



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
INDEPENDENT BUDGET OFFICE

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September 17, 2020

The Honorable Mark Treyger  
New York City Councilmember  
250 Broadway, Suite 1785  
New York, New York 10007

Dear Council Member Treyger,

At your request, IBO estimated the additional weekly cost of operating New York City's public schools while complying with state public health guidance prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although considerable uncertainty remains, we project that the cost will be roughly \$32 million a week across multiple city agencies.

IBO has reviewed [guidance](#) released by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as well as the [reopening plan](#) that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) submitted to the state. Our cost estimate incorporates personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and staff, safety and medical supplies, and the additional costs of staffing, school bus transportation, and monthly testing for Covid-19. We are able to account for costs for traditional public schools—including those in school districts 1-32, citywide special education schools (district 75), and alternative programs (district 79). However, we are unable to estimate costs for programs in community-based organizations that participate in the city's Universal PreK and 3K programs, for which we have no detailed information on staffing. Costs for students who attend PreK and 3K programs in the city's district schools and PreK Centers are included in our estimates, however.

Our cost estimates make no assumptions about the availability of funding. Some of these costs may qualify for federal reimbursement under either already-enacted Covid-19 relief legislation or under a future bill. Moreover, we expect some of these costs to be funded from existing school budgets, potentially crowding out other spending planned by the school, while other costs are projected to be paid from central DOE accounts or from the budgets of other city agencies. Given the lack of information on funding, for the purposes of this exercise, IBO assumes that all costs would be borne by the city.

We project that the cost of hiring additional teachers will account for over 60 percent of the additional costs for operating New York City public schools—more than \$19 million a week. These costs are particularly uncertain, both in terms of how many more teachers will be needed and how many more will be available. IBO assumes that on average, schools across the city would require a 20 percent increase in the number of general and special education teachers on their rosters compared with last year (2019-2020), when there were more than 78,000 school-based general education and special education teachers in the system. After accounting for positions remaining in the Absent Teacher Reserve, a group of teachers who currently do not have permanent school assignments, and other DOE employees who hold teaching licenses but are not teaching, IBO estimates that an additional 11,900 teachers or substitutes would be needed to meet the demands of schools' hybrid schedules of in-person and remote instruction.

IBO projects that custodial work, monthly testing, transportation, PPE for school-based staff, and additional nurses will *each* cost more than \$1 million a week. Custodial costs—including spending for PPE, custodial supplies, and labor costs associated with the extra cleaning—will total nearly \$6 million a week and account for more than 17 percent of the additional costs. The weekly cost for testing almost 103,000 students and school-based staff each month (15 percent of each group that has opted into in-person instruction) is estimated at \$1.6 million a week. Additional transportation costs would be \$1.7 million a week (including costs of PPE for bus employees and students, cleaning supplies, and the cost of labor to clean the buses). School bus costs incorporate the costs of transporting both public and nonpublic school students, with public school students accounting for more than 84 percent of riders. Note that we assume that the number of routes and bus trips will be the same as last year; although this is consistent with DOE announcements, scheduling decisions will be made by individual schools. PPE for school-based staff is estimated at \$1.7 million a week and masks for students who forget is \$302,500 a week. The hiring of 400 nurses by the city’s Health + Hospitals system will cost roughly \$1 million a week. The cost of school supplies such as hand sanitizer, infrared no-touch thermometers, oximeters, electrostatic sprayers, and partitions for main offices is expected to total nearly \$265,000 a week. Finally, we estimate that existing professional development contracts can cover the cost to provide social emotional learning supports for students, as described in the city’s reopening plan.

IBO expects the cost of PPE across all domains to total \$2.8 million each week, with the more than 941,000 masks needed weekly accounting for \$1.7 million of the cost. This includes masks for all school-based staff, students, bus employees, students who ride school buses to get to school, and custodians. We include costs for additional PPE (disposable gowns, nitrile gloves, face shields, and eye protection) for employees in close contact with students or working in sensitive areas such as nurses, paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities, school food services employees, bus employees, and custodians.

Cost per Week of Reopening New York City Public Schools		
	Total	Assumptions
Students' PPE	\$302,500	58% of students opt for in-person instruction, and 30% of those students need masks
School Staff PPE	\$1,703,600	Masks for all school staff; additional PPE for nurses, paraprofessionals serving students with disabilities, and school food services employees
Nursing/Safety Supplies	\$264,700	Includes cost of hand sanitizer, thermometers, oximeters, and electrostatic sprayers
<b>Cost of Additional Staff Needed</b>	<b>\$20,391,900</b>	
Teachers	\$ 19,379,100	A 20% increase in teachers is needed to replace the 15% that opted out and to staff remote learning. The estimate assumes more than 3,700 DOE employees who are not teaching currently but are licensed can be moved into instructional positions
Nurses	\$1,012,800	400 additional nurses
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>\$1,738,700</b>	
Student and Employee PPE	\$141,100	Includes costs for masks and nitrile gloves for employees and masks for the 30% of students who will forget

Electrostatic cleaners and foaming hand sanitizer	\$ 35,800	1 electrostatic cleaner per 20 buses per bus company and one hand sanitizer per bus per week
Labor cleaning costs	\$1,561,800	5% increase in contract cost
<b>Custodial Costs</b>	<b>\$5,559,900</b>	
Custodial staff PPE	\$519,200	Includes costs for masks, nitrile gloves, face shields, disposable gowns, and eye protection
Custodial Supplies	\$2,804,000	50% increase in costs relative to fiscal year 2020 Covid-related supplies
Labor cleaning costs	\$2,236,800	12.5% increase in contract cost
<b>Costs for Covid-19 Testing</b>	<b>\$1,637,700</b>	15% of all students and school-based staff that have opted for in-person instruction, including teachers, administrators, other support staff, custodians, school safety agents, school food service staff, and nurses
<b>Social Emotional Learning</b>	\$0	Existing contracts will be used to provide professional development to staff to provide support to students
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$31,599,000</b>	
SOURCES: New York State Education Department Reopening Guidance; New York City Reopening Plan; city's Financial Management System; Department of Education 2019-2020 Demographic Snapshot.		
<i>New York City Independent Budget Office</i>		

For a more detailed breakdown of costs, click [here](#).

There are several key areas for which our estimates reflect costs that are particularly challenging to predict: additional staffing costs for teachers, transportation costs, and custodial costs.

- IBO estimated the additional costs for a 20 percent increase in the number of teachers needed to meet the demands of schools' hybrid schedules of in-person and remote instruction. We assumed some positions can be filled from within the department by using staff holding teaching licenses and by deploying teachers in the Absent Teacher Reserve. If schools continue to find it difficult to hire additional teachers, costs could be higher than we estimate if teachers demand a rate higher than that of a novice substitute (as we assume) or costs could be lower if schools hire fewer teachers than we estimate. Either way, costs would likely come from schools' own budgets rather than the DOE central budget.
- Transportation costs would be significantly higher if DOE is forced to add buses in order to comply with social distancing requirements or if DOE has to reimburse parents for alternate methods of transportation. Although DOE has reported that there are currently no plans to add bus routes, the department does expect to offer busing, MetroCards or reimbursement for other means of transportation for all students who are eligible.
- The additional labor costs for cleaning school buses and school buildings are also largely unknown. We estimated a 5.0 percent increase in school bus contract spending and a 12.5 percent increase in the custodial contract—amounting to an extra hour of custodial labor each day for deep cleaning.
- We were unable to estimate the additional cleaning costs necessary if positive Covid-19 cases are identified. The additional costs of cleaning classrooms and buildings in those circumstances

could trigger considerably higher custodial costs. Similarly, the identification of positive Covid-19 cases would trigger additional costs for contact tracing.

Aside from the operating costs we identified, there are also additional capital costs that will be incurred, such as costs for upgrading HVAC systems, purchasing air filters for classrooms, and purchasing additional tablets and hotspots to meet students' technology needs. IBO has not estimated costs for these or other capital needs.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at [ronniel@ibo.nyc.ny.us](mailto:ronniel@ibo.nyc.ny.us) or Sarita Subramanian (who coordinated the study) at [saritas@ibo.nyc.ny.us](mailto:saritas@ibo.nyc.ny.us).

Sincerely,

*Ronnie Lowenstein*

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