

Too Crowded to Learn

Queens Schools Continue to Face Chronic Overcrowding Conditions



Report by:
Make the Road New York
May 2011

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Make the Road New York

Make the Road New York (MRNY) is New York City's largest community-based, membership organization that builds the power of Latino and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education and survival services.

For more information about Make the Road New York please visit our website at:

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Executive Summary

Make the Road New York has examined data distributed by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) documenting the enrollment, utilization and capacity trends in community school districts (CSD) 24 and 30 in Queens. CSD 24 and 30 serve the fastest growing populations of immigrant students in New York City, and many children of Make the Road New York in Queens attend a school in one of these districts.¹ **The city's data shows that school overcrowding is pervasive in these communities, with more than half of students attending an overcrowded school.** Many of the Queens public schools, which suffer from high utilization rates, are also noted to be well-performing schools. It is crucial to understand that the well-performance of a school must not overshadow the severe effects of an overcrowded school building on the overall educational experience of the students. Due to the high levels of overcrowding in the school, students are dealing with situations that are affecting their academic experience and progress, such as: lack of or the complete removal of specialized classes such as art, music and/or physical education; lack of or conversion of cluster rooms² designated for science laboratories, gymnasiums, libraries, art and music studios to accommodate space for regular subject classes for all students; the use of carts for teachers who are forced to move from classroom to classroom due to the lack of classrooms for the number of required teachers; multiple lunch shifts that in some cases have a first lunch shift of 9:30am and a last lunch shift of 1:30pm; receiving classes in temporary structures (portables) outside the main school building, which forces students to walk to the main building for the use of common spaces such as the auditorium and cafeteria, causing the teachers to use valuable teaching time to get the students ready and allocate enough time for this process.

Overcrowded schools in not new to Queens parents, teachers, students and community advocates. Unfortunately, it has been an issue that has plagued Queens for over two decades. Though the DOE Capital Plan has included additional seats for the borough of Queens and the School Construction Authority has made and has plans for new school constructions in the borough, these do not satisfy the current and future needs of the growing neighborhoods and the issue of overcrowding will continue to linger for years to come. It's a step forward, but it is not enough. The City needs to create a comprehensive plan that will look at increasing the number of new seats in CSD 24 and 30 and engage parents and students in that process. The Five Year Capital Plan must include accurate utilization rates for appropriate construction of new schools that relieves the most overcrowded and in-need school districts. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity proposes that the schools with utilization rates of 150% or over, low performing schools with over 125% utilization rates and over-utilized schools with temporary structures must be designated as "high priority".

Also, the City Council should pass Intro 155, commonly referred to as the blue book legislation. This bill would require the chancellor of every city school district to submit to City Council an annual report on school enrollment, capacity and utilization data in order to be used for the current or future school year plan. This bill would improve access to information to address persistent problems in the public school system including reducing class sizes to optimize learning.

¹*New York City Public Schools, Demographic and Enrollment Trends, 1990-2002, Queens*, New York City Department of City Planning.

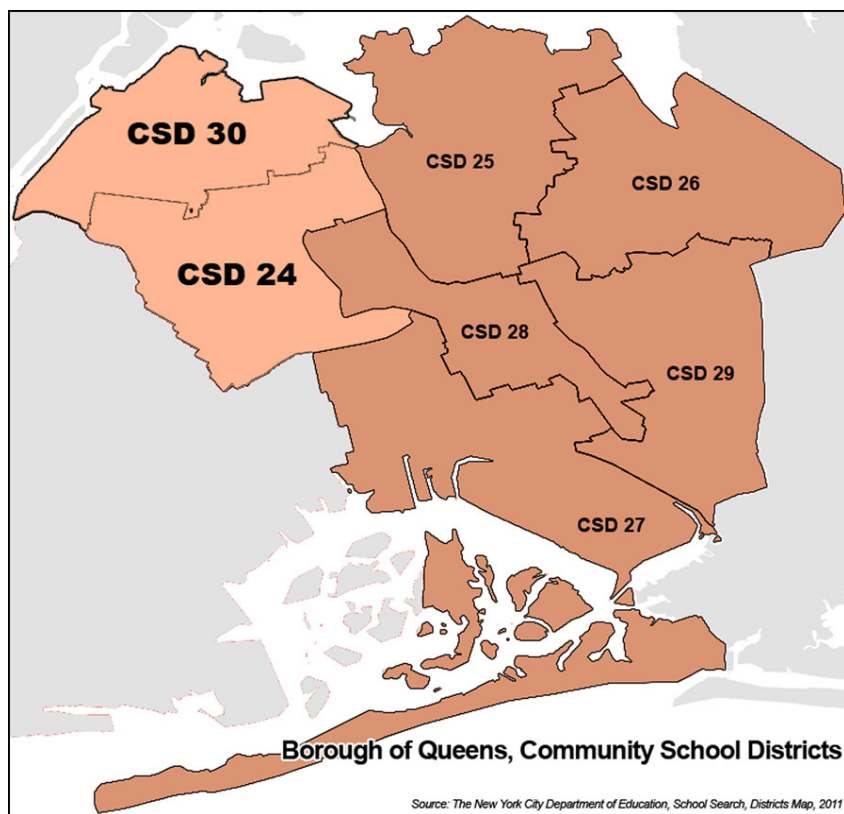
² *Introduction No. 155*, April 14, 2010, The Legislative Research Center, Christine C. Quinn, Speaker, The New York City Council.

Queens Community School Districts 24 and 30

CSD 24 includes the neighborhoods of Ridgewood, Maspeth, Elmhurst, Corona, Middle Village, Glendale, Hunters Point, and Long Island City. CSD 30 includes the neighborhoods of Queensbridge, Dutch Kills, Sunnyside, Woodside, Ravenswood, Astoria, Ditmars, Steinway, Jackson Heights and East Elmhurst.³

These communities have the largest populations of immigrant students in New York City and, according to the New York City Department of City Planning, respectively rank 1st and 2nd for having the highest average annual enrollment of recent immigrants.⁴ Between 1998 and 2001, CSD 24 registered 4,535 immigrant students for Pre-K through 6th grade, which were more students than any other NYC school districts. The predominant countries of origin were Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, China, the Dominican Republic, India, Bangladesh, Korea, Pakistan, Poland, Albania and Peru. CSD 24 had the highest average annual enrollment of *recent* immigrants in New York City. During the same three year period, In CSD 30 gained 4,133 immigrant students for grades Pre-K to 6 in CSD 30, with the predominate countries of origin being Colombia, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Mexico, India, Pakistan, the Dominican Republic, Korea,

Brazil, Peru and Egypt. After CSD 24, CSD 30 had the second highest average annual enrollment of recent immigrants in New York City during this period.⁵



"There has to be a state of emergency declared to finally end nearly 30 years of school overcrowding and conditions you'd expect to see in undeveloped countries, not the greatest city in the world," State Senator Jose Peralta said. "The limited resources available need to be focused exclusively on the areas where they are most needed. And they are needed most here."

***- State Senator Jose Peralta
13th District – Queens***

³ *Community District Profiles, Borough of Queens.* New York City Department of City Planning, Updated September 2010.

⁴ *New York City Public Schools, Demographic and Enrollment Trends, 1990-2002, Queens.* New York City Department of City Planning.

⁵ *New York City Public Schools, Demographic and Enrollment Trends, 1990-2002, Queens.* New York City Department of City Planning.

Key Findings

Using the data outlined below, we have found that:

1. Overcrowding is pervasive in CSD 24 and 30.

- 63% of high schools in these communities are overcrowded. In CSD 24, 10 out of the 16 high schools are overcrowded. In CSD 30, 5 out of 8 high schools are overcrowded.
- 64% of elementary and middle schools in these communities are overcrowded. In CSD 24, 25 out of 35 elementary and middle schools are overcrowded. In CSD 30, 20 out of 35 elementary and middle schools are overcrowded. As of April 2010, over 800 children from Queens were on kindergarten waiting lists.⁶

2. Overcrowding is severe.⁷

Some schools in CSD 24 and 30 are hundreds of students above their building's capacity. For example, though the Department of Education determined that Corona's Thomas Emanuel Early Childhood Center has a building capacity of 349 students, during the 2008/2009 school year, 499 students were enrolled in elementary school. This means that the school's utilization rate is 143%, with 150 more students (pre-kindergarten to second grade) than the building was designed to accommodate. (See Table of Over-utilized Schools CSD 24 and 30, Appendix 1)

3. CSD 24 and 30 are among the most overcrowded school districts in New York City.⁸

The worst overcrowding is in Queens with 72.9% of enrolled students (57,545 students) attending school in overcrowded buildings. District 24 is second among 9 community school districts in the entire city with more than 10,000 elementary students attending an overcrowded school.

4. The temporary structures that were built to address are also over capacity.⁹

Queens has the greatest number of temporary structures city-wide with a total of 94; the borough has temporary structures in all 7 districts, and at all school levels. CSD 30 has ten schools with temporary structures. Three of these schools have overcrowded main buildings *and* temporary structures. In CSD 24, there are also ten schools with temporary structures. Six of these temporary structures are also overcrowded. For example, Louis Armstrong elementary school, PS 143, has a main building (Q143), a temporary transportable building, and an annex that are all over-utilized. According to the 2008/2009 Blue Book data, PS 19 had a main building and two temporary structures that were all over-utilized. As of 2010, PS 19 has an over-utilized main building and 5 temporary structures. (See table and photos in Appendix 1).

⁶ *Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization Report*, 2008/09, New York City Department of Education

⁷ *Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization Report*, 2008/09, New York City Department of Education

⁸ *Maxed Out: New York City's Overcrowding Crisis*, The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2009.

⁹ *Maxed Out: New York City's Overcrowding Crisis*, The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2009.

5. Plans for increased classroom seats are inadequate to respond to predicted increases in enrollment for these districts.¹⁰

Although there has been a decline in enrollment citywide, some boroughs and school districts, including CSDs 24 and 30, are experiencing an *increase* in student enrollment. Both CSD 24 and 30 are predicted to grow in the next 5 years.

The FY2010-2014 Capital Plan outlines a process of allotting more seats to over-utilized buildings. However, the Plan does not account for the projected increases in population in CSD 24 or 30. In addition, there are no plans to replace existing temporary structures with permanent classroom space. Given that the new seats would only be sufficient to mitigate overcrowding if the population does not increase, and that temporary structures would still be relied upon, the Plan falls short of measures necessary to fully address overcrowding.¹¹

Though Capital Plan makes annual amendments based on new census and student enrollment data, the amendments for the allocations of new seats and school constructions continue to fall short of the demand in the community. The plans for new school constructions and seats allocated do not account for an accurate projection of population growth and current overutilization rates –numbers that are bound to be increasingly larger by the time the schools are constructed and seats are allocated. Census data for CSD 24 and 30 show are not accurate to the population growth and thus there should be an independent study to generate an accurate number of the population in the most overcrowded school districts.

¹⁰ *Enrollment Projections for 2007-2016 for the New York City Public Schools, Prepared for the New York City School Construction Authority, Statistical Forecasting, LLC, November 2007.*

¹¹ *Maxed Out: New York City's Overcrowding Crisis, The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2009.*



Student Testimonies

Yileni Hernandez (Right), Long Island City High School, Class of 2011

The majority of my classes have between 33 and 34 students. When I need help with a difficult subject, the teachers don't have time to give me any individualized attention. I am late to class, because the halls are so crowded. Even when I get to class on time, the teacher having to switch classrooms to teach, will still be setting up for the lesson after the bell has rung. Some teachers share rooms and others do not have a room at all and thus their "classroom" is essentially a cart they walk around with from classroom to classroom. This is in part due to the fact that there are too many students in the school. They have to hire a teacher but there aren't enough classrooms in the building.

I just want to be able to get to class on time, and have classes with less students so I can have more attention from my teachers. I just want to be able to learn.

Elizabeth Hernandez (Left), Long Island City High School, Class of 2010

One year, I **had my lunch period scheduled at 9:30 a.m.** Even with the early lunch, the line to buy food was so long that it took up 20 minutes of the half hour lunch break. Sometimes, I chose to not eat because it was just too hectic to deal with the crowds, but that meant would go the entire day without food.

It's so crowded that people get frustrated and pushy in the halls and staircases, which leads to bullying and fighting. There is a fight almost every day.

I'm proud that I was able to graduate, and with honors, too. But it was a struggle given the overcrowded conditions.

Parent Testimony

Aracelly Correa, mother of 3rd grader and member of
Make the Road New York's Parents in Action Committee in Queens

My son has been in three schools in the last two years. My son used to go to P.S. 89 and then got placed in P.S. 149. I then moved him to P.S. 148 because of the overcrowding.

I was concerned that my child's homework was not being checked. When I asked the teacher about this, she told me that there were too many students in the class and she was too busy to check everyone's homework. I spoke with a parent who had their child in the same class as my son and she told me that her child's homework was never checked. I found out that because of my persistency with the teacher, she only checked my son's homework. I used to ask my son also if the teacher checked homework and he said, "only mine".

The overcrowding is also seen in other activities that take place in school. Students start class at different times by group due to the lack of space outside the school and all parents are required to be there 10 minutes earlier to start time.

In some schools there is no backyard; there is no gym; the auditorium is very small. If the school ever wanted to do a school activity, it could not incorporate the entire student body.

During parent teacher conferences, forget about it! There's no way to enter the school. Meetings are by appointment only, but parents want to leave early and so they get to school early. When I am given the first appointment, I don't go because there is nowhere to walk through.

Recommendations

The data reflects a pervasive and troubling trend of overcrowding in CSD 24 and 30, which may become more severe as the student population in these communities continues to grow. Overcrowding has substantial impacts on student learning environments and compromises students' education in multiple ways:

1. Class sizes exceed the target capacity recommended by the Blue Book, and based on these markers are unacceptable.
2. Specialized spaces intended for art, music, science laboratories, and library use are converted into classroom space, depriving students of important holistic educational opportunities.
3. Lunch periods begin as early as 9:30, and students are without food until the school day is over.
4. Allocation of space for students in special education is treated as an afterthought.¹²

Make the Road New York advocates for an approach that is inclusive of community residents by thoroughly disseminating accessible information and working with community groups. A comprehensive and inclusive action plan must include the direct engagement of parents, teachers, principals and advocacy groups, along with the Department of Education and School Construction Authority in effectively directing time, energy and resources towards a steady decrease in the overcrowding of schools for an ultimate end result that completely eliminates the problem within a specified time frame.

Make the Road New York recommends:

1) Parent & Student Involvement in Assessment of Utilization Rates

The New York City Department of Education can require that parents, students and school leaders participate in assessing whether a school is over or under utilized. This assessment should include whether or not there is adequate time and space dedicated to the arts and physical education. Serious weight should also be given to the appropriateness of accommodations for special education students. There should be a formal appeal process that can address any disagreement about the ultimate utilization rate.

2) Transparent Capacity Calculations

The New York City Department of Education must reform its current "capacity calculation" formula used in the Blue Book. The reformed formula should include detailed information about temporary structures, including their life span and plan to deal with the overcrowding of such school to ultimately eliminate the transportables. The new formula should not calculate "cluster" rooms for art, music, physical education, hallways, administrative offices and janitorial closets in order to protect these spaces.

3) Plan to Address Overcrowding in the Capital Plan

The Five Year Capital Plan must include accurate utilization rates for appropriate construction of new schools that relieves the most overcrowded and in-need school districts. CFE proposes that the schools with utilization rates of 150% or over, low performing schools with over 125% utilization rates and over-utilized schools with temporary structures must be designated as "high priority".

¹² *Maxed Out: New York City's Overcrowding Crisis*, The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2009.

Data, Sources and Methodology

This report is based primarily on data for the 2008-2009 school year by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) in the New York City Department of Education/New York City School Construction Authority Enrollment- Capacity-Utilization Report; the Five-Year Capital Plan released by the (DOE); and *Maxed Out*, released by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE). In addition, Make the Road New York has gathered anecdotal evidence of overcrowding through their organizing efforts with parents and students in CSD 24 and 30.

*The Enrollment-Capacity-Utilization Report, 2008/09*¹³

The Enrollment- Capacity-Utilization Report 2008/09, also referred to as the Blue Book, is released annually by the New York City Department of Education and the New York City School Construction Authority. The report contains data on a variety of characteristics of New York City schools, such as enrollment data for each school, the capacity of each school, and the utilization rate.

Enrollment data is provided by the audited register.

The capacity is calculated based on system-wide classroom standards as well as data derived from an annual study of school principals that ask about the use for each room. In addition, the Blue Book outlines the historical and target capacity for classrooms in New York City schools. The Blue Book lists the target capacity for each classroom according to grade level. For early elementary grades (pre-K through 3rd grade), the target capacity is 20 students. For later elementary grades (4th through 5th grade) as well as middle school grades (6th through 8th grade) the target capacity is 28 students. In high school, students should be in classes no larger than 34 for regular subjects and science labs, and no larger than 25 for workshop.

The utilization rate determines whether a school facility is overcrowded. The rate is calculated by dividing the school's yearly *enrollment* (the number of students attending classes at a particular school) by the school building's *capacity* (the number of students a particular building was constructed to accommodate). The resulting percentage is the school's utilization rate. If the utilization rate exceeds 100%, then the school is over-utilized or overcrowded.

Many schools with above-capacity buildings rely on "temporary" structures to house the overflow of students and classes. The most common temporary structures are transportables (two classroom trailers) and annexed buildings. As the DOE calculates capacity by the individual building (not by the entire school), a school may have an overflow of students who attend classes in temporary structures because they cannot be accommodated in the main buildings(s), yet still be categorized as underutilized. In addition, school gymnasiums, libraries and cluster rooms designated for elective classes such as art and music are often converted into classrooms if the regular classroom space is above capacity. As a result, a school could have no library, no gym and no elective classes because they are being used as regular subject teaching classrooms in order to accommodate enrolled students, and still be considered underutilized.

¹³ *Maxed Out: New York City School Overcrowding Crowding*, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2009.
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Five-Year Capital Plan (2010-2014)

The Five-Year Capital Plan, released by the New York City Department of Education, outlines the city's plans for addressing overutilization in New York City public schools. The report documents the City's fiscal plans for new building construction.

Maxed Out: New York City School Overcrowding Crisis¹⁴

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity's report "Maxed Out: New York City School Overcrowding Crowding" ("Maxed Out") examines overcrowding in New York City's public school buildings. The report uses data from the current Blue Book and historical The Blue Book for the 2006/07 and 2007/08 SINI/SRAP school lists issued by New York State Department of Education, Enrollment projections contained in Enrollment Projections 2007 to 2016 New York City Public Schools prepared by The Grier Partnership and Statistical Forecasting LLC, and the Five-Year Capital Plan.

"Maxed Out" highlights a various characteristics of the Community School Districts (CSD) in New York City. The report: (1) identifies all school buildings with utilization rates above 90% and all school buildings with temporary structures, (2) analyzes where these buildings are located and the number of students attending school in these buildings and all temporary structures, (3) examines how overcrowding has changed in overcrowded school buildings over a ten year period, (4) evaluates potential impact on overcrowding of DOE enrollment projections through 2016 and (5) identifies where new school buildings are planned and the potential effect on overcrowding.

The New York City Council, Introduction. No. 155

The Speaker of the New York City Council, Christine C. Quinn, along with Council Members Jackson, Barron, Chin, Comrie, Crowley, Dickens, Dromm, Fidler, Gentile, James, Koppell, Koslowitz, Lander, Nelson, Palma, Recchia, Rodriguez, Rose, Seabrook, Vann, Williams, Foster, Lappin, Vacca, Cabrera, Mendez, Mark-Viverito, Ulrich and Ignizio introduced legislation on April 14, 2010 requesting,

A Local Law to amend the New York city charter, in relation to requiring the chancellor of the city school district to submit to the council an annual report concerning school enrollment, capacity and utilization

This bill would require the chancellor of every city school district to submit to City Council an annual report on school enrollment, capacity and utilization data in order to be used for the current or future school year plan. This bill would improve access to information to address persistent problems in the public school system including reducing class sizes to optimize learning.

¹⁴ *Maxed Out: New York City School Overcrowding Crisis*, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, May 2009.
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Appendix 1 – List of Over-utilized Schools

(Source: New York City Department of Education, *Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report, 2008-2009*)

CSD 24:

	SCHOOL NAME	UTILIZATION RATE (using Target Method)
	Elementary/Middle Schools	
1.	P.S. 7	129%
2.	P.S. 12	139%
3.	P.S. 13 P.S. 13 (temporary structure)	174% 58%
4.	P.S. 14	109%
5.	P.S. 16	128%
6.	P.S. 19 P.S. 19 (temporary structure) P.S. 19 (temporary structure)	128% 108% 137%
7.	P.S. 28	143%
8.	P.S. 49	135%
9.	P.S. 68	112%
10.	P.S. 81 P.S. 81 (temporary structure) P.S. 81 (temporary structure)	118% 108% 136%
11.	P.S. 88 P.S. 88 (temporary structure)	101% 97%
12.	P.S. 89	117%
13.	P.S. 91	102%
14.	P.S. 102 P.S. 102 (temporary structure)	163% 133%
15.	P.S. 113	173%
16.	P.S. 128 P.S. 128 (temporary structure)	176% 174%
17.	P.S. 143 P.S. 143 (temporary structure) P.S. 143 (temporary structure)	120% 108% 119%
18.	P.S. 153	122%
19.	P.S. 199	121%
20.	P.S. 199 P.S. 199 (temporary structure) P.S. 199 (temporary structure)	100% 127% 110%
21.	P.S. 229	111%
22.	P.S. 239 P.S. 239 (temporary structure)	122% 202%
23.	51st Avenue Academy	119%

24.	I.S. 61	106%
25.	I.S. 125	89%
	I.S. 125 (temporary structure)	99%
	I.S. 125 (temporary structure)	129%
	High Schools	
1.	Academy of Fin. & Enterprise	102%
2.	HS of Applied Communication	110%
3.	Newtown HS	122%
4.	Grover Cleveland	119%
5.	Middle College HS	121%
6.	International HS	174%
7.	HS for Arts and Business	126%
8.	Queens Vocational HS	101%
9.	Aviation HS	118%
10.	Frank Sinatra	100%

CSD 30:

	SCHOOL NAME	UTILIZATION RATE (using Target Method)
	Elementary/Middle Schools	
1.	P.S. 2	103%
2.	P.S. 11	115%
	P.S. 11 (temporary structure)	117%
	P.S. 11 (temporary structure)	161%
3.	P.S. 69	130%
	P.S. 69 (temporary structure)	85%
4.	P.S. 70	81%
	P.S. 70 (temporary structure)	115%
	P.S. 70 (temporary structure)	73%
5.	P.S. 78	111%
6.	P.S. 84	106%
7.	P.S. 92	116%
	P.S. 92 (temporary structure)	164%
8.	P.S. 112	105%
9.	P.S. 122	113%
10.	P.S. 127	103%
11.	P.S. 148	115%
12.	P.S. 149	117%
13.	P.S. 150	102%
	P.S. 150 (temporary structure)	160%
14.	P.S. 151	67%
	P.S. 151 (temporary structure)	223%
15.	P.S. 152	133%

16.	P.S. 212	128%
17.	P.S. 222	148%
18.	P.S. 228	160%
19.	P.S. 234	111%
20.	I.S. 145	104%
	High Schools	
1.	William C. Bryant HS	108%
2.	Long Island City HS	149%
3.	HS for Information Technology	130%
4.	Academy for American Studies	138%
5.	Baccalaureate School for Global Education	109%

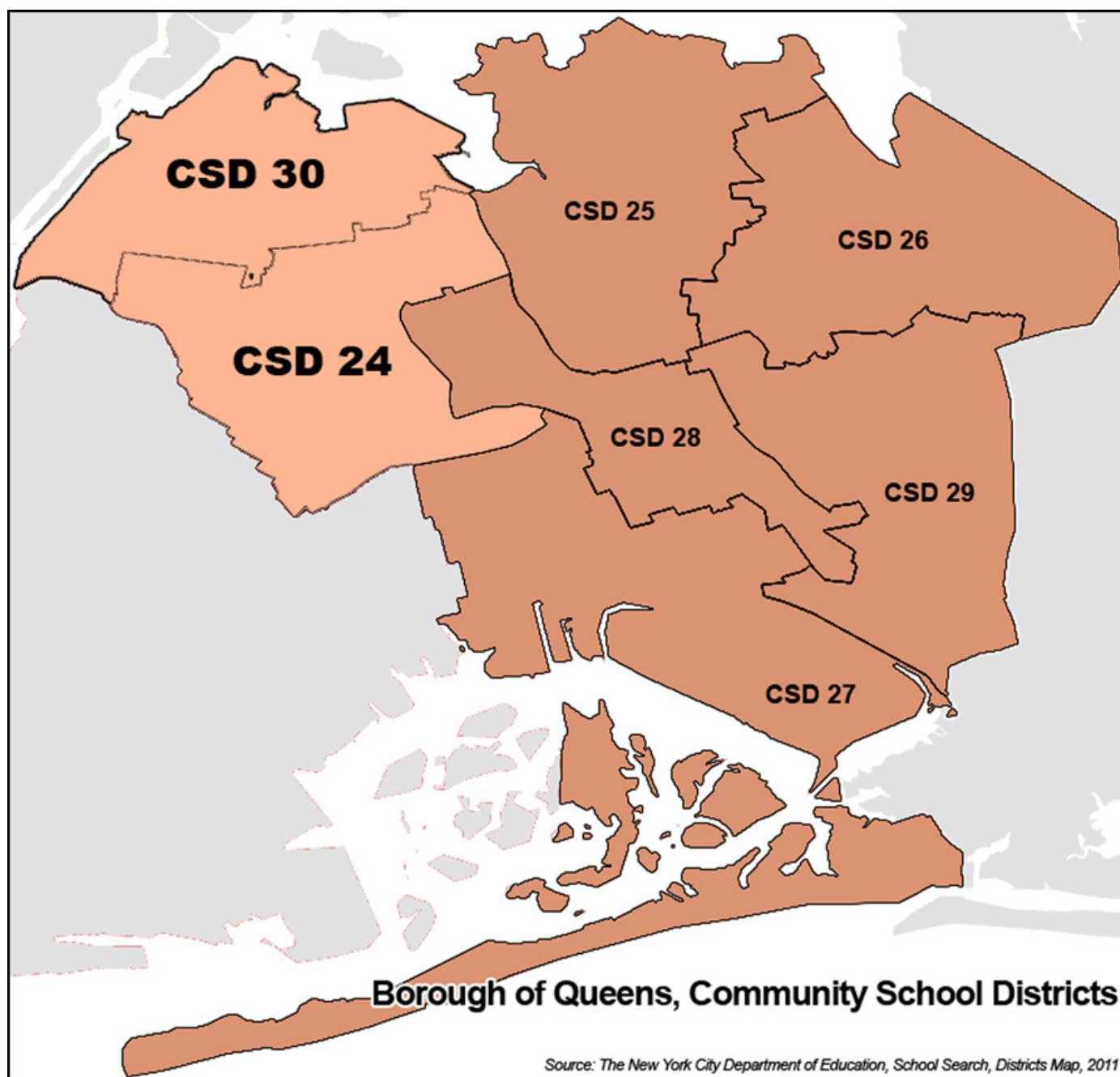


Portables at P.S.19 Queens 98-02 Roosevelt Avenue, Corona

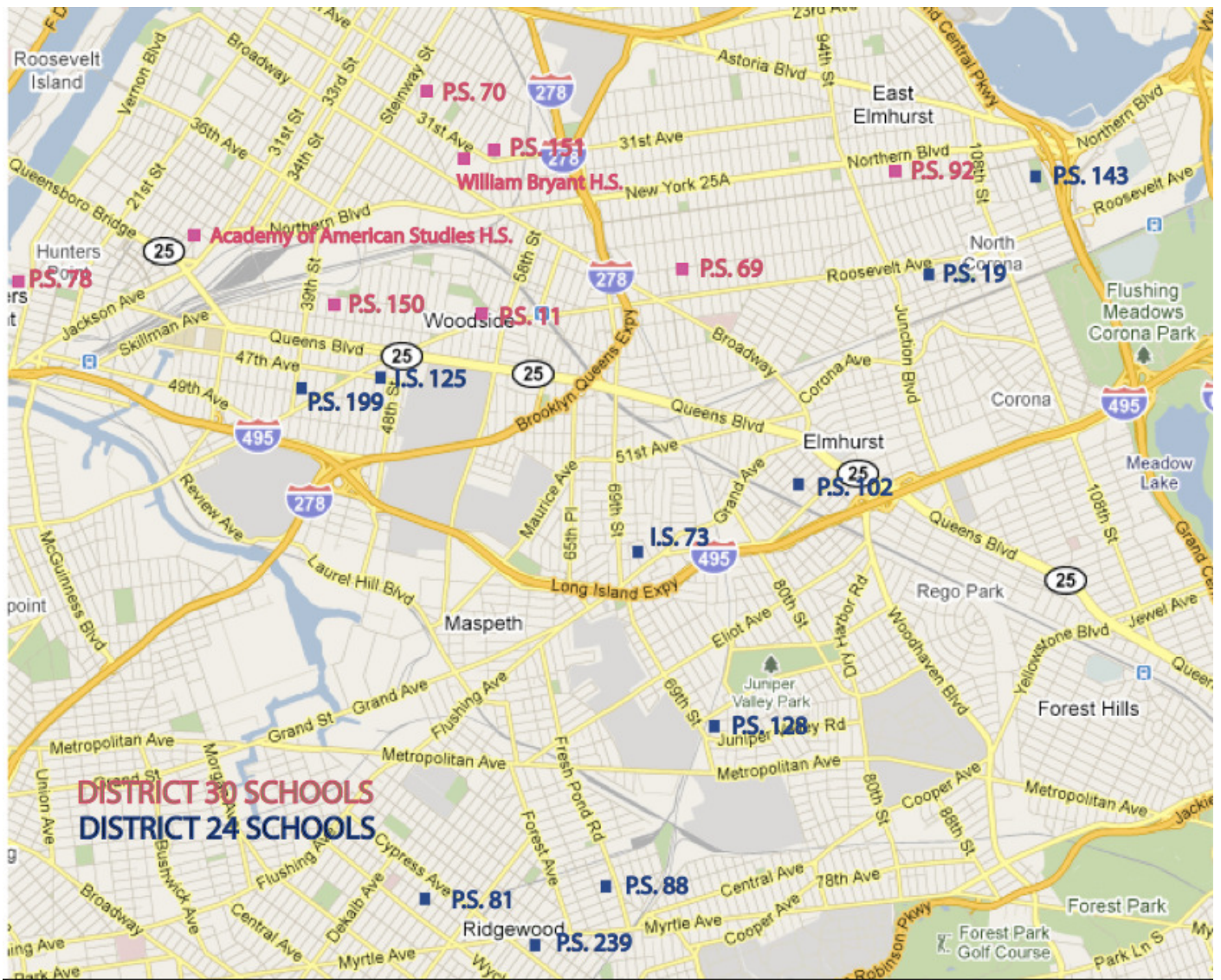


Main Building & Portables at P.S.143 Queens 34-74 113 Street, Corona

Appendix 2: Queens Community School Districts Map



Appendix 3: Locations of Overcrowded Schools in CSD 24 & CSD 30





TOO CROWDED TO LEARN

Queens Schools

THE PROBLEM: Overcrowded Schools in Queens - the most overcrowded borough in NYC

- 63% of high schools are overcrowded. In CSD 24, 10 out of the 16 high schools are overcrowded. In CSD 30, 5 out of 8 high schools are overcrowded.
- 64% of elementary and middle schools are overcrowded. In CSD 24, 25 out of 35 elementary and middle schools are overcrowded. In CSD 30, 20 out of 35 elementary and middle schools are overcrowded. As of April 2010, over 800 children from Queens were on kindergarten waiting lists.
- In the 2008/2009 school year there were over 26,000 students in CSD 24 alone that attended overcrowded schools
- Temporary structures originally built to address overcrowding in main school buildings are over capacity. In CSD 24, ten schools have temporary structures. Six of these schools' main buildings and temporary structures are all overcrowded.
- CSD 24 and CSD 30 serve the largest populations of immigrant students in New York City. According to the New York City Department of City Planning, these two districts were ranked 1st and 2nd respectively in terms of having the highest average annual enrollment of recent immigrants.

THE SOLUTION: Build more schools, a transparent capacity calculation, include parents & students in assessing utilization rates, address overcrowding in the Capital Plan

More Schools, More Seats, More Education!

Too Crowded to Learn, Queens Schools Campaign is calling on the Department of Education (DOE) and the School Construction Authority to:

1) Parent & Student Involvement in Assessment of Utilization Rates

The New York City Department of Education can require that parents, students and school leaders to participate in assessing whether a school is over or under utilized. This assessment should include whether or not there is adequate time and space dedicated to the arts and physical education. There should be a formal appeal process that can address any disagreement about the ultimate utilization rate.

2) Transparent Capacity Calculations

The New York City Department of Education must reform its current “capacity calculation” formula used in the Blue Book. The reformed formula should include detailed information about temporary structures, including their life span and plan to deal with the overcrowding of such school to ultimately eliminate the portables. The new formula should not calculate “cluster” rooms for art, music, physical education, hallways, administrative offices and janitorial closets in order to protect these spaces.

3) Plan to Address Overcrowding in the Capital Plan

The Five Year Capital Plan must include accurate utilization rates for appropriate construction of new schools in the most overcrowded districts. CFE proposes that the schools with utilization rates of 150% or over, low performing schools with over 125% utilization rates and over-utilized schools with temporary structures must be designated as “high priority”.