chicago	322,800	326,200 in 2028
Clark County	304,600	289,667 in 2029
Broward	251,400	181,827 in 2029
Hillsborough	224,200	N/A
Orange	206,800	N/A
Palm Beach	189,800	167,891 in 2029
Houston	184,100	N/A



What to Do About NYC’s Empty Schools

An analysis by the Fordham Institute listed 500 schools identified by states as low-performing that have also had “a substantial enrollment decline in the wake of the pandemic.”⁵ Of the 40 of these schools in New York, four have already closed; most of the others continue to see drops in enrollment (**Table 3**).

TABLE 3

New York Schools Identified as Low-Performing with Significant Post-Pandemic Enrollment Decline

District	School	2019–20 Enrollment	2022–23 Enrollment	Absolute Enrollment Decline 2019–23	2023–24 Enrollment	Absolute Enrollment Decline 2019–24	Percentage Enrollment Decline 2019–24	2025–26 Projected Enrollment
Auburn City School District	Casey Park Elementary School	496	392	-104	387	-109	22%	
Buffalo City School District	Marva J. Daniel Futures Preparatory School	528	422	-106	390	-138	26%	
Jasper-Troupsburg Central School District	Jasper-Troupsburg Junior-Senior High School	201	158	-43	150	-51	25%	
NYC District 1	University Neighborhood Middle School	217	160	-57	164	-53	24%	126
NYC District 4	P.S. 155 William Paca	240	182	-58	213	-27	11%	158
NYC District 5	P.S. 197 John B. Russwurm	289	199	-90	160	-129	45%	178
NYC District 5	Frederick Douglass Academy	1093	815	-278	708	-385	35%	546
NYC District 5	P.S. 194 Countee Cullen	188	148	-40	129	-59	31%	157
NYC District 5	Eagle Academy for Young Men of Harlem	386	210	-176	214	-172	45%	216
NYC District 7	P.S. 1 Courtlandt School	619	458	-161	352	-267	43%	306
NYC District 7	P.S. 30 Wilton	532	405	-127	318	-214	40%	268
NYC District 7	P.S. 18 John Peter Zenger	553	342	-211	298	-255	46%	261
NYC District 7	P.S./I.S. 224 Middle School	281	198	-83	187	-94	33%	165



What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

NYC District 7	Mott Haven Village Preparatory High School	302	176	-126	176	-126	42%	200
NYC District 8	Gotham Collaborative High School	482	313	-169	300	-182	38%	342
NYC District 8	Bronx Arena High School	171	114	-57	130	-41	24%	174
NYC District 9	P.S. 70 Max Schoenfeld	1040	785	-255	671	-369	35%	649
NYC District 9	Validus Preparatory Academy	355	253	-102	263	-92	26%	253
NYC District 9	Frederick Douglass Academy Iii Secondary School	337	218	-119	233	-104	31%	201
NYC District 9	School for Excellence	259	101	-158	closed in 2024			
NYC District 10	P.S. 85 Great Expectations	838	641	-197	588	-250	30%	653
NYC District 10	P.S. 46 Edgar Allan Poe	820	633	-187	582	-238	29%	546
NYC District 10	Bronx Collaborative High School	570	444	-126	418	-152	27%	411
NYC District 10	Providing Urban Learners Success in Education High School	204	134	-70	174	-30	15%	192
NYC District 11	North Bronx School of Empowerment	515	370	-145	closed in 2025			
NYC District 12	Bronx Career and College Preparatory High School	275	202	-73	158	-117	43%	95
NYC District 12	Wings Academy	395	257	-138	237	-158	40%	232
NYC District 12	P.S. 47 John Randolph	1018	796	-222	820	-198	19%	766
NYC District 12	The Metropolitan High School	274	154	-120	165	-109	40%	203
NYC District 14	P.S. 250 George H. Lindsay	403	284	-119	202	-201	50%	205



What to Do About NYC’s Empty Schools

NYC District 15	South Brooklyn Community High School	148	103	-45	122	-26	18%	153
NYC District 18	Olympus Academy	179	107	-72	177	-2	1%	183
NYC District 19	Highland Park Community School	365	277	-88	246	-119	33%	205
NYC District 19	School of the Future Brooklyn	171	105	-66	127	-44	26%	116
NYC District 19	High School for Civil Rights	232	140	-92	closed in 2024			
NYC District 23	P.S. 150 Christopher	189	142	-47	88	-101	53%	86
NYC District 23	Kappa V (Knowledge and Power Prep Academy)	179	83	-96	82	-97	54%	91
NYC District 25	North Queens Community High School	153	95	-58	102	-51	33%	136
Oneida City School District	North Broad Street School	229	173	-56	closed in 2024			
Syracuse City School District	Clary Middle School	398	275	-123	263	-135	34%	

This list is not exhaustive, as it was limited to the lowest-performing 5% of Title I schools or high schools with graduation rates below 67%; e.g., this list does not include M.S. 297 in Manhattan,⁶ where enrollment dropped from 852 students in the 2019–20 school year to only 292 students in 2023–24. Over that period, its incoming sixth-grade class dropped from 304 students to just 68 students.

The Fordham Institute list includes only eight schools in Chicago, but *Wirepoints* has identified 20 schools in the city that are mostly empty (with utilization rate varying between 3.8% and 24.4%).⁷

In Los Angeles, only five schools were included on the Fordham list. But as Tim DeRoche reported in *The74*, “nearly half of the district’s 456 zoned elementary schools—225 campuses—are half-full or worse, and 56 have seen rosters fall by 70% or more.” Furthermore, “most zoned L.A. elementary schools are almost half empty, and many are operating at less than 25% capacity.”⁸ DeRoche identifies 225 schools in Los Angeles that have experienced an enrollment decline of over 50% since 2001 and 34 schools that could potentially be closed.



School Closures

Public-school enrollment and the number of school closures remained stable until 2019–20. At that point, when enrollment began to drop, the number of school closings also went down for two years, but there are signs that it has increased since.⁹ Notably, charter schools have accounted for a disproportionate share of the closed schools nationwide, relative to the relatively small percentage of students they educate (**Table 4**).

TABLE 4

Charter School Closures and Share of Enrollment

School Year	Charter Schools Closed	Charter Share of All School Closures	Charter Share of Total Public-School Enrollment
2010–11	157	9.0%	3.6%
2011–12	185	10.9%	4.2%
2012–13	153	11.0%	4.6%
2013–14	232	14.1%	5.1%
2014–15	206	15.4%	5.4%
2015–16	236	22.1%	5.7%
2016–17	181	17.0%	6.0%
2017–18	247	18.9%	6.3%
2018–19	215	19.2%	6.5%
2019–20	235	20.8%	6.8%
2020–21	179	20.7%	7.5%
2021–22	89	11.8%	7.5%

Recently, several districts have announced plans to close several schools in order to deal with declining enrollment.¹⁰ Houston ISD, currently under state takeover, announced that 12 of its 274 schools will close next year. Cleveland Metropolitan School District approved a plan to close or merge nearly one-third—29 out of 88—of its schools for next year.¹¹ Philadelphia is proposing to close 20 out of 220 schools in the district.¹²

In New York City, several schools have closed or merged in the past four years, after Mayor Eric Adams took office. His administration closed two schools and merged 16 schools.¹³ But it also opened, or announced plans to open, 28 new schools. In total, the Adams administration added nearly 14,000 additional school seats to the public system, contributing to overcapacity in the public schools.¹⁴

NYC’s declining public-school enrollment will likely continue for several reasons. The city now sees 25,000 fewer births per year compared with the pre-Covid period. Parents continue to choose non-district schools to educate their children. Despite the charter school cap, NYC charters have continued to increase enrollment through grade expansion, growing by 2.3% in the past school year.¹⁵ Charters now educate 16% of the city’s population. Homeschooling has also grown, from 9,000 families in 2020 to more



than 11,600 in 2024.¹⁶ Public-school kindergarten applications were down 12% for the 2025–26 school year,¹⁷ indicating lower enrollment in future grades. This year, the city saw even a significant decline in applications for the free pre-K program.¹⁸

Empty Schools Buildings in New York City

In New York City, 112 public schools were projected to have fewer than 150 students enrolled in the 2025–26 school year.¹⁹ For the next school year of 2026–27, the number is even bigger with 134 schools.²⁰ This number is important because with so few students, it is hard to justify the minimum number of nonteaching jobs that each school is required to have. Union contracts require all NYC public schools to hire at least a principal and a nurse. Moreover, nearly all the city's public schools have an assistant principal: out of 1,596 schools, only about 100 do not have an assistant principal.²¹

A recent report prepared for the New York City School Construction Authority projects that the district will lose 153,000 students over the next ten years.²² The report shows that the biggest enrollment drop in the last year occurred in the early grades, with fewer than 3,500 students in pre-k and kindergarten in SY2024-25. This indicates that families with young children are leaving the city right before their children enroll in school. The report highlights that the enrollment declines are likely to continue, given the increase in charter school enrollment, the significant drop in births in the city since COVID, and outmigration from the city.

The proliferation of microschoools shows that it is possible to run a small school efficiently, but doing so requires a level of staffing and budgetary flexibility that is not possible given the constraints of the union contracts in NYC public schools. Marguerite Roza, director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University, has explained how some school districts have been able to manage small-school budgeting, which often requires teachers to be responsible for several grades and the principal to have teaching responsibilities, with generally no support staff (nurses, counselors, etc.).²³

School consolidation would help the Department of Education find needed savings, given the current gap in the city's budget. The city's smallest schools, those with enrollment under 150, shown in **Table 5**, have a combined budget of \$523,475,598. Per-pupil funding at these schools (\$41,442) is significantly higher than the citywide average of \$23,908. A rough estimate is that merging half these schools, thus bringing per-pupil spending in line with the district average, could generate at least \$109 million in savings. This is a low estimate because it does not include building and maintenance costs.



TABLE 5

Per-Pupil Funding at NYC Public Schools with Fewer than 150 Students Enrolled

Borough	District	School	Level	No. of Students Projected	Total School Funding	Per-Pupil Funding
Brooklyn	14	P.S. 319	Elementary	28	\$1,912,421	\$68,301
Manhattan	5	School of Earth Exploration and Discovery Harlem (SEED Harlem)	Middle School	53	\$4,920,851	\$92,846
Queens	30	Academy for New Americans	Middle School	61	\$2,987,090	\$48,969
Bronx	9	P.S. X088 S. Silverstein Little Sparrow School	Elementary	63	\$2,764,334	\$43,878
Brooklyn	13	Albee Square Montessori Public School	Elementary	65	\$1,492,420	\$22,960
Brooklyn	13	Restoration Academy	Middle School	66	\$4,100,695	\$62,132
Bronx	9	I.S. 313 School of Leadership Development	Middle School	69	\$5,716,021	\$82,841
Brooklyn	17	Central Brooklyn Literacy Academy	Elementary	72	\$3,097,728	\$43,024
Brooklyn	13	M.S. K266 Park Place Community Middle School	Middle School	81	\$3,653,100	\$45,100
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 287 Bailey K. Ashford	Elementary	83	\$3,508,348	\$42,269
Brooklyn	19	P.S. 190 Sheffield	Elementary	84	\$3,534,527	\$42,078
Brooklyn	23	Riverdale Avenue Middle School	Middle School	84	\$4,506,822	\$53,653
Manhattan	5	Urban Assembly Academy for Future Leaders	Middle School	86	\$4,739,653	\$55,112
Brooklyn	23	P.S. 150 Christopher	Elementary	86	\$4,179,840	\$48,603
Brooklyn	16	Whitelaw Reid Academy of Arts and Business	Middle School	87	\$3,394,543	\$39,018
Manhattan	5	New Design Middle School	Middle School	88	\$5,366,802	\$60,986
Brooklyn	17	Brownsville Academy High School	High School	89	\$3,483,825	\$39,144



What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

Brooklyn	23	Kappa V (Knowledge and Power Preparatory Academy)	Middle School	91	\$3,943,711	\$43,337
Brooklyn	21	Middle School of Innovation	Middle School	92	\$2,040,502	\$22,179
Manhattan	2	Harvey Milk High School	High School	93	\$2,521,948	\$27,118
Manhattan	6	Community Math & Science Prep	Middle School	93	\$5,064,924	\$54,462
Bronx	10	The Bronx STEM and Arts Academy	Elementary	94	\$3,151,643	\$33,528
Bronx	10	P.S. 209	Elementary	94	\$5,286,083	\$56,235
Bronx	12	Bronx Career and College Preparatory High School	High School	95	\$5,117,590	\$53,869
Brooklyn	17	M.S. K394	Elementary	95	\$4,945,079	\$52,053
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 044 Marcus Garvey	Elementary	97	\$3,746,516	\$38,624
Manhattan	6	Harold O. Levy School	Middle School	98	\$6,602,786	\$67,375
Bronx	9	High School for Violin and Dance	High School	103	\$3,892,174	\$37,788
Queens	29	HBCU Early College Prep.	High School	103	\$2,378,340	\$23,091
Brooklyn	15	Khalil Gibran International Academy	High School	105	\$4,472,172	\$42,592
Brooklyn	17	Ronald Edmonds Learning Center II	Middle School	105	\$4,205,114	\$40,049
Manhattan	2	Murry Bergtraum High School for Business Careers	High School	106	\$4,908,767	\$46,309
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 270 Johann DeKalb	Elementary	107	\$3,739,851	\$34,952
Brooklyn	23	P.S. 137 Rachel Jean Mitchell	Elementary	108	\$4,707,352	\$43,587
Brooklyn	23	Mott Hall IV	Middle School	108	\$4,937,362	\$45,716
Brooklyn	14	P.S. 018 Edward Bush	Elementary	110	\$4,558,436	\$41,440
Brooklyn	32	Bushwick Community High School	High School	110	\$3,572,239	\$32,475
Manhattan	1	P.S. 064 Robert Simon	Elementary	111	\$5,231,343	\$47,129
Manhattan	5	P.S. 154 Harriet Tubman	Elementary	111	\$6,418,134	\$57,821
Brooklyn	19	The East New York Arts and Civics High School	High School	114	\$3,670,542	\$32,198



What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

Bronx	7	Bronx Haven High School	High School	115	\$3,724,470	\$32,387
Brooklyn	15	P.S. 295	Elementary	115	\$6,577,297	\$57,194
Brooklyn	19	School of the Future Brooklyn	Middle School	116	\$4,285,865	\$36,947
Bronx	7	South Bronx Literacy Academy	Middle School	118	\$5,493,116	\$46,552
Brooklyn	13	Dr. Susan S. McKinney Secondary School of the Arts	High School	120	\$5,956,117	\$49,634
Brooklyn	16	P.S. 081 Thaddeus Stevens	Elementary	120	\$5,604,102	\$46,701
Manhattan	3	P.S. 242 The Young Diplomats Magnet Academy	Elementary	122	\$4,763,730	\$39,047
Brooklyn	13	Brooklyn Academy High School	High School	122	\$4,067,111	\$33,337
Brooklyn	14	P.S. 147 Isaac Remsen	Elementary	124	\$5,145,183	\$41,493
Brooklyn	17	Elijah Stroud Middle School	Middle School	125	\$4,025,022	\$32,200
Queens	27	Waterside School for Leadership	Middle School	125	\$4,072,016	\$32,576
Manhattan	1	University Neighborhood Middle School	Middle School	126	\$6,975,702	\$55,363
Manhattan	3	STEM Institute of Manhattan	Elementary	128	\$5,228,679	\$40,849
Bronx	9	P.S. 170	Elementary	128	\$4,969,344	\$38,823
Brooklyn	17	Aspirations Diploma Plus High School	High School	128	\$4,561,907	\$35,640
Staten Island	31	P.S. 046 Albert V. Maniscalco	Elementary	128	\$6,151,045	\$48,055
Manhattan	2	Urban Academy Laboratory High School	High School	129	\$3,723,820	\$28,867
Brooklyn	17	P.S. 091 The Albany Avenue School	Elementary	129	\$4,941,762	\$38,308
Brooklyn	22	P.S. 326	Elementary	129	\$4,431,051	\$34,349
Manhattan	3	Innovation Diploma Plus	High School	130	\$3,059,609	\$23,535
Bronx	9	New Directions Secondary School	High School	130	\$4,347,147	\$33,440
Manhattan	4	Renaissance School of the Arts	Middle School	131	\$5,310,433	\$40,538
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 003 The Bedford Village	Elementary	131	\$4,663,633	\$35,600



What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

Brooklyn	32	I.S. 349 Math, Science & Technology	Middle School	131	\$6,265,840	\$47,831
Manhattan	4	P.S. 38 Roberto Clemente	Elementary	132	\$5,408,594	\$40,974
Bronx	12	School of Performing Arts	Middle School	132	\$6,608,417	\$50,064
Bronx	12	Bronx Regional High School	High School	132	\$4,770,665	\$36,141
Brooklyn	23	Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School (BEES)	Middle School	132	\$6,127,410	\$46,420
Manhattan	3	West Prep Academy	Middle School	133	\$6,270,393	\$47,146
Brooklyn	19	Legacy School of the Arts	Middle School	135	\$5,614,849	\$41,591
Brooklyn	15	Global Innovators Academy	Middle School	136	\$3,506,790	\$25,785
Brooklyn	16	P.S. 262 El Hajj Malik El Shabazz Elementary School	Elementary	136	\$4,927,159	\$36,229
Brooklyn	17	I.S. 340	Middle School	136	\$4,254,684	\$31,284
Queens	25	North Queens Community High School	High School	136	\$3,501,751	\$25,748
Bronx	10	P.S. 159 Luis Munoz Marin Biling	Elementary	137	\$4,364,880	\$31,860
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 067 Charles A. Dorsey	Elementary	137	\$5,393,277	\$39,367
Brooklyn	23	P.S. 165 Ida Posner	Elementary	137	\$5,553,622	\$40,537
Bronx	12	P.S. 061 Francisco Oller	Elementary	138	\$6,022,998	\$43,645
Brooklyn	16	P.S. 005 Dr. Ronald McNair	Elementary	138	\$5,722,117	\$41,465
Brooklyn	32	P.S. 075 Mayda Cortiella	Elementary	138	\$6,568,967	\$47,601
Manhattan	5	Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School	Elementary	139	\$4,665,841	\$33,567
Bronx	7	Academy of Public Relations	Middle School	139	\$5,304,741	\$38,164
Bronx	7	Young Leaders Elementary School	Elementary	140	\$5,628,740	\$40,205
Bronx	8	M.S. 301 Paul L. Dunbar	Middle School	140	\$6,058,992	\$43,279
Bronx	9	South Bronx International Middle School	Middle School	140	\$5,227,570	\$37,340



What to Do About NYC’s Empty Schools

Brooklyn	18	Brooklyn Bridge Academy	High School	140	\$3,410,830	\$24,363
Manhattan	2	Urban Assembly School of Business for Young Women the	High School	143	\$4,262,433	\$29,807
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 256 Benjamin Banneker	Elementary	144	\$5,433,418	\$37,732
Manhattan	1	P.S. 015 Roberto Clemente	Elementary	145	\$6,214,811	\$42,861
Manhattan	1	P.S. 134 Henrietta Szold	Elementary	145	\$6,330,869	\$43,661
Brooklyn	19	P.S. 213 New Lots	Elementary	145	\$6,194,675	\$42,722
Manhattan	4	Central Park East I	Elementary	146	\$3,512,563	\$24,059
Bronx	9	Kappa	Middle School	146	\$5,204,164	\$35,645
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 54 The Detective Rafael Ramos School	Elementary	146	\$5,760,492	\$39,455
Queens	26	The CIVIC School of Bayside Hills	Elementary	146	\$4,175,992	\$28,603
Manhattan	3	M.S. 258 Community Action School	Middle School	147	\$5,741,042	\$39,055
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 093 William H. Prescott	Elementary	147	\$5,159,336	\$35,098
Brooklyn	16	M.S. 267 Math, Science & Technology	Middle School	147	\$5,108,282	\$34,750
Brooklyn	17	P.S. 191 Paul Robeson	Elementary	147	\$5,485,089	\$37,314
Manhattan	2	Satellite Academy High School	High School	148	\$3,981,867	\$26,905
Manhattan	6	J.H.S. 143 Eleanor Roosevelt	Middle School	148	\$7,726,828	\$52,208
Brooklyn	17	P.S. 221 Toussaint L’Ouverture	Elementary	148	\$5,156,700	\$34,843
Queens	29	P.S. 156 Laurelton	Elementary	148	\$4,533,479	\$30,632
Manhattan	1	Earth School	Elementary	149	\$6,825,253	\$45,807
Brooklyn	16	Brighter Choice Community School	Elementary	149	\$4,970,725	\$33,361

There are 23 high schools and 35 middle schools that have fewer than 150 students, but most such schools are elementary schools. School districts with the largest number of these tiny schools are Brooklyn’s Districts 13 (representing wealthy neighborhoods like Brooklyn Heights, Carroll Gardens, and Park Slope) and 17 (which encompasses lower-income neighborhoods like Crown Heights, East Flatbush, and Brownsville). Both districts have experienced a significant drop in enrollment in the past 10 years (**Table 6**).



TABLE 6

Enrollment Trends in NYC School Districts with Largest Number of Under-Enrolled Schools

School District	No. of Schools with Fewer than 150 Students	Change in Enrollment in the School District in the Past 10 Years
13	13	-20%
17	10	-37%
2	8	-10%
9	7	-35%
23	7	-31%

Of these small schools, 17 have seen an enrollment decline of over 30% since the 2022–23 school year. **Table 7** lists the 20 schools with the largest drops in enrollment in the past three years.

TABLE 7

NYC Schools with Largest Enrollment Drops in Last Three Years

Borough	District	School	2025–26 Projected Enrollment	2022–23 Enrollment	Change
Bronx	9	I.S. 313 School of Leadership Development	69	172	-59.88%
Manhattan	5	School of Earth Exploration and Discovery Harlem (SEED Harlem)	53	127	-58.27%
Brooklyn	14	P.S. 319	28	61	-54.10%
Bronx	12	Bronx Career and College Preparatory High School	95	202	-52.97%
Brooklyn	13	Dr. Susan S. McKinney Secondary School of the Arts	120	247	-51.42%
Brooklyn	15	P.S. 295	115	226	-49.12%
Brooklyn	32	I.S. 349 Math, Science & Technology	131	246	-46.75%
Bronx	9	Kappa	146	241	-39.42%
Bronx	10	P.S. 209	94	152	-38.16%
Bronx	12	Frederick Douglass Academy V. Middle School	150	239	-37.24%
Bronx	9	P.S. X088 S. Silverstein Little Sparrow School	63	96	-34.38%



What to Do About NYC’s Empty Schools

Brooklyn	16	P.S. 081 Thaddeus Stevens	120	181	-33.70%
Brooklyn	16	Brighter Choice Community School	149	224	-33.48%
Brooklyn	23	P.S. 150 Christopher	86	129	-33.33%
Bronx	12	School of Performing Arts	132	196	-32.65%
Manhattan	6	Harold O. Levy School	98	143	-31.47%
Manhattan	6	Community Math & Science Prep	93	133	-30.08%
Brooklyn	13	Restoration Academy	66	94	-29.79%
Bronx	12	P.S. 061 Francisco Oller	138	195	-29.23%
Brooklyn	19	The East New York Arts and Civics High School	114	161	-29.19%
Manhattan	5	P.S. 154 Harriet Tubman	111	156	-28.85%
Brooklyn	23	Riverdale Avenue Middle School	84	118	-28.81%
Manhattan	1	P.S. 064 Robert Simon	111	154	-27.92%
Brooklyn	32	P.S. 075 Mayda Cortiella	138	190	-27.37%
Brooklyn	13	P.S. 003 The Bedford Village	131	180	-27.22%

Table 8 shows the 53 schools in NYC with fewer than five students proficient in math or ELA, 44 of which are projected to have a smaller enrollment than last year. Of these 53 schools, 13 are high schools projected to have fewer than 150 students enrolled in this school year. Schools with such a small number of students will likely struggle to afford the necessary school personnel or offer extracurricular classes such as music and arts.

TABLE 8

NYC Schools with Fewer than Five Students Proficient in Math or ELA

School	Enrollment 2024–25	Projected Enrollment 2025–26	Change
Academy for New Americans	57	61	7.02%
School of Earth Exploration and Discovery Harlem	73	53	-27.40%
South Bronx Literacy Academy	97	118	21.65%
Riverdale Avenue Middle School	102	84	-17.65%
P.S. 287 Bailey K. Ashford	114	83	-27.19%
Renaissance School of the Arts	133	131	-1.50%
University Neighborhood Middle School	134	126	-5.97%
P.S. 270 Johann Dekalb	136	107	-21.32%



What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

Community Action School M.S. 258	139	147	5.76%
The Civic School of Bayside Hills	147	146	-0.68%
Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School (Bees)	150	132	-12.00%
Central Park East I	169	146	-13.61%
M.S. 224 Manhattan East School for Arts & Academic	170	162	-4.71%
The 47 American Sign Language & English Lower School	173	124	-28.32%
P.S./I.S. 224	174	165	-5.17%
Castle Bridge School	199	183	-8.04%
P.S. 377 Alejandrina B. De Gautier	207	179	-13.53%
Neighborhood School	213	179	-15.96%
M.S. 053 Brian Piccolo	242	246	1.65%
Lenox Academy M. S. 961	264	279	5.68%
P.S. 047 Chris Galas	274	228	-16.79%
Pelham Academy of Academics and Community Engagement	281	282	0.36%
I.S. 171 Abraham Lincoln	282	277	-1.77%
Pelham Gardens Middle School	287	313	9.06%
I.S. X303 Leadership & Community Service	295	256	-13.22%
Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing & Visual Arts	315	300	-4.76%
P.S. 3 Raul Julia Micro Society	317	277	-12.62%
The Mott Hall School	317	347	9.46%
P.S. 178 Saint Clair Mckelway	320	276	-13.75%
P.S. 188 The Island School	344	279	-18.90%
P.S. 290 Juan Morel Campos	379	333	-12.14%
P.S. 206 Jose Celso Barbosa	386	379	-1.81%
J.H.S. 144 Michelangelo	390	356	-8.72%
P.S./I.S. 157 The Benjamin Franklin Health & Science	393	363	-7.63%
Theatre Arts Production Company School	428	417	-2.57%
P.S./I.S. 045 Horace E. Greene	445	350	-21.35%
P.S./I.S. 266	468	413	-11.75%
Young Women's Leadership School of the Bronx	501	484	-3.39%
Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science	523	512	-2.10%
Preparatory Academy for Writers: A College Board School	523	516	-1.34%
The Queens College School for Math, Science and Technology	536	506	-5.60%
P.S. 146 Howard Beach	546	516	-5.49%
Community Health Academy of the Heights	551	552	0.18%
P.S./I.S. 295	566	537	-5.12%



The Queens School of Inquiry	593	599	1.01%
Frederick Douglass Academy	621	546	-12.08%
Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Secondary School for Arts and Technology	624	599	-4.01%
P.S./M.S. 114 Belle Harbor	639	611	-4.38%
P.S./I.S. 217 Roosevelt Island	688	644	-6.40%
P.S. 107 Thomas A Dooley	819	712	-13.06%
P.S. 232 Lindenwood	833	780	-6.36%
J.H.S. 088 Peter Rouget	841	804	-4.40%
I.S. 025 Adrien Block	1,025	1007	-1.76%

“Hold Harmless” Policies

Costs and other issues associated with poorly enrolled schools are amplified through New York City’s “hold harmless” policy. Introduced in the aftermath of Covid-19, this policy allocates the same level of funding to individual schools, even if enrollment drops, ostensibly to preserve school-level staffing and programs. Ordinarily, schools with enrollment below their projections must return part of their budget midyear, while those that gain students receive more funding.

The “hold harmless” policy prevents school budgets from adjusting downward in light of lower enrollment, which increases per-pupil funding in schools with lower demand. This can lock in inefficiencies and make it more difficult to control DOE budget expansion.

Mayor Adams attempted to reimpose enrollment-based funding discipline, proposing midyear budget clawbacks tied to actual enrollment. That triggered intense political backlash from principals, unions, and parents, including litigation. Facing that pressure, Adams restored the “hold harmless” policy, which cost \$250 million in November 2025.²⁴ As of late March 2026, schools received \$388 million this school year in funds that would have otherwise been removed because of lower enrollment.²⁵ In dozens of schools, “hold harmless” funds represent over 10% of budget allocations.

Despite needing to fill a budget gap of \$5.4–\$7.1 billion, Mayor Mamdani is under great pressure to continue the “hold harmless” policy intact. Currently, the administration had not made a decision about whether to continue the policy.

Recommendations

The NYC public system is currently designed to educate more than 1 million students. In reality, it is educating only 884,400 students this school year and will likely serve far fewer students in the future, given the declining birthrate in the city and the recent drop in pre-K and kindergarten applications, as well as the continued growth of homeschooling and charter schools.



What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

The city's schools should be right-sized to better serve currently enrolled students. Plans for merger or closure should begin by considering schools that meet the following criteria:

1. Fewer than 150 students enrolled in 2025–26 (112 schools)
2. Five or fewer students proficient in math and ELA in 2024–25 (53 schools)
3. Large enrollment declines since 2022–23 (25 schools)

The city's small schools are much more expensive than the typical city school. On average, small schools were allocated school-based funding of \$41,442 per pupil, compared with the citywide average of \$23,908 (this figure is only what is allocated directly to each school and does not include central office costs and other costs, such as transportation, pensions, and fringe benefits).

If the city merges half its under-enrolled schools and brings the per-pupil spending at the newly merged schools in line with average spending, the city would save at least \$108 million every year—and even more, after factoring in building and maintenance costs.

The Mamdani administration could also save \$250–\$400 million annually if it ended the “hold harmless” policy. School budgets should respond to enrollment declines, so that per-pupil spending does not vary widely between schools within a district and between districts.

Conclusion

If the city does not tackle this problem, the city's total per-pupil spending—currently estimated to reach \$42,000 this year²⁶—will continue to increase, but these resources will be spread thinly across a large number of schools that will continue to poorly educate a declining number of students. The taxpayers and the children of New York City will continue to receive no increase in educational outcomes in return for the massive investment of \$42.8 billion allocated to the NYC Department of Education annually.



Endnotes

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What to Do About NYC's Empty Schools

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