



Hey, Mayor Bloomberg, don't shortchange our schoolkids

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"We face uncertain times ahead, but this much is certain: We must keep the promises to our kids."

This is the message that hundreds of parents, students, education activists and elected officials who Wednesday rallied at City Hall wanted to make sure [Mayor Bloomberg](#) would hear.

Organized by the Keep the [Promises Coalition](#), the demonstration made clear that the education budget cuts that are already undermining public education are not - and should not be - an option.

"We hope that the governor and the mayor will pay attention to this demonstration," said [Manuel Castro](#), an organizer with Make the Road New York, a group that is part of the coalition.

"We hope they realize that the school budget cuts are unacceptable for the community because they compromise the quality of the education of our children."

The coalition - a diverse group of parents, education advocates, community organizations, civic groups, clergy, labor unions and elected officials - is leading the campaign against the cuts.

It is asking Mayor Bloomberg not to forget his promises to build more schools, fund full-day pre-kindergarten, decrease class sizes, improve middle schools, expand English Language Learners programs, and keep after-school programs and tutoring services.

Instead, the city is proposing more than \$324 million in education cuts in the 2009 budget, and imposed a surprise midyear cut of \$100 million. The coalition is demanding the restoration of these reductions - current and proposed.

The budget reductions already have wreaked havoc in the education system, according to a survey of 375 [New York](#) public schools conducted by the coalition.

"It is not fair to the kids," said Lidia Rosa Noreña, whose 11-year old daughter attends [Public School 150](#) in [Sunnyside, Queens](#). "They are the ones suffering the consequences."

Schools already have had to "reduce or eliminate after-school and weekend programs, tutoring services and extracurricular activities while coping with shortages of textbooks and instructional supplies along with higher class sizes," the coalition said in a written statement.

"What is more worrisome to us is that these cuts would certainly mean an even greater dropout rate," said [Emma Vidal](#), whose two daughters attend PS 20 on [Staten Island](#). "For working parents, the after-school programs are a necessity."

Vidal, a member of El Centro de Hospitalidad, a Staten Island community group, knows that if the proposed budget cuts are approved, schools will have an even more difficult time next year.

Not surprisingly, schools with large numbers of low-income, English Language Learner or special education students will be the hardest hit.

Last year, Mayor Bloomberg promised to allocate more resources to try to reduce the number of dropouts among the 14% of the city's students who are recently arrived immigrants and not yet proficient in English.

Yet now he is proposing to eliminate an existing allocation of \$15 million destined for 113 English-Language-Learner teaching positions this year, and some 226 positions next year.

But the coalition thinks that before going ahead with cutting the public schools budget, the [Department of Education](#) should open its books.

"Cut consultants, no-bid contracts and excessive testing procedures," the coalition is asking. "Do whatever it takes to make sure budget cuts do not hurt children or core classroom services."

Sounds like a great idea.