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Alternative to School Closure: Significant Resources Directed Towards 94 Renewal Schools

Prior to the current 2014-2015 school year, the Department of Education (DOE) identified 94 schools for participation in its Renewal Schools program. Following an infusion of \$31 million in new funds in fiscal year 2015 as part of the preliminary budget plan in February, the Mayor's executive budget adds an additional \$40 million in funding for this program in 2016, with larger amounts added to subsequent years. Cumulatively, these actions add \$149 million in new city funding to the DOE budget over three years (2015 through 2017). The executive budget also identifies \$113 million in existing funding that is being reallocated to the Renewal Schools program each year through 2019.

Specific intended uses of this funding include: a two-year plan to bring each school's Fair Student Funding (FSF) allocation to 100 percent of the formula amount by 2017; summer school programs; substance abuse counselors; additional math, English Language Arts (ELA) and science programs; mental health clinics; and parent engagement.¹ The full array of initiatives and budget allocations is presented in the table below. The de Blasio Administration has said that renewal schools will also provide one additional hour of instruction each day, although funding for the added instruction is not broken out in the budget.

Budget for Renewal Schools Program					
<i>Dollars in millions</i>					
Program Costs	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Additional Services Out-Years	\$0.0	\$108.3	\$107.6	\$107.6	\$107.6
Raise Fair Student Funding to 100 % of Formula*	0.0	33.6	59.7	59.7	59.7
Summer School Programs	0.0	9.2	12.1	12.1	12.1
Substance Abuse Prevention (SAPIS) Workers**	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Urban Advantage Science Programs	0.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Double ELA/Math Intervention Funding	0.0	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8
Mental Health Clinics	0.0	1.2	2.0	2.0	2.0
Support for Overage 8th Graders	0.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Parent Engagement	0.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Administrative Field Support	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
First-Year Costs (Added in February Plan)	30.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Program Cost	\$30.7	\$162.6	\$187.8	\$187.8	\$187.8
Existing Funds Redirected to Renewal Schools:					
Federal	\$0.0	(\$58.0)	(\$58.0)	(\$58.0)	(\$58.0)
After School Inter-City	0.0	(55.5)	(55.5)	(55.5)	(55.5)
Net New Funding	\$30.7	\$49.1	\$74.3	\$74.3	\$74.3
NOTES: *Includes funds for Persistently Failing and Community Schools, as well as a 1 percent increase in the Fair Student funding "floor" for all schools. **Includes funds for Persistently Failing Schools.					
<i>New York City Independent Budget Office</i>					



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Challenges to the Program's Success

In order to be successful, the Renewal Schools program will have to overcome formidable challenges in three areas: the very depressed level of performance in these schools prior to the program's inception; a trend of declining enrollment in these schools; and a short timeline to show measurable results.

Schools Start Program with Very Depressed Performance and Funding Shortfalls.

DOE describes the Renewal Schools as its most troubled public schools. Schools were chosen for this initiative because they: 1) had been identified as low-performing under the state's accountability system; 2) appeared in the lowest 25 percent (of ELA or math scores for elementary and middle schools or of the graduation rate for high schools) of the city's public schools in each of the last three years; and, 3) scored proficient or lower in the DOE's own quality review.

DOE data confirms that these schools are indeed very low performing. Of the 65 schools that serve grades in which annual state tests are administered (grades 3 –8), only 6.4 percent of students scored proficient or better in English Language Arts. Only four of these schools had proficiency rates above 10 percent. Math scores were similarly depressed, with only 5.7 percent of students scoring proficient or better and only 8 schools showing proficiency rates above 10 percent. For the 29

renewal schools serving grade 12, the aggregate high school graduation rate was 51.7 percent. Eleven of these schools had graduation rates of less than 45 percent. The characteristics of the students in Renewal Schools and their measurable outcomes are presented below, along with comparable data for other DOE schools.

The participating schools experienced considerable shortfalls in their Fair Student Funding allocations in the current year. Five large high schools had FSF allotments more than \$2 million, or 17 percent to 18 percent, below their formula amount and two additional schools were underfunded by more than \$1 million. All but 4 of the 94 schools were underfunded, 53 of them by more than 15 percent of their formula amount.

Student Enrollment Has Been Declining in These Schools.

Slightly over 45,000 students were enrolled in these schools in 2014-2015, down 11 percent from the previous year's enrollment and down 21.5 percent or 12,327 students since 2012-2013. Some individual schools have faced even steeper declines, with 14 having lost more than a third of their enrollment over the three years. The distribution of changes in student enrollment in these schools is shown below.

As a result of these declines, the renewal program includes 26 schools with fewer than 250 students each. To the extent that these schools continue to be avoided by students and families, it is likely that they will consist of higher concentrations of the students most in need. Renewal Schools already have higher percentages of English language learners, males, immigrant students, students with disabilities, students in temporary housing, as well as more black and Hispanic students than other DOE schools. Previous IBO studies uncovered similar patterns in low-performing schools that had been chosen for closure under the previous mayoral administration.

While enrollment in the renewal schools has been declining, the program also includes 8 high schools that still serve more than 1,500 students each. In total, 11 of the high

Student Characteristics and Outcomes Renewal Schools Compared With Other DOE Schools		
	Renewal Schools	All Other DOE Schools
Student Characteristics		
English Language Learners	20%	14%
Students with Disabilities	21%	18%
Black	36%	26%
Hispanic	52%	40%
Male	54%	52%
U.S. Born	73%	84%
Primary Language English	57%	58%
Students in Temporary Housing	12%	7%
Student Outcomes:		
Student Attendance	84.2%	90.9%
ELA Proficiency, Grades 3-8*	6.4%	29.4%
Math Proficiency, Grades 3-8*	5.7%	35.5%
4-Year High School Graduation Rate**	51.7%	70.3%
NOTES: *65 schools with students in grades 3-8. ** 29 schools with a grade 12. All data is from the end of the 2013-2014 school year. New York City Independent Budget Office		

Change in Enrollment from 2012-2013 to 2014-2015	
	Number of Schools
Enrollment Increased	14
Enrollment Decreased	
up to 10%	17
10.1 to 20%	22
20.1 to 33%	27
More than 33%	14
New York City Independent Budget Office	

schools in the program come from the city's dwindling number of large, long-established, traditional high schools.

There is a Short Timeline for Measurable Success. More than half the schools in the Renewal Schools program are facing very tight timelines to show significant improvement. These are the 51 renewal schools that have also been identified by the state as low-performing schools. While the state Legislature resisted the Governor's proposal to require the State Education Department to appoint an outside receiver to take over low-performing schools, including those in the renewal program, they did enact a provision which will require the DOE to take such action unless these schools show demonstrable improvement

by the end of 2016-2017. At that point, depending on the final form of the regulations, the city would be required to appoint receivers for any of these 51 renewal schools that had not demonstrated sufficient improvement as determined by the state.

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Endnote

¹Fair Student Funding covers basic instructional needs and is allocated to each school based on the number and need-level attributes of students at the school, adjusted for the school's funding percentage. All money allocated through FSF can be used at the principal's discretion.

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