



**WOMEN'S CITY CLUB OF NEW YORK  
TASK FORCE ON PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**THE PERSISTENT PROBLEM OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN THE  
NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS:**

**DATA SUPPLIED BY THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET OFFICE REVEALS  
DISPARITIES IN SPACE AND TEACHERS**

Over the past few years there have been increasing calls for the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to address its failure to provide adequate physical education (PE) to all the students in its schools. Now, a full year has passed since DOE, in response to *the New York City Comptroller's Audit Report on the Department of Education's Compliance with the Physical Education Regulations in Elementary Schools (Comptroller's 2011 Audit)*, stated it would prepare a district Physical Education plan by the end of summer 2012. To date no plan has been announced. In the face of compelling evidence that academic performance is enhanced in students who receive regular PE, the lack of definitive action by DOE on this problem is disappointing.

Because a number of factors affect the ability of schools to offer the mandated hours of PE, Women's City Club (WCC), in previous reports has recommended that DOE should begin a plan for improvement by conducting an inventory of mandated PE time, space and licensed PE teachers in schools throughout the system.<sup>1 2</sup> However, no such comprehensive inventory has been attempted or reported by DOE.

Seeking other sources for obtaining this information, early in 2012 WCC approached the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO), which agreed to collect data on space usage for physical education from the DOE Annual Facilities Survey, and on teachers assigned to physical education classes in each school from school budget data and DOE's Human Resources database. Data on required PE time, however, were inaccessible to the IBO.

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<sup>1</sup> Physical Education in City Public Schools Task Force, Women's City Club of New York, Physical Education in New York City's Public Schools: A Missing Ingredient for Academic Success (2010)

<sup>2</sup> Physical Education in City Public Schools Task Force, Women's City Club of New York, Stop Short-Changing Our Children: Bring Physical Education Back to the Curriculum (2012)

Spread sheets<sup>3</sup> prepared by IBO showed:

- Space (square ft/student) used for physical education in each school building, including gymnasium, dance room, playground/play area, swimming pool or weight room.
- Shared space usage when more than one school is sharing space in the same building, showing which schools share the space and percent of time each school uses the shared space.
- Licensure of teachers assigned to physical education classes and the total number of teachers assigned to teach PE in each school.

Subsequently the IBO provided summaries and a tabulation of this material. (See attached letter and tables.)

The first IBO tabulation, which ranked school buildings by grade level from lowest to highest in terms of space per student available for PE, revealed very large disparities in the rankings. For both elementary and high school buildings, those ranked in the top 10% for amount of space per student had almost 5 times the amount of space per student as did those ranked in the bottom 10%. In middle school buildings the disparity between top and bottom 10% was 3 times the amount of space per student.

In the second tabulation, displaying shared space usage, a ratio was created to show the percent of time a school used shared physical education space compared to that school's percent of total building enrollment. (When the percentages are the same for the share of time and the enrollment, the ratio is 1, meaning the school is receiving its proper portion of access to the space. A ratio above 1 means a school is receiving more than its expected share and a ratio below 1 means it is receiving less.) Schools were then ranked by ratio, from lowest to highest. For the majority of schools the ratio was close to 1, indicating that space is being shared equitably. However, up to 25% of schools using shared space had a ratio of .9 or lower, meaning they had a lower share of time available than would be expected according to the size of their enrollment.

The final tabulation presented a citywide distribution of the number of teachers, licensed and unlicensed, assigned to teach physical education, according to type of school. A separate count of licensed PE teachers was included. Subsequently WCC made a calculation<sup>4</sup> to estimate the number of PE teachers that would hypothetically be needed to provide the required number of classes for the total city enrollment, by type of school:

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<sup>3</sup> The spread sheets are posted on the Women's City Club website, [www.wccny.org](http://www.wccny.org), where parents, school personnel and other interested parties may obtain this information for individual schools.

<sup>4</sup> Assuming that one PE teacher can provide the 120 required minutes of PE to 320 elementary school students each week (30 classes of 40 minutes, with 32 students in each class), the total number of NYC elementary students in 2011 is divided by 320 to arrive at the number of teachers that would be needed. For middle and high schools, a class size of 50 was used.

### **Elementary and K–8 Schools:**

The approximate number of teachers needed to meet mandated standards for all enrolled students is 1174. The actual number of assigned teachers is 825. Therefore at least 350 more PE teachers would be needed to properly staff the city’s elementary schools. At present, the number of teachers with licenses is 53% of the number of teachers assigned to physical education in these schools.

### **Middle Schools:**

The approximate number of teachers needed to meet mandated standards is 426. The actual number of assigned teachers is 486. Therefore middle schools appear to have a full complement of PE teachers. The number of teachers with licenses is equal to the number of teachers assigned to PE.

### **High Schools:**

The approximate number of teachers needed to meet mandated standards is 612. The actual number of assigned teachers is 1138. Therefore high schools appear to have a surplus of PE teachers. The number of teachers with licenses is greater than the number of teachers assigned to PE.

### Comments:

The information provided in these summaries is consistent with concerns about space and staff expressed previously by parents, advocates, and others. The data also offer additional insight into the breadth and scope of the problems and the challenges that will be presented by the search for solutions.

While not unexpected, the marked disparities in available space are particularly troubling because they are likely to be structural and not easily remedied. This situation makes it all the more important that the School Construction Authority specify sufficient PE space in all plans for renovation and new school construction. In existing schools where space is inadequate, leadership will require extra ingenuity and assistance in order to comply with New York State PE requirements. One partial approach at DOE has been to incorporate the **Move-to-Improve**<sup>5</sup> curriculum into classrooms, while recognizing that it cannot replace regular PE. Although there may be no easy solutions for shortages of space, doing nothing should not be an option. Change can only begin to happen if school administrators at all levels make a firm commitment to the importance of identifying or creating suitable areas for students’ PE experience. From small beginnings, larger improvements may eventually appear.

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<sup>5</sup> Move-to-Improve (MTI) classroom physical activity program was designed by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). MTI to provide teachers with the tools to incorporate brief, structured, classroom fitness breaks. These fitness breaks integrate grade-level academic concepts and physical activity into 10-minute lessons aligned to New York State PE Learning Standards.  
[http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BE492EE1-51E2-4386-AEDE-8F6CF720D6DF/0/MTIFY13NOVINFORMSHEET\\_FORP](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BE492EE1-51E2-4386-AEDE-8F6CF720D6DF/0/MTIFY13NOVINFORMSHEET_FORP).

With respect to the citywide distribution of PE teachers according to level of school, the findings are rather surprising, and even puzzling, both within and between categories of school.

Reasons for the insufficient number of teachers reported at the elementary school level deserve further investigation. Have the numbers of teachers been correctly reported in the school budget? Is the absence of a teacher the cause or the result of the inadequate PE class time that was reported in the Comptroller's 2011 Audit? Is the distribution of available teachers equally proportioned among the different elementary schools? Are the barriers to employing a sufficient number of teachers to fulfill the state requirements due to budgetary constraints or priorities, shortages of qualified candidates or simply lack of interest or attention to the need by the leadership and/or absent demand from the field?

These conjectures can hardly be considered separately from the information about the assignment of teachers in the high schools, where a large surplus is reported. Do these teachers have responsibilities above and beyond PE? If so, what are they? And if this surplus is indeed genuine, how can it be reconciled with the situation in the understaffed elementary schools?

Given the limited and possibly inconsistent sources of data available to the IBO, attempts by any outside group to understand or interpret these IBO data will be flawed and uncertain. What is certain, however, is that these findings demand a review and response from DOE officials. In addition, comprehensive information about mandated PE time, the third key requirement for provision of adequate PE, should be compiled in order to create a complete assessment of the current PE situation and a plan for what is needed to bring it into compliance with the New York State mandates.

The Women's City Club reiterates its past position that the Department of Education must begin systematically to address the factors contributing to the marked inequity in access to physical education by far too many of its students. Once again we challenge educators at all levels to do what is best for the well-being of our children: establish a curriculum that recognizes the contribution of regular physical education to their academic achievement.