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# Thousands Protest Budget Cuts Aimed at City Schools

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Thousands of parents, students, teachers and administrators rallied in front of City Hall in late afternoon rain Wednesday, denouncing budget cuts to the Education Department and demanding that the state and the city fulfill pledges they made last year to drastically increase spending for the public schools.

“This is all parents talk about,” said Alicia Cortes, the parent coordinator at Intermediate School 302 in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn. “We have been getting better for a while, and we thought there was a way to progress, and then all of the sudden there’s these cuts. You can’t cut off people’s legs and then expect them to succeed.”

Ms. Cortes said she was extremely frustrated that her school had to scale back after-school programs this year when it lost more than \$107,000.

In January, Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) and Gov. [Eliot Spitzer](#) said a dramatic downturn in the economy was forcing them to reduce the amount of money they had planned to spend on schools after a longstanding education financing lawsuit was settled last year. Schools were forced to cut 1.75 percent from their current budgets in January, and more dramatic cuts are expected for next year.

The protest came the day before Schools Chancellor [Joel I. Klein](#) was expected to testify about the budget cuts before the City Council’s Education Committee. City officials arranged a background briefing with reporters before the protest began, emphasizing that Mayor Bloomberg considered money for public schools a priority and had increased education spending by 72 percent since 2002.

But the figure did little to satisfy the protesters, who repeatedly chanted, “Keep the promises!” in English and Spanish during the two-hour rally.

“I’d be the first to acknowledge that we are spending more money,” said Ernest A. Logan, the president of the city’s principals’ union. “But you have to remember that we have been suffering and waiting for a long time. We cannot wait anymore.”

Many people in the crowd lining Broadway arrived on buses provided by the teachers’ union and several community groups, which spent weeks organizing what they had hoped

would be a large protest. When rain began in the morning, organizers tempered their expectations and seemed happily surprised that so many people did come.

Richard Burgess, whose two children attend elementary and middle schools in Washington Heights, said he was fearful of losing after-school programs and teaching assistants. “The only thing this is going to do is hurt our children,” he said.