



[Protest the Bad Math on School Budget Cuts](#)

City Hall

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By Ernest Logan

Across the city, individual school budgets have been cut an average of \$70,000 because of an aggressive and ill-timed \$100 million cut by the Department of Education (DoE). Principals literally walked in to their offices halfway through the school year to find the DoE had pulled thousands of dollars from their school accounts. As a result, dozens of advocacy groups, community organizations, clergy, unions and elected officials have come together to form the “Keep the Promises” coalition. Budget cuts always have the unintended consequence of leaving the most at-risk students behind and disenfranchising those students who have been thus far engaged and passionate about their education. Our goal is to get these funds restored and protect schools against future cuts.

\$70,000 is a significant amount for notoriously fragile school budgets to absorb mid-year, especially when you consider most schools still depend on grant writing, candy sales and other fundraisers to subsidize school activities and purchases. It is worth noting that while \$70,000 may represent the average budget cut, 230 schools lost more than \$100,000 and nearly 50 schools lost more than \$200,000.

These cuts are forcing principals to discard some of their carefully-calibrated plans and make immediate reductions in programs and academic intervention services that students depend upon. Pick any neighborhood, and you will see the direct impact. In District 10 in the Bronx, for example, at least one school had to cancel SAT prep courses on weekends, affecting hundreds of students. In District 31 on Staten Island, a principal reported that After School Regents Review and Saturday AP Exam Simulations are no longer an option. In District 24, over one hundred students lost their Saturday Math Prep Program. In District 5, one school was forced to cancel testing tutorials for ELL students. These types of losses directly affect student achievement, test scores and graduation rates. The cuts went deeper than programs, however. One school in District 2 lost funding that was allocated to pay for its graduation ceremony. A school in District 4 was in the process of purchasing air conditioners for classrooms that don't have any. Still others can no longer afford much-needed library books, computers and classroom materials.

Extra-curriculars such as clubs, teams, music lessons and other after-school activities have also taken a major hit in all five boroughs. Complicating matters, parents now are scrambling to pick up their children earlier or find alternative programs—a major inconvenience for working families, especially mid-year.

In addition, schools trying to keep up with the ebb and flow of staff illnesses, retirements and maternity leaves are reporting that their efforts to hire personnel and pay substitutes are in jeopardy. Principals are being forced to combine whole classes in large group settings due to the lack of teacher coverage, or split up individual classes among other classes, thus increasing class size.

The members of the “Keep the Promises” coalition believe much more could have been done to prevent the cuts from reaching the school level, and we are profoundly disappointed that the Department of Education chose not to collaborate or make smart choices. We stand united to right that wrong.

This battle is also about principle and accountability. The school system has been redesigned to give principals more resources and more authority over their school budgets. Yet, this surreptitious and unilateral reduction of school budgets demonstrates how fleeting that power can be. No one wants a system that places additional responsibilities and accountability on the shoulders of school leaders, then pulls the rug out from under them. There has to be a better way, and we want to work with the Department of Education to fix that major inconsistency.

Is it possible that the DoE’s finances are so tight that it was necessary to leave schools unprotected? Highly unlikely, considering that high-profile, high-cost consultants and a multitude of initiatives were held harmless from these cuts. We may never know the true story, however, because most of the DoE’s finances and data remain clandestine and out of reach of any meaningful accountability. It is time to open the DoE’s financial books. The “Keep the Promises” coalition came together because these challenging economic times demand strong leadership, and the children of this city deserve the quality education they have been promised. Besides the restoration of the recent cuts, we are also campaigning against proposals in the State and City budgets that would cost city schools approximately \$700 million and slow the pace of school construction. Our campaign will culminate in a large rally at City Hall at 4 p.m. on March 19. We encourage everyone who cares about New York City schools to join us.

Ernest Logan is the president of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators.