

By Any Honest Measure

New York City's Long Record of School Failure —
and the Price We Keep Paying

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Executive Overview

Despite New York City's international reputation as an economic power and cultural influencer, the city's public school system, funded at twice the average rate of other American school districts, has struggled for decades to deliver results that at best are mediocre.

At worst, as this report reveals, close to half of NYC's public schools are failing to adequately educate our children and prepare them with the basic knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in today's global marketplace.

This report documents the depth and breadth of this failure, the reasons why it persists, and what must be done to fix a system courting financial ruin.

The data behind this report is public — but it has never been assembled.

New York State and New York City each maintain records of school performance, accountability designations, per-pupil expenditures, chronic absenteeism, and exam results stretching back decades.

What no public agency has done is to compile those records into a single, comprehensive picture. No state report. No city dashboard. No accountability framework has ever connected the dots across years, systems, and school names to show New Yorkers how deep this failure runs — or how long it has been running.

Success Academy did that work. Our researchers spent months gathering, cross-referencing, and analyzing data from primary public sources: NYS Education Department school accountability records, NYC Department of Education school quality and expenditure data, federal school improvement designation databases, and standardized test results spanning more than a decade.

The resulting analysis is the most complete accounting of school failure in New York City ever assembled — not because the underlying data was secret, but because the public entities responsible for accountability chose, year after year, not to look at it whole.

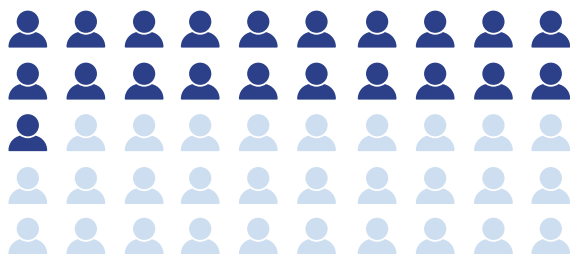
Here is what the full picture shows.

More than 900 NYC schools — nearly half of all public schools in the city — had fewer than half their students passing math, reading, or both on state exams last year. Those 906 schools enroll 409,379 students: 43 percent of all NYC public school children. In 503 of those schools, the majority of students failed both math and reading.

Nearly half of NYC’s public schools failed to get a majority of students to pass — impacting 43% of all public school children.

Students in Failing Schools

409,379 students—43% of all NYC students



 In a failing school  Not in a failing school

These are not schools teetering at the edge of success. They are schools that have been massively failing — persistently, systemically, and at staggering public expense — for years, and in many cases for decades.

About a third of the 906 schools in this report have been cycling through state and city accountability lists since 2012 or earlier: receiving additional funding with each new designation, sometimes changing names, sometimes merging with other schools, but rarely turning around.

No official document has ever recorded that history across all those schools. This report does. An Appendix with a full list of failing schools and other data is included in this report.

The cost is enormous. New York City spent \$40 billion on public education in 2024 — \$36,293 per pupil, double the national average of \$17,619.¹ The city is now committed to billions more to fund a class-size mandate that the evidence does not support, while propping up hundreds of vacant schools that drain resources at a premium rate with no return. Meanwhile, the students most harmed by this failure attend the same schools that have been failing since before many of them were born.

Documented in this report are the policies, practices, and blunders that have allowed this failure to persist and to go largely unacknowledged: accountability frameworks that reset every few years, erasing a school's documented history of failure; grade inflation that allows students to pass courses they are not learning; test cut scores quietly lowered so that gains can be announced; a school survey designed to measure satisfaction rather than learning. These are not accidents. They are the product of a system that has chosen, year after year, to protect itself rather than serve its students.

Imagine a hospital where more than half of patients died from routine procedures. A fire department that failed to respond to more than half its calls. A municipal water utility that delivered contaminated water to more than half its residents, or air traffic controllers whose lack of oversight regularly resulted in massive casualties.

No other public institution would be permitted to operate in this way. Yet in New York City public education, this level of failure has been normalized — and, worse, systematically obscured.

This report examines the scale of the problem, the wasteful and convoluted funding structures, and the total absence of real accountability or sincere efforts to improve that have perpetuated it — and how it is being obscured to the point that New Yorkers have come to accept this level of failure as irreversible, even normal.

We cannot afford to disregard the profound harm done to hundreds of thousands of children, nor can we afford the high societal cost of this failure.

The Scale of Failure

As this report reveals, the disconnect and warning signs of this dysfunctional system are clear: Last year, city leaders celebrated proficiency scores of 57 percent in math and 56 percent in reading on state exams (with radically lowered standards both in learning task complexity, as well as lowered cut scores) with much fanfare.

Instead of providing an honest assessment of our schools, they chose to overlook the 906 schools with fewer than half of students passing math, reading, or both — schools attended by more than 43 percent — 409,379 — of NYC public school students.

400,000+ children — 43% of the city’s public school students — attend schools where the majority of students are failing math or ELA — or both

School type	District & charter failing schools	Students attending failing schools	All NYC K-12 students	% of students in failing schools
Elementary Schools	276	108,375	320,938	34%
Middle Schools	173	59,965	123,451	49%
K-8 Schools	73	37,145	150,649	25%
High Schools	297	157,178	252,277	62%
Other (G6-12, K-12)	87	46,716	103,011	45%
Total	906	409,379	950,326	43%

Pause for a minute to reflect on these numbers: More than 900 schools, enrolling more than 400,000 students, where half or more of students are failing to learn basic math and reading.

For the students languishing in these failing schools, not learning, not mastering fundamental knowledge and core academic competencies, the basic expectations of public education are nonexistent. What is worse: the failure deepens the longer students are in school.

What Happens to Children as They Move Through a Dysfunctional School System

Elementary Schools

34%

of students attend a school where most fail math, reading, or both

276 failing schools
108,375 students

Third-grade reading gaps rarely close without intensive intervention.

Middle Schools

49%

of students attend a school where most fail math, reading, or both

173 failing schools
59,965 students

These schools don't close the gap – they widen it.

High Schools

62%

of students attend a school where most can't pass Regents Exams in Algebra or ELA

297 failing schools
157,178 students

Median Algebra I Regents pass rate: 29%. 81% graduate – few college-ready.

Source: NYC DOE state exam results, 2024-25. District and charter schools combined.

The damage compounds at every stage. A child who cannot read at grade level in third grade is statistically unlikely to catch up without intensive and very costly intervention — which does not happen in NYC schools.

That child arrives at middle school already severely behind — and the 173 middle schools on this report’s failing list, enrolling nearly half the city’s middle schoolers, do not close the gap.

With a median math proficiency of 36 percent, these failing middle schools then send underprepared children forward into high schools where, across 297 failing schools enrolling 62 percent of the city’s high school students, the median Algebra I Regents pass rate is 29 percent, despite the test’s very low cut score (to pass, students must earn 28 of 82 raw points, roughly 34 percent). Those students will accumulate course credits and, in many cases, diplomas — because, as this report documents, New York City’s grading system is designed to ensure that most students pass their courses regardless of whether they have mastered the material.

The end of this pipeline is visible and measurable.

Even for those who actually graduate and are accepted to two- or four-year colleges, chances of earning a college diploma are slim. Roughly 22,000 (80 percent) of students entering CUNY community colleges are placed into “developmental education” — non-credit remedial courses — because they arrive without the skills a high school diploma implied they had.² Nearly 90 percent of those CUNY students who need remediation fail to earn a degree on time.³

This is not a new problem. It is not a resource problem. It is a failure that has persisted for decades, survived every intervention, outlasted every label, and consumed billions of dollars with little to show for it.

Warning Signal: Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism — missing at least 10 percent of the school year — is severe across the NYC system.

Roughly 35 percent of all NYC students, around 300,000 children, were chronically absent in the 2023–24 school year. The 190,646 students at the double-fail schools in this report make up almost two-thirds of that number; the average chronic absenteeism rate at these schools is 43 percent.

Absenteeism is both cause and symptom. Students cannot learn when they are not in school to be taught. But sustained absence at this scale also reflects a judgment: students and families are voting with their feet.

In a functioning accountability system, a school posting 50 percent chronic absenteeism alongside 50 percent academic failure would face immediate and intensive intervention.

Warning Signal: The Opt-Out Loophole

A second warning signal is harder to see — which is part of the problem.

About 13 percent of NYC students in grades 3-8, roughly 58,000 children, opted out of state ELA exams last year; about 11 percent skipped the math exam. That's the average. Many schools have extraordinarily high numbers of students refusing to take exams, which inflates their proficiency rates. The actual failure is almost certainly worse than the official numbers show.

At PS 172 Beacon School of Excellence, for example, only 96 of the 179 eligible students took the ELA state exam — 83 kids refused testing. With 90 students passing, the official proficiency rate was 94 percent — students who opt out are not counted. That high score led to PS 172 being rated sixth best elementary school in NYC, even though only 90 out of its 179 students could demonstrate reading proficiency.

Federal rules require that at least 95 percent of students in grades 3-8 sit for the exams, but NYSED has avoided taking action to address this.

The majority of high-performing districts and schools have opt-out rates of five to ten percentage points, and in some cases much lower. But on average, NYC schools have 88 percent participation in ELA and 84 percent in math. (New York State participation rates average roughly five points lower for both subjects, with many affluent suburban school districts on Long Island and Westchester County showing very low participation rates of 50 percent.)

High opt-out rates don't necessarily predict poor student results — the point is that schools with low participation have no external standard for measuring student achievement, and school leadership has no insight into how well their students are learning.

The opt-out problem is not merely a distortion of individual school data. It corrupts the entire accountability system — ensuring that the schools most likely to have failing students are also the schools where the most students avoid being tested and therefore counted.

Education Unaffordability

In 2024, New York City spent \$40 billion on public education — up 67 percent from \$24 billion in 2014, growing at more than 5 percent per year, even as enrollment fell by nearly 100,000 students. That’s \$36,293 per pupil annually, more than double the national average of \$17,619.⁴

NYC Public Education

Growing 5%+ annually, even as enrollment fell by 100,000 students



NYC spends more than double of the national average per student.

Despite outspending every other large school district in the country, the Big Apple’s education system has decided to layer two additional financial commitments on top of an already-broken system: the class size reduction law and the refusal to manage the city’s shrinking schools. These commitments will cost tens of billions of dollars more, with no credible evidence they will move the needle.

The Class Size Mandate: Unaffordable, and Contradicted by the Evidence

After years of lobbying, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) was finally successful in its campaign to reduce class sizes. Despite profound evidence to the contrary, politicians jumped on this bandwagon, and the bill was signed into law in September 2022: class size caps of 20 students in grades K–3, 23 in grades 4–8, and 25 in high school were mandated to be implemented by 2027–28.⁵

Two years into implementation, the steep cost is undeniable. Since 2023, \$639 million has been spent to hire roughly 3,700 new teachers and reach the 60 percent compliance milestone.⁶

Thereafter, city officials estimate \$1.6 billion to \$1.9 billion will be needed annually for teacher salaries and another \$17 billion to \$22 billion in capital costs to build new classroom space for schools currently not meeting the new mandate.⁷

It's no surprise, then, that Mayor Mamdani sought a delay in the class-size mandate to help close the city's \$5.4 billion budget gap. Gov. Hochul agreed to extend the deadline for 100% implementation to September 2029-30.

In a separate agreement with the UFT, as reported by the *New York Post* in early June, the city will pay "bonuses" of \$8,500 to \$9,500 to teachers whose classes exceed the cap over the next two years.⁸

This is not an incentive for producing greater student outcomes; according to UFT president Michael Mulgrew, it's an "accountability incentive" to put financial pressure on the city to not delay beyond two years.

This stopgap fix is not a solution — it just delays the expense of a profoundly misguided policy.

New York City's own data offer clear evidence that contradicts the promise of smaller class sizes.

We examined the 30 double-failing schools that had already fully achieved the class size mandate before tests were administered.⁹ At schools with every classroom at or below the mandated size, the average math proficiency was 30.1 percent and average ELA proficiency was 34.6 percent — both below the averages for the partially or non-compliant double-failing schools (32.2 percent math, 37.4 percent ELA). (See Appendix G: "Schools That Are 100 Percent Class-Size Compliant — and Still Failing.")

The pattern across *all* 1,143 NYC elementary and middle schools is definitive. Fully compliant schools average 43.6 percent ELA and 41.1 percent math proficiency. Schools with zero compliant classrooms average 72.6 percent ELA and 75.6 percent math — a gap of roughly 30 percentage points in both subjects.

The high school data, using 2025 Regents Algebra I and ELA pass rates across 387 schools, are equally unambiguous.

The mandate's central premise — that reducing class size improves learning — finds no support whatsoever in the city's own current data.

This is exactly why the Class Size Reduction law will not benefit the children who are stuck in failing schools. NYC enrollment has been declining for years — by 123,000 students since 2020 with a drop of 153,000 more predicted for the next decade.¹⁰ The average student to teacher ratio is lower than that of each of the next 80 largest school districts.¹¹ According to the NYC Independent Budget Office (IBO), the ratio is one instructor for every nine students. This includes specialized educators, guidance counselors, coaches, and speech pathologists.¹²

This costly experiment has been tried before, and the results are instructive: 24 other states adopted and then abandoned similar policies,¹³ after spending billions.

Significant details from the original study (Project STAR) were omitted from “expert” testimony in Albany — stating that what had benefited K-3 students had also proved beneficial to grades 4-12, when there was no evidence of that.

For a deeper understanding of the evidence that counters this mandate and specific recommendations for amending the law, see our report **“Class Size Reduction: An Expensive Mistake,” in the Appendix.**

Taken together, these findings make a simple point: across the full range of NYC schools — from the worst performers to the best — class size compliance predicts *nothing* about student achievement.

The mandate will cost billions without significantly moving the needle.

Declining Enrollment & Shrinking Schools

The second costly drain on city resources is the Department of Education's commitment to propping up schools that have lost enrollment. Since the pandemic, NYC schools have lost 123,000 students, causing many schools to shrink to levels that are pedagogically and operationally ineffective, according to the Citizens Budget Commission.¹⁴

More than 800 NYC schools, roughly half of all schools, have fewer than 400 students; 241 schools enrolled fewer than 200 students.

Of the roughly 900 failing schools in this report, 167 fall into that category, enrolling 25,500 students — a structural feature of a system that has never consolidated its way out of a decade of enrollment decline.

Underenrolled schools are expensive by definition. A school with 150 students still requires a principal, full administrative staff, a building, utilities, safety agents, cafeteria workers, and teachers across every required subject. PS 123 Mahalia Jackson and PS 111 Jacob Blackwell — both under 400 students — each spent more than \$40,000 per pupil last year, 20 percent above the citywide average.

PS 123 had a staff of 67 and a student/teacher ratio of 9:1. PS 111 had a staff of 65 and a student to teacher ratio of 12:1. These are not outliers. They are illustrations of a systemwide pattern in which small, failing schools consume resources at a premium rate while producing results at the bottom of every scale.

The cycle is self-reinforcing. As schools fail, families leave. Enrollment falls, per-pupil costs rise, and the school qualifies for additional intervention funding. Under the state's "Hold Harmless" provision, districts do not lose funding when enrollment declines.¹⁵ Consolidating even a fraction of NYC's shrinking schools would free hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

Failing schools rob children of their futures. Underenrolled schools drain the budget for no return. The class size mandate will spend billions more on schools where class size is already low — and where it has demonstrably not helped. New York City cannot afford any of this in the midst of a significant educational crisis.

The Same Schools, Decade After Decade

New York State has been identifying failing schools since 1989. Over the past three decades, the labels have changed numerous times. The quality of the schools has not.

What makes this record damning is not simply that the interventions failed. It is that the system was designed — whether by intention or institutional inertia — so that failure could never accumulate into a single, continuous public record.

Each new federal law, each new state commissioner, each new mayoral administration arrived with a new framework, new terminology, and effectively a new list.

The schools that appeared on every one of those lists were never officially connected across them. In New York City, a school can appear on six consecutive state accountability frameworks over thirteen years and still not have a single official document that says so.

About a third of the 906 schools in this report have been cycling through failure designations for more than a decade, receiving additional funds and support, merging, rebranding, relabeling, but were never turned around.

Dozens have appeared on five of the six lists — sometimes under entirely different names. The Hunts Point School is now the Bronx Academy for Multi-Media. Banana Kelly High School is now Longwood Preparatory Academy. The School of Diplomacy (MS 370) merged with the Globe School for Environmental Research and is now known as Leaders of Tomorrow. The names change; the failure and social impact on students does not.

The Appendix to this report does what no state agency has done: it cross-references the same schools across the major accountability frameworks since 2012.

The names at the top of that list are familiar. IS 117 Joseph H. Wade. JHS 80 Mosholu Parkway. JHS 22 Jordan L. Mott. PS 123 Mahalia Jackson. PS 111 Jacob Blackwell.

Each was “identified” in 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2019. Each time, a formal announcement promised action. Each time, the framework changed, the list reset, and the schools — most of them still failing — waited for the next round. (See Appendix E and Appendix H for the full accountability framework history and school-by-school track record.)

Rewarding Failure

Failing schools in NYC receive funding from multiple overlapping sources, which makes it difficult to understand exactly the support they receive.

What the data does show is this: the deeper a school's failure, the more categorical funding it becomes eligible for. A few layers are worth highlighting here.

Fair Student Funding Weights

NYC's per-pupil formula adds extra dollars for students performing below grade-level standards — meaning a school with more failing students receives more per child, by as much as \$1,700 to \$2,100 per academically struggling student per year, depending on grade level.

The formula also includes a “concentrated need” weight for schools with the highest concentrations of high-need students. According to a May 2025 analysis by the IBO, 304 schools qualify for this additional weight, structured in three tiers ranging from 0.04 to 0.12 of the base per-pupil amount — adding an average of roughly \$95,000 per qualifying school.

The formula also accounts for salary increases negotiated through union collective bargaining, meaning additional formula dollars may route to labor costs before they reach any student.¹⁶

School Improvement Grants (SIG)

Failing schools can receive additional annual federal funds for schools designated as needing improvement, through grants they apply for — with eligibility amounts rising with the severity of the designation:¹⁷

- **TSI**
Targeted Support & Improvement
\$75,000/yr
- **ATSI**
Additional Targeted Support & Improvement
\$150,000/yr
- **CSI**
Comprehensive Support & Improvement
\$250,000/yr
- **RECEIVERSHIP**
Chancellor's Receivership
Additional \$200,000/yr

Underlying all of these streams is the architecture through which the money must move. Schools identified as failing must engage only NYSED-vetted “School Support Partners” — a closed list of pre-approved vendors — often union-affiliated entities. The United Federation of Teachers’ professional development arm, for example, operates as a paid vendor at approximately 134 schools.¹⁸

The result is a closed loop: failure triggers eligibility, eligibility funds approved vendors, and the same approved vendors cycle through the same schools, year after year, with limited accountability for results.

Title I

NYC receives roughly \$826 million per year in federal Title I funds directed to high-poverty schools. Not all high-poverty schools are failing, but the vast majority of failing schools enroll low-income children of color.

Community Schools

Under Mayor Bill de Blasio, Community Schools Program (CSP) became the go-to turnaround strategy for failing schools, although there was limited evidence that the high-priced “wraparound services” — mental health counseling, legal aid, food pantries, after-school programming, and family engagement — significantly improved academic performance. A 2017 study by Rand reported improved attendance rates (although chronic absenteeism is still higher than the city average); an increase in on-time graduation rates; slight gains in math after the third year, but no positive impact on reading levels.¹⁹

Twelve years later, there are 422 Community Schools, up from the initial 45 in 2014, including 292 of the double fail schools in this report.

Shockingly, while participating in New York City’s Community School Program is supposed to address academic failure — one of the main reasons a school lands on a state list — “academic enrichment services” receive only 10 percent of any community school’s funding, according to the 2024-25 Community School City Council report.²⁰

Despite the lack of academic improvement, Community Schools have remained the standard first step for a failing school. Similar to the restrictions around SIG grants, city contracts go to roughly 92 pre-approved community-based organizations to implement and manage Community Schools services, including the UFT's United Community Schools, Inc., at costs ranging from \$93,750 to \$953,135 per school — totaling \$166.8 million in SY 2024.²¹

Yet that figure captures only the DOE's Office of Community Schools budget line. Parallel funding flows separately through the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and individual City Council member discretionary grants — none of which is consolidated into a single reported total.

No oversight body — not the IBO, not the Comptroller, not the City Council — has ever formally computed what this program costs in full.

Every community school is required to have a full-time CBO-employed Community School Director who typically deploys additional workers or service providers at each site, including licensed social workers, family outreach coordinators, and after-school programs, although the city publishes no consolidated count of these positions or vendors.

None of these funding streams is conditioned on academic improvement.

They flow to failing schools because those schools are failing. The identification system does not create accountability. It creates eligibility.

As an example, PS 123 Mahalia Jackson in Harlem, with 375 students, received the following in 2024-25:²²

Fair Student Funding	\$6,548,251
All other state and local funding	\$3,330,157
State Contracts for Excellence (C4E)	\$555,414
Title 1 funding	\$718,729
All other federal funding	\$269,343
Total	\$11,121,894

Thus, PS 123 — a school where only one in four students was proficient in math and one in three able to read at grade level — received a total of \$11,421,894 in school funding, with additional funding for the Department of Education’s central services. Combined, the per pupil funding amounts to \$43,335 — 33% higher than the NYC average per pupil spending.

PS 123 was among the first schools to become a Community School in 2014. Last year it received \$593,383 in CPS funding from the New York City Council; \$59,000 (10 percent of that funding) was spent on Enriched Academic Services. Almost \$300,000 was spent on after-school enrichment programs.

How Failure is Concealed

New York’s officials have gone to extraordinary lengths to avoid saying plainly what the data show. In 2015, the State Legislature made that avoidance official: under CRR-NY §100.19, the term “failing school” was formally struck from state regulation and replaced with “struggling school.” A “persistently failing school” became a “persistently struggling school.”²³

The change was not semantic. A “struggling” school evokes sympathy and patience. A “failing” school demands accountability. Albany chose sympathy. The children paid a dear price for it.

The language ban was the most visible layer of a concealment system that operates through several reinforcing mechanisms.

Institutional Amnesia: The Framework Reset

The most consequential form of concealment is structural.

Every few years, the accountability framework resets. New labels are coined, new lists are published, new press releases announce action.

But because each framework is administered independently, the history of a school’s failure across prior frameworks is never officially synthesized. Each reset gives every responsible party — the state, the city, the union, the school administration — plausible deniability about the depth of a school’s failure.

When NYSED announced in 2016 that nine of ten “persistently struggling” schools had made “demonstrable improvement,” it set no public standard for what that meant, published no follow-up data, and did not note that many of those same schools had already appeared on the previous two frameworks’ lists. Several schools declared improved in 2016 — including JHS 80 Mosholu Parkway, IS 117 Joseph H. Wade, and JHS 22 Jordan L. Mott — are still failing today.²⁴

Manipulating the Measuring Stick

When the labels change, often the tests change too. Last August, the NYC DOE announced record-breaking gains: citywide ELA proficiency up 7.2 percentage points, math up 3.5 points. Mayor Adams called them historic. Three facts put those gains in context.

First, the bar moved. Since adopting Common Core standards in 2013, NYSED's downward adjustments to cut scores (the specific minimum score a test taker must achieve to pass an exam) have outweighed upward ones for 11 of the 12 math and reading tests in grades 3–8. The average math cut score dropped four points, from 68 percent to 64 percent; ELA fell nine points, from 70 percent to 61 percent. Reporting a “record” without disclosing that the bar was also lowered is not transparency — it's a shell game.²⁵

Second, the independent national benchmark tells a different story.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) — which does not change its cut scores — shows NYC 4th graders at 33 percent math proficiency and 8th graders at 23 percent in 2024.

By NYSED standards, 58.1 percent of 4th graders and 44.3 percent of 8th graders were math proficient. Reading proficiency has barely moved in a decade. If real, sustained learning gains were occurring, they would show up on NAEP. They do not.

Third, even with the lowered cut scores, the schools in this report did not show improvement; in essence their performance has declined. “Historic gains” at the citywide level have not reached the schools that need them most. (See Appendix K: NAEP and State Reading/Math Comparison.)

Grade Inflation and Social Promotion

There is a number on MS 301 Paul L. Dunbar’s [School Quality Report](#) that demands explanation: 94 percent of students passed their core courses. And yet only 17 percent of students demonstrated math proficiency on the state exam, and 18 percent in ELA. That 76-point gap is not unique to MS 301. It is endemic to failing schools across the city.

The explanation is NYC’s grading policy. Under Chancellor’s Regulation A-501, grades reflect a “body of work” that includes effort, participation, and attendance — not exam performance.

A minimum grade of 55 is typically recorded even for missing or unsatisfactory work, making it arithmetically difficult to fail a course.²⁶

In 2024, 44 percent of students at MS 301 were chronically absent — and yet 94 percent passed their courses. The grades are a paper record designed to survive accountability reviews. They tell parents their children are learning. The state exam tells a different story — with less than 20 percent passing math or ELA.

As the School Quality Report reveals, a failing elementary school almost certainly puts a child on a path to low-quality middle and high schools.

It’s almost impossible for children to escape to better schools. MS 301’s School Quality Report lists five high schools that the middle school’s 8th grade graduates are most likely to attend; all but one are failing and listed in this report.

The Teacher Evaluation

In 2022–23, 98 percent of New York City teachers were rated Effective or Highly Effective. Only one percent received a Developing rating, and another one percent were rated Ineffective. There is no public, school-by-school report card for teacher quality because New York State Education Law §3012-c(10) strictly prohibits publishing individual teacher scores or creating public performance rankings by school.²⁷

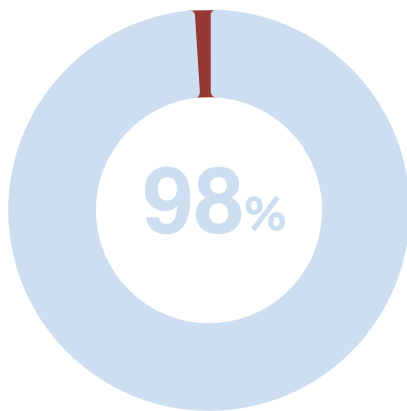
In the same system where 906 schools cannot prepare half their students to pass a basic exam, virtually every teacher is rated outstanding.

**98% of teachers effective.
43% of students failing.
The math doesn't add up.**

NYC Chancellor's Office 2022–23 Evaluation Results

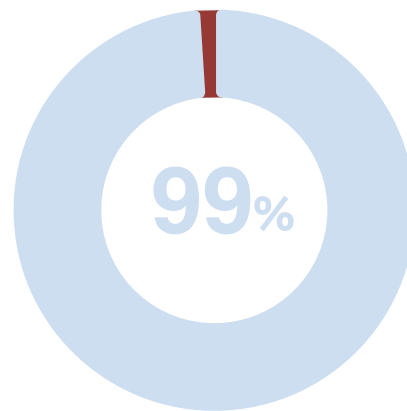
Teacher Evaluations

Overall Rating



Principal Evaluations

Overall Rating



■ Effective & Highly Effective ■ Ineffective/Developing

When 98 percent of teachers are rated effective/highly effective and 43 percent of students attend a school where more than half of students are failing math or reading

— or both — the only logical conclusion is that the evaluation system is not measuring what it claims to measure.

The DOE Schools Survey: What it Reveals – and Conceals

The 2025 NYC School Survey of students, families, and teachers reveals a striking disconnect between how adults describe New York City’s schools and how students experience them.

Families reported 94 percent satisfaction with their child’s education.²⁸ Teachers rated “Academic Press” — the school culture that pushes students toward excellence — at 89 percent favorable; 93 percent said their principal set high standards for learning; 92 percent said they had the tools and resources to help students engage in meaningful discussion.

But students told a different story. Citywide, only 52 percent said they felt challenged in their classes. Seventy-eight percent said they felt bored in school. Just 46 percent reported being absorbed in learning.

The disconnect deepens when teacher self-assessments are read alongside their assessments of students.

While teachers gave their principals and their peers high marks, they also reported that only 63 percent of students in grades 6–12 build on each other’s ideas during class discussions, and only 61 percent use data or text references to support their arguments. Why are teachers rating their schools’ standards and practice so highly while simultaneously offering such a more critical assessment of student mastery levels? If teachers have all the “tools and resources,” why aren’t children learning?

These results were no accident — they were the predictable product of a survey built to find them.

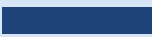
Learning Gaps

What teachers reported

What students reported

The Excellence Gap


“Academic Press” – the school culture that pushes students toward excellence – rated favorable

 89%

Feel challenged in their classes

52% 

Their principal set high standards for learning

 93%

Being absorbed in learning

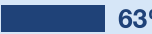
46% 

The Practice Gap

Had the tools and resources to help students engage in meaningful discussion

 92%

Students in grades 6–12 build on each other’s ideas during class discussions

 63%

Students use data or text references to support their arguments

 61%

Felt bored in school

78% 

94%

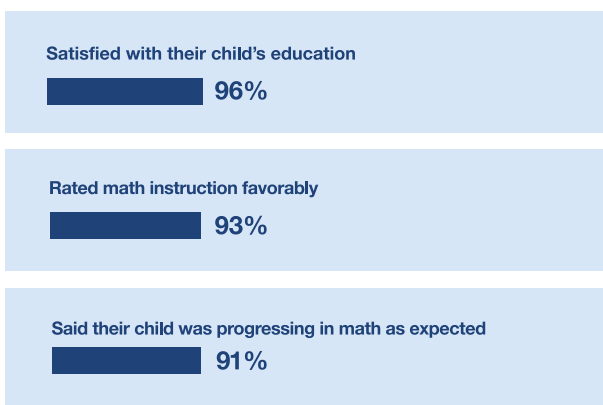
of families reported satisfaction with their child’s education, even as students described classrooms where boredom, disengagement and low academic challenge were the norm.

Consider Longwood Preparatory Academy, a chronically failing Bronx high school where only 21 percent of students passed the Algebra Regents and 53 percent were chronically absent last year, yet 96 percent of families reported satisfaction with their child's education.

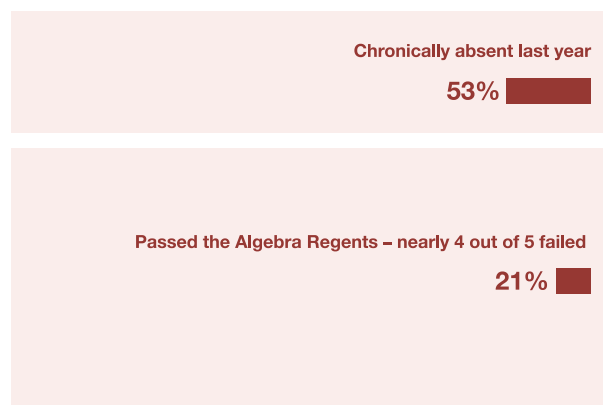
Ninety-one percent said their child was progressing in math the way they would expect; 95 percent said the school helped them understand what grade-level work looked like.

Longwood Preparatory Academy - Bronx - Chronically Failing

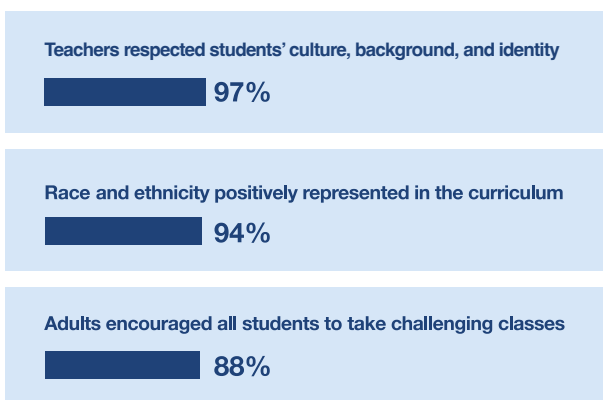
What families reported



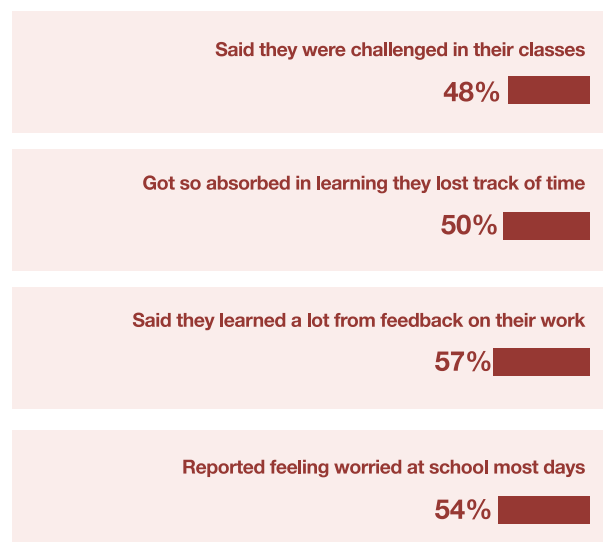
Academic Reality



What NYC DOE focused on



What students wanted adults to know



The encouragement was there. The challenge was not.

Those numbers were not anomalies. They were what the survey was built to produce.

Look at what the survey actually asked. Of 79 **student questions**, fewer than ten addressed academic challenge or intellectual engagement in any direct way.

Of 143 **teacher questions**, the opening 16 focused almost entirely on cultural responsiveness and DEI integration in instruction. It devotes more questions to the Chancellor's performance and trustworthiness (questions 18–20) than to whether students are being academically challenged.

The **family survey** followed the same architecture: heavy on communication, trust, and comfort; nearly silent on whether children were mastering grade-level content.

The questions were not neutral. A survey that asked families whether they felt comfortable communicating with the principal — but never asked whether their child was on track to pass the Regents — was a survey designed to find comfort and approval.

The survey found it at Longwood, where families rated math instruction favorably at 93 percent — even as nearly four out of five students failed the Regents Algebra exam.

The students themselves delivered a different view. Only 48 percent of Longwood students said they were challenged in their classes — down five points from the year before. Just 50 percent said they got so absorbed in learning that they lost track of time. Only 57 percent said they learned a lot from feedback on their work, a drop of 11 points in a single year. Fifty-four percent reported feeling worried at school most days.

And yet: 97 percent of students said their teachers respected their culture, background, and identity. Ninety-four percent said their race and ethnicity were positively represented in the curriculum. Eighty-eight percent said adults encouraged students of all backgrounds to take challenging classes. The encouragement was there. The challenge was not.

The survey captured what adults had decided to measure: belonging, representation, comfort, trust.

What it did not capture — what it was not designed to capture — was the widening gap between how students said they felt and whether they were actually learning. That gap was not hidden. It was simply not asked about.

The Obstruction of Accountability Data

A final mechanism of concealment is harder to document but no less real: the systematic obscuring of data that once made accountability journalism possible.

A decade ago, NYSED routinely released detailed **press statements** and **presentations** of state exam results — showing performance comparisons across subgroups (racial and economic, special education students, and English language learners) as well as direct comparisons between charter and district schools.

In recent years, NYSED stopped including any analysis of state exam results in its press statements — even **topline scores** were missing. Instead, NYSED provides a link to its **database** and a **single consolidated file** accessible only through proprietary ACCESS database software that requires technical expertise to query. Subgroup comparisons, charter-versus-district performance, year-over-year trend data — all of it is still theoretically public, but practically inaccessible to any journalist without a data team and the right software license. The headlines get released.

The specific details and critical comparisons do not. Journalists, parents, and the general public are denied a full picture of student achievement, or in this case, lack of achievement.

Reporters who covered this beat a decade ago had data handed to them in **digestible, detailed form**. Their successors must excavate it.

The failure documented in this report required downloading raw NYSED files, building custom analyses, and cross-referencing multiple databases — work that a daily reporter on deadline cannot easily replicate.

A system that wanted public scrutiny would make its data accessible. New York's does not.

The Affordability Alternative that NYSED Wants to Ignore

The systematic obscuring of data described above has a specific casualty worth naming: the public record of how NYC’s charter schools compare to district schools on the same state exams.

Ten years ago, NYSED’s formal presentation of state exam results included a dedicated slide on charter school performance. That year, NYC charter school students passed the math exam at a rate of 48.7 percent — compared to 36.4 percent for NYC district school students. In ELA, NYC charters posted a 43 percent pass rate against 38 percent for district schools.

The data was right there in the official presentation, part of the **public record**.

After 2019, NYSED stopped including charter data in its exam releases entirely.

No slide. No table. No mention in press statements.

The data still exists — buried in the same ACCESS database file that requires specialized software to open — but it is no longer formally presented as part of the public record.

The comparison that once appeared on slide 10 of the **state’s official results** briefing in 2016 has simply been removed from view.

What that comparison shows today is striking.

On the 2025 state ELA exam, 67.5 percent of NYC charter school students scored proficient, compared to 56.3 percent of NYC district school students — an 11.2 percentage point gap. In math, the gap was even bigger: 68.6 percent of charter students scored proficient compared to 56.8 percent of district students. Black and Hispanic charter school students — who make up roughly 90 percent of charter enrollment — outperformed their district peers by even wider margins.

In math, Black charter students in NYC are nearly twice as likely as their district school counterparts to be proficient.²⁹

These are not boutique results from a handful of high-performing outliers.

Over 70 percent of NYC charter schools had higher percentages of students scoring proficient than the overall NYC public school average on the ELA exam; over 64 percent exceeded the district average in math.³⁰

There are some failing charter schools; they're on this list. But the cumulative results are undeniably strong.

The argument against charter schools in New York has always been partly political and partly financial — the claim that charters drain resources from district schools.

The truth is that charter schools in New York receive significantly less per-pupil funding than district schools, and while they serve the same high-poverty, high-need student populations, they are producing results at rates the district schools, despite decades of intervention and billions in additional spending, have not approached.

The political will to expand charter schools in New York City has been constrained by fierce union opposition and the reluctance of successive administrations to acknowledge what the data shows.

Over the five years between 2019-20 and 2023-24, NYC public school enrollment declined by more than 11 percent while charter school enrollment grew by nearly 14 percent³¹ — a signal that families, given the choice, are increasingly voting with their feet in the other direction from the one that gets measured in NYSED's accountability reports.

NYC School Enrollment Change 2019 to 2024

District Schools



-11%

Charter Schools



+14%

A city that is keeping 906 failing schools, enrolling more than 400,000 students, open at \$40,000+ per pupil should be asking why it has simultaneously constrained the expansion of a sector that serves comparable students at lower cost and with measurably better outcomes. (There is a ban on new charters in NYC.)

Conclusion: What Is Missing?

The pattern is consistent across three decades: Identify the failing schools, attach a new label, direct more money, wait a few years, declare limited progress, retire the label, and begin again.

The schools remain. The children in them do not get opportunities back. They are lost forever.

New York City cannot afford this. It cannot afford the hundreds of underenrolled schools that cost \$40,000 per pupil while producing the worst outcomes in the system. It cannot afford a \$22 billion class size mandate with no demonstrated relationship to student achievement. And it cannot afford the concealment — the euphemistic language, the framework resets, the inflated grades, the 98 percent teacher effectiveness ratings — that has allowed decades of relabeling to substitute for accountability. New York City's children deserve better, much better.

This report has pointed out the problems, not the solutions, not what must be done to fix public education.

The answer is simple, obvious, but surprisingly difficult to make the big changes needed.

New York City's education system is massive and laws like the new Class Size Reduction Act and the older "Maintenance of Effort" (MOE) law, which ensures that state or local funding for specific programs such as education does not decrease from year to year, make bold change impossible.

This report highlights many areas that must be addressed, with emphasis on the following:

- NYSED must make all data easily available, in a format that parents and journalists alike can access.

- Incentivize excellence. Tie teacher and school evaluations to results. Strong student performance depends on excellent educator performance.

- Compare data across subgroups, find the schools, principals, and teachers who are excelling, and then share what they are doing and how they are getting their outcomes. Reward excellence. Learn from it, and repeat it.

- Stop manipulating state tests and cut scores. End social promotion and grade inflation. Make assessments mandatory, and educate parents on why they need to understand how well their child is learning.

- Stop the waste. Scrutinize every program, especially high-cost non-instructional initiatives like Community Schools and Carter cases (well reported in a recent *Atlantic* article³²) that have grown explosively without oversight or accountability.

- Focus on reading and high quality texts. If Mississippi can do it, New York can too.

- Embrace math, the great equalizer.

- Bring the pleasure of learning back to the classroom.

What is missing is a true commitment to high quality teaching and learning; the political will to consolidate underenrolled schools that cost a fortune and produce nothing; and the practice of real accountability — telling parents, taxpayers, and children the truth about what is happening in 906 schools across this city; and embrace charter schools as an alternative that is especially effective in low-income neighborhoods.

**What is missing is not money.
What is missing is honesty — honest measurement, honest reporting, and honest consequences when schools consistently fail.**

Endnotes

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Appendices

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[Appendix B — Transfer High Schools & Other Specialized Schools](#)

[Appendix C — Double-Fail Schools](#)

[Appendix D — Single-Fail Schools](#)

[Appendix E — Persistently Failing Schools](#)

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