This year Mayor Bill de Blasio rolled out his greatly anticipated universal pre-K program opening 1,100 private, free, full-day preschools across the city’s 59 districts. While 53,000 kids can now get a jumpstart into their education, the program is sapping the education of children in grades K through three and onward.

Over the course of nine months, de Blasio successfully allotted $9.5 million to fund his initiative, a fraction of the amount that the class size reduction effort has received. While universal pre-K might seem like a win-win situation, it’s much needed space, money and attention has directly undermined class size reduction. The ratio of students to teachers among New York City’s public schools, which is a growing concern among parents and educators alike – and one which just last year warranted legal attention – has been increasingly steadily for years.

While both universal pre-K and class size reduction is part of a six-pronged citywide budget administered by the state, pre-K has received significantly more attention and tangible results. On the other hand, class size reduction, has received $160.3 million, 46 percent of total state funding, but has seen only hindrances and setbacks as ratios between students and teachers consistently increase annually. Community stakeholders including parents of students, school teachers and lobbyists have grown skeptical of the implementation of the sizeable class size reduction budget.

ALT lead:

Everyday, six-year old Sydney McGowan walks into a classroom that overflows with 43 other children who share the same **TK**-square-feet of classroom space -- a space that is typically allotted for half the number of students. Surprisingly, Sydney’s case is not uncommon among public school elementary students across New York City: Like 48 percent of her peers in Manhattan, the first graderis taught in overcrowded conditions. What’s worse, her class shares the room with another class in the same section at P.S. 11 in Chelsea.

P.S. 11 is one of the most overcrowded schools in District 9 with an overcapacity rate of 103 percent according to the 2013-2014 Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report released by the New York City Department of Education and New York City School Construction Authority.

“Right now, they don’t even have room to play outside”, said Deborah McGowan, Sydney’s mother, in reference to the children in her daughter’s class. “They don’t get to eat in the cafeteria and pick where they want to sit and socialize with who they want and those things are very good to learn at this age.” Instead, McGowan’s daughter has to eat lunch at her desk in the classroom, since there is no space in the cafeteria during lunchtime. Despite the limited space it already has, P.S. 11 implemented a pre-K program this past September like many other schools across the city. The school’s inclusion of the pre-K program was mandated  in order to comply with Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Universal pre-K expansion.

At the start of the school year, de Blasio’s greatly anticipated expansion of the city’s existing universal pre-K program successfully welcomed more than 51,500 preschoolers across the city’s 32 districts -- a number just shy of his administration’s original enrollment goal of 53,000. Now, 1,693 free, full-day preschool programs are open to three- and four-year-olds across the city’s 32 districts. While 70,000 kids next year will get a jumpstart into their education if de Blasio fulfills his first year goal, some argue the program is directly undermining the already tenuous citywide overcrowding crisis among public schools.

“As wonderful as the idea of universal pre-K is, based on the desperate situation that we are in, the whole city is already in need of space – and then the city is going to add 40,000 new seats to the system that cannot contain the kids that they already have?” said Deborah  Alexander, a parent who recently enrolled her three year-old at Kid Crazy, a community-based pre-K in Astoria.

At the start of the school year, de Blasio’s greatly anticipated expansion of the city’s existing universal pre-K program publicly boasted an enrollment number of more than 51,500 preschoolers across the city’s 32 districts -- a number just shy of his administration’s original enrollment goal of 53,000.

Even though ultimately, 70,000 children will get a jumpstart into their education if de Blasio fulfills his goal, parents, lobbyists and advocates among public schools who work closely with the city’s Department of Education argue the program’s expansion is directly undermining the already tenuous citywide overcrowding crisis among public schools.

“These proposals, though laudable, will put even more pressure on existing school capacity,” Leonie Haimson, Executive Director of Class Size Matters, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for smaller classes in New York City schools wrote in her report, “[Space Crunch](http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SPACE-CRUNCH-Report-Final-OL.pdf).” “Without a specific plan to lease or build more facilities, [they are] likely to cause even more overcrowding and lead to yet larger class sizes.”

According to the New York City Construction Authority’s Capital Plan, the Administration acknowledges that de Blasio’s pre-K initiative will contribute to capacity concerns by “[adding] significantly to new capacity to be constructed.” However, this belief is contingent upon the success of class size reduction -- an effort which has seen no success over the past seven years, as class sizes have consistently increased according to DOE class size reports. As for the Administration’s plan of action, they report that “analyses are currently underway for these new categories.”

“The Mayor and Chancellor have said repeatedly that overcrowding is a serious issue to them and have already taken steps to combat it,” said Harry Hartfield, the Deputy Press Secretary at the New York City Department of Education.

While he argues that the alarming trade off between classroom functionality and space is being addressed by city officials, in reality, New York City Schools Chancellor Farina turned a blind eye this past fall when Lower Manhattan’s P.S. 323, The Peck Slip School, pleaded with her for more space during their incubation period while waiting for their new school to be built.

Joy Martini, President of the school’s PTO, said that seven Kindergarten, first- and second-grade classes were crammed into five classrooms temporarily sectioned off by flimsy dividers. Ironically, these temporary rooms share the same building with Chancellor Farina’s office -- and are across the hall from her two large, unused meeting rooms. Parents said the environment was so distracting to their children that they complained about being able to hear lectures through the dividers. “There are two rooms that the Chancellor keeps for her own conference use (not often used) that could easily be turned into classrooms,” said Martini as she noted that their effort was “squarely focused on getting the Chancellor to share these rooms.”

While both universal pre-K and class size reduction is part of a six-pronged citywide budget administered by the state, pre-K has received significantly more attention and tangible results. On the other hand, class size reduction has received $160.3 million, but has seen only hindrances and setbacks as ratios between students and teachers consistently increase annually, according to Haimson.

Over the course of nine months, under the Contract for Excellence plan which designates citywide funding for pre-K and class size reduction, de Blasioallotted $9.5 million  to fund his initiative -- a fraction of the amount that the class size reduction effort has received. According to leases signed by the New York City School Construction Authority, for every new preschooler enrolled in universal pre-K, at least $494 is needed to fund 20 more square feet of classroom space -- a minimum spatial requirement designated by the New York City Department of Building’s building code. While universal pre-K might seem like a win-win situation, it’s much needed space, money and attention has put New York City’s historic class size reduction initiative on the backburner, according to multiple community education council leaders, public school lower-elementary school teachers, lobbyists and parents.

“The city made a commitment in 2007 to reduce class sizes in all grades as part of the Contract 4 Excellence law and instead class sizes have gone up significantly every year since then and now they’re the largest in 15 years in grades K-3,” said Haimson. “Many of the gains that would be expected from preschool will be undermined once kids get to kindergarten,” Haimson pointed out in reference to the shortage of classrooms caused by the introduction of new preschool programs.

When de Blasio mandated that all of the city’s existing 747 universal pre-K programs be extended from [2.5 hours](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/upk/faq.html) to 6.5 hours beginning this past September, 38 new pre-K programs were added to public schools and 18newcommunity-based organizations were created according to various reports, yielding a total of 1,693 programs available to all three- and four-year-olds in New York City.

Hartfield, acknowledged the overcrowding crisis pointing out the creation of a new Capital Plan which will build 33,000 new seats.“School overcrowding is a longstanding historical issue in the city, and we are using all the tools available to us, such as rezoning, new construction and leasing space, to address it,” he said.

Press release on class sizes skyrocketing: <http://www.classsizematters.org/press-release-class-size-averages-drop-slightly-this-fall-in-grades-k-3-and-4th-8th-but-grow-in-hs-at-least-367794-students-remain-in-classes-of-30-or-more/>

Psych study that shows that class sizes are just as important to students’ future success as pre-K: [**Research has shown**](http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Chetty-et-al-2011.pdf) **that smaller classes in early education are linked with an increased likelihood of attending college, owning a home and earning a larger salary. Overcrowded classrooms, on the other hand, threatens the quality of students’ education and** [**can cause**](http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Class-Size-and-Class-Heterogeneity-Giacomo-De-Giorgi-Michele-Pellizzari-William-Gui-Woolston.pdf) **students’ to earn 6 percent less than their peers in smaller classes, later in life.**

More overcrowding specific info:

DOE refuses to allocate any funds specifically towards class size reduction.

•Allows principals to use C4E funds to *Minimize growth of class size*

•*As a result, m*ore than [330,000 students](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/02/nyregion/new-york-citys-public-schools-are-poorer-and-more-crowded-report-says.html?_r=0) attended classes of 30 or larger last year.

•Blue Book’s school utilization formula aligned with large class sizes ( 28 students per class in 4th -8th grade, and 30 in high school) and thus will push class sizes even higher in these grades.

•Schools have become more overcrowded over last six years. More than 480,000 students citywide are in extremely overcrowded buildings.

Publicly available [data](http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/data/classsize/classsize.htm) released by the city reveals that

The results of the English Language Arts results, one of **xx** portions of the Common Core, a standardized assessment administered by the New York State Department of Education

* Bronx:
  + Data revealed that the fifth grade class at P.S. 051 Bronx New School performed the best on the ELA test last year according to the weighted averages of all Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 scores. The class size of fifth graders at the Bronx New School averaged 26.
  + The top three highest scores on
  + This, though, tells us little more than