

A LOOK AT THE
**Impact
Schools**

A
DRUM MAJOR INSTITUTE
FOR PUBLIC POLICY
DATA BRIEF

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**DRUM
MAJOR**
INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
POLICY

A LOOK AT THE IMPACT SCHOOLS

SUMMARY

Inaugurated by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in January 2004, the Impact Schools initiative has brought increased police and security presence into 22 New York City middle and high schools to introduce more stringent enforcement of the Department of Education's discipline code. The schools targeted for inclusion in the Impact Schools initiative were selected by the New York Police Department and the Department of Education for their higher than average number of criminal incidents, transfers of students due to safety violations, and what the Department of Education terms "early warning problems" such as low school attendance and disorderly behavior. This report finds that high levels of crime and disorder are not the only characteristics that distinguish the Impact Schools from the rest of the New York City public school system. Based on an analysis of the 2003-2004 Annual School Reports released by the Department of Education, this report concludes that, as a group, the Impact Schools were more overcrowded than the average city high school, were far larger than most city high schools, received less funding per student for direct services, had more students over-age for their grade, and served a student body that was disproportionately comprised of poor and black students as compared to the average New York City public high school.

IMPACT SCHOOLS: A HISTORY AND OVERVIEW

New York City launched the school safety initiative known as Impact Schools in January 2004. A joint effort by the New York Police Department, the Department of Education, and the Mayor's Office, the program was initiated in 12 schools with high levels of reported crime. The Impact Schools initiative brought three police department strategies for reducing crime into the public schools: dispatching large numbers of uniformed police officers into targeted areas, cracking down on even minor incidents of disorderly behavior, and quickly punishing those who repeatedly violate the rules. In April of 2004, the program was expanded to an additional four high schools and six more joined the program in January of 2005. Also in 2005, five of the initial Impact Schools saw sufficient crime reduction that they were declared "ready to begin the transition out of Impact status" and had their numbers of police officers and school safety agents reduced.

Explicitly modeled on the New York Police Department's "Operation Impact" that employed crime data from the COMPSTAT computer system to identify and target high crime areas in the city for intensive policing, the Impact Schools were selected based on their higher than average number of criminal incidents, suspensions, and what the Department of Education terms "early warning problems" such as low school attendance and disorderly behavior.

According to the Mayor's Office, the initial twelve Impact Schools, while comprising less than 1 percent of the schools in the system, accounted for 13 percent of all serious crimes in the school system. The NYPD created a school safety task force of 150 uniformed officers dedicated exclusively to the Impact Schools. In 2005, the task force was increased to 200 officers. The targeted schools also received increased numbers of school safety officers and implemented stepped-up scanning and security measures.

The Impact Schools initiative is informed by the "Broken Windows" theory of crime prevention, which holds that visible disorder and minor quality of life offenses, if not addressed, will lead to more serious crime. Students who have been suspended more than twice in two years are singled out as "spotlight students" and subject to a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy that removes them from the school immediately upon the fourth offense, even if a

minor offense. This adaptation of the NYPD’s “Operation Spotlight” initiative streamlines the suspension process and lengthens suspensions, increasing the numbers of Off-Site Suspension Centers, After-School Instruction Centers for detentions, and Second Opportunity Schools for students who have been suspended for an entire year.

The cost of the Impact Schools initiative has never been fully explained by the Office of the Mayor or the Department of Education. In September 2004, the City received a \$6.25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to pay for 50 new police officers on the school safety task force, but city officials have maintained that other than this, the program merely shifts existing resources and thus has no additional cost.

To date, the results of Impact Schools initiative are mixed. While the city boasted in January of 2005 that major crime was down 43 percent overall at the sixteen schools where the program had been implemented so far, these gains were concentrated in a subset of the Impact Schools, while others, like Christopher Columbus and Evander Childs high schools, actually saw an increase in crime while in the program.

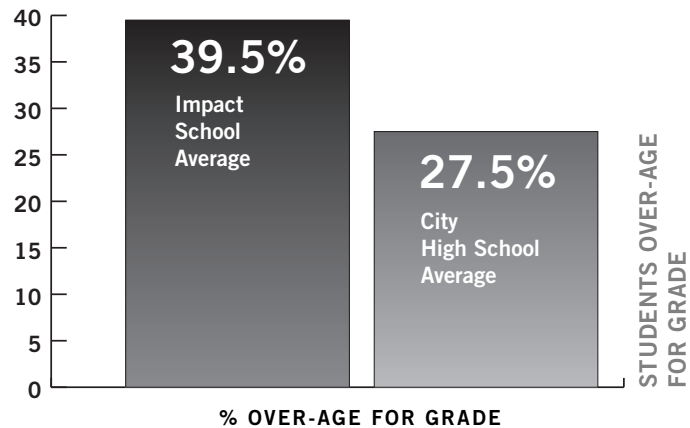
A NOTE ON SOURCES

This brief is based on data from the Annual School Reports released by the New York City Public Schools Division of Assessment and Accountability in cooperation with the New York State Education Department. The most recent reports cover the 2003–2004 school year, and data used in this brief refers to that year unless otherwise specified. Data on school spending refers to the 2002–2003 school year, the most recent year for which spending information about specific schools has been made public.

IMPACT SCHOOLS AS OF JANUARY 2004	IMPACT SCHOOLS AS OF APRIL 2004	IMPACT SCHOOLS AS OF JANUARY 2005
		Abraham Lincoln High School
Adlai E. Stevenson High School	Adlai E. Stevenson High School	Adlai E. Stevenson High School
Canarsie High School	Canarsie High School	Canarsie High School
Christopher Columbus High School	Christopher Columbus High School	Christopher Columbus High School
	Eramus Campus High Schools	Eramus Campus High Schools
Evander Childs High School	Evander Childs High School	Evander Childs High School
Far Rockaway High School	Far Rockaway High School	
Franklin K. Lane High School	Franklin K. Lane High School	
		Harry S. Truman High School
		John Bowne High School
Jordan L. Mott Junior High School	Jordan L. Mott Junior High School	Jordan L. Mott Junior High School
		Lafayette High School
Mario Salvadori Middle School (MS 222)	Mario Salvadori Middle School (MS 222)	
		Norman Thomas High School
	Samuel J. Tilden High School	Samuel J. Tilden High School
Sheepshead Bay High School	Sheepshead Bay High School	Sheepshead Bay High School
South Shore High School	South Shore High School	
		Springfield Gardens High School
	Theodore Roosevelt High School	Theodore Roosevelt High School
Thomas Jefferson High School	Thomas Jefferson High School	Thomas Jefferson High School
	Walton High School	Walton High School
Washington Irving High School	Washington Irving High School	

STUDENTS AT THE IMPACT SCHOOLS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE OVER-AGE FOR THEIR GRADE

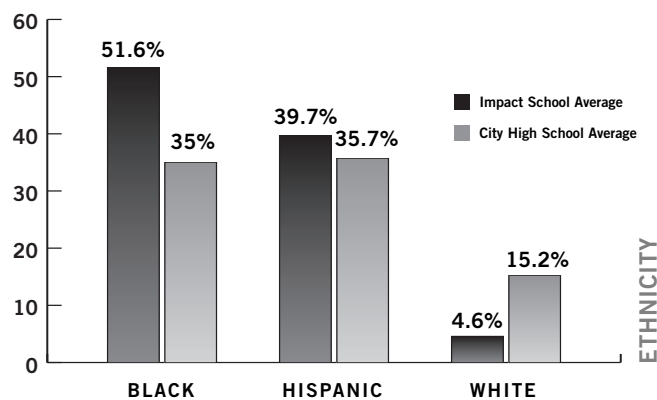
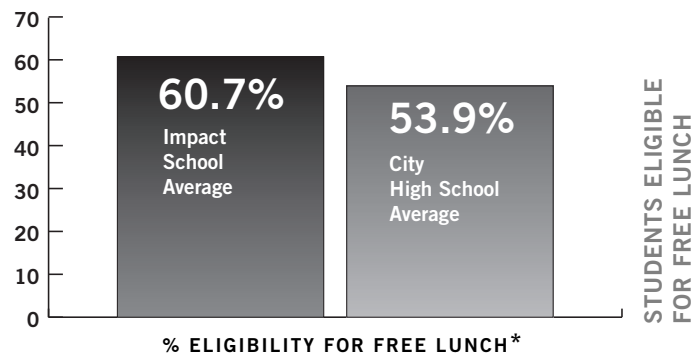
By the time they reach high school, students who are older than their peers in the same grade have already experienced a difficult academic trajectory. At the average city high school, 27.5 percent of the entering ninth and tenth grade students are over-age for their grade. At the average Impact School, however, nearly two out of every five students (39.5 percent) is over-age for their grade.



STUDENTS AT THE IMPACT SCHOOLS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY POOR AND BLACK

The student population at the Impact Schools is more heavily poor and Black than in city high schools as a whole. At the average city high school, 53.9 percent of students lived in households within 130 percent of the federal poverty level and thus qualified for a free lunch at school. This compares to 60.7 percent of students at the average Impact School.

Blacks make up a significantly greater proportion of the student population in the Impact Schools than they do in the city schools as a whole: 51.6 percent of students at the Impact Schools are black, compared with 35 percent in the average city high school. There is also a slightly greater proportion of Hispanic students in the Impact Schools (39.7 percent compared to 35.7 percent citywide) and a substantially lower proportion of white students (4.6 percent compared to 14.2 percent citywide).



*Indicator of poverty

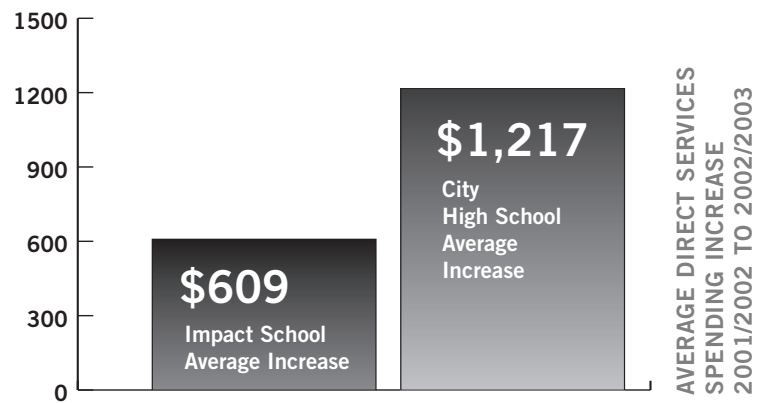
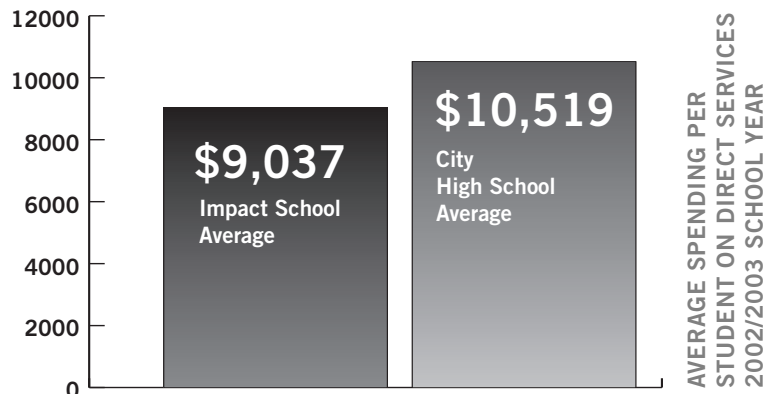
THE IMPACT SCHOOLS ARE UNDER-FUNDED RELATIVE TO OTHER CITY SCHOOLS

As the Court of Appeals concluded in their 2003 decision to *Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. v. State of New York*, the New York City public schools as a whole lack adequate funding to provide a “sound basic education” including a “meaningful high school education” to city students. But even in comparison with the average under-funded New York City high school, the 22 schools chosen to participate in the Impact Schools program fall still further behind in funding of direct services. Direct services include all services provided by the school to support teaching and learning, including classroom instruction, parent involvement, school safety, and building maintenance.

Direct student spending increased between the 2001–2002 school year and the 2002–2003 school year in both the average city high school and the 22 schools that would later join the Impact Schools program. However, at the Impact Schools per student spending increased only \$609, about half of the increase at the average city school (\$1,217).

In the 2002–2003 school year, the school year before the Impact Schools program was initiated at any school, the 22 schools that would eventually join the program spent an average of \$1,482 less per student on direct services than the average city high school. The Impact Schools’ spending average was \$9,037 per student compared to \$10,519 at high schools citywide. This means that the average student at one of the 22 Impact Schools benefited from only 86 percent of the direct services funding that the average student citywide received in 2003.

The Department of Education advises that per student spending differences among schools differ for a variety of reasons. Some schools may be more successful than others at obtaining competitive grants, for example. Small schools spread fixed costs among fewer students, increasing per student costs, while overcrowded schools may require additional services, such as paraprofessionals, also increasing per student costs. One difference in spending stems from the special needs of the student body, including characteristics like a higher proportion of students over-age for their grade or of students receiving free lunch. To capture some of these differences, the Annual School Reports compare spending to “similar schools” where the entering ninth and tenth graders are demographically similar in terms of the number of English Language Learners, students over-age for grade, and other characteristics. Comparing the Impact Schools to the schools the Department of Education defines as similar, the Impact Schools still fall behind: on average spending \$1,265 less per student than the average of the similar schools to which each Impact School is compared.



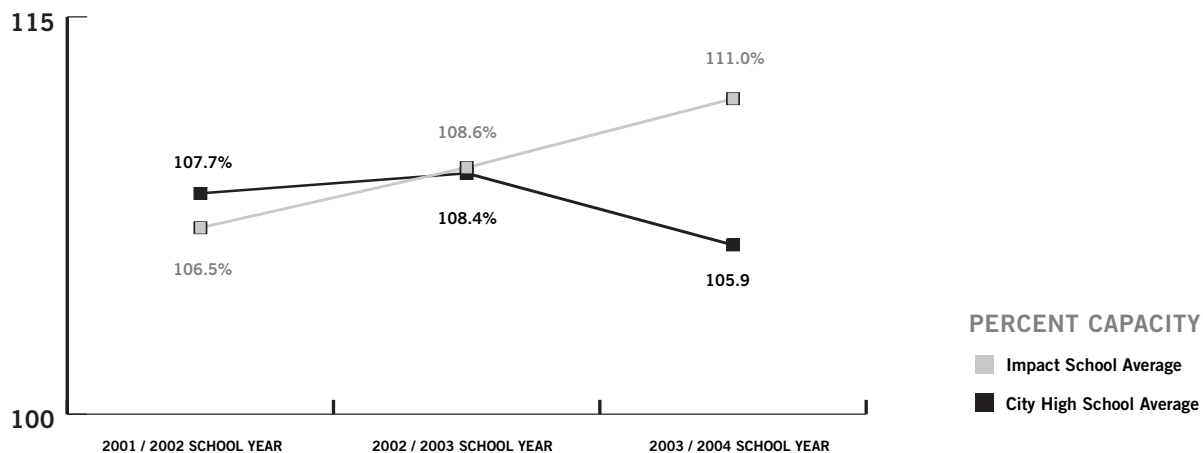
THE IMPACT SCHOOLS ARE AMONG THE LARGEST IN THE CITY

One of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's signature accomplishments has been the creation of small public high schools with a maximum enrollment of 500 students. Among the reasons the Department of Education has cited for promoting the establishment of small schools are studies indicating that small schools are safer than big ones.¹ It's not surprising, therefore, that the 22 schools singled out for their high crime rates are among the biggest in the city. On average, the Impact Schools enrolled 2,486 students each, making them larger than 81 percent of the high schools in New York. While there were no Impact Schools among the 100 smallest schools in the city, 14 of the city's 50 largest high schools are Impact Schools. The largest Impact Schools, Franklin K. Lane and John Bowne, each reported a student body of more than 3,700 students during the 2003-2004 school year.

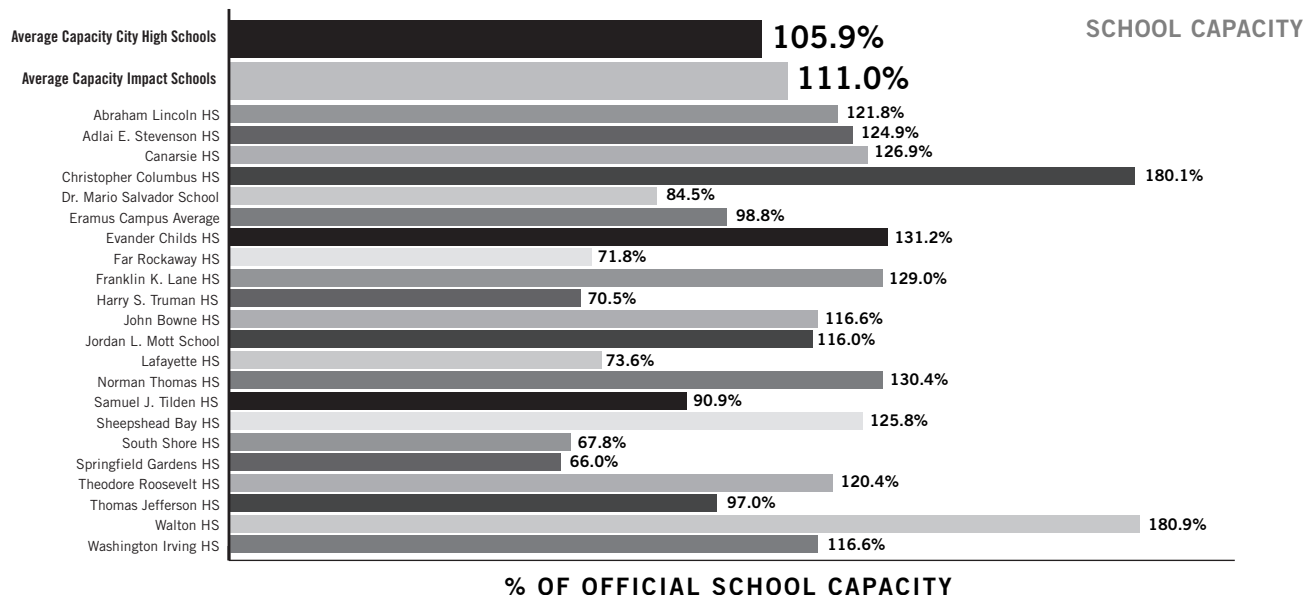
THE IMPACT SCHOOLS BECAME MORE OVERCROWDED EVEN AS OVERCROWDING DECLINED SYSTEM-WIDE

During the 2003-2004 school year, the average city high school was overcrowded, operating at 105.9 percent of its official capacity. But the Impact Schools were still more overcrowded, and congestion in these schools had only recently become so severe. Over a short time, the Impact Schools became increasingly overcrowded even as overcrowding declined among other city high schools. The worst of the Impact Schools, Walton High School and Christopher Columbus High, were operating at more than 180 percent of capacity during the 2003-2004 school year.

The Impact Schools averaged 111.0 percent capacity in the 2003-2004 school year, 4.8 percent more overcrowded than the average school citywide. The overcrowding in these schools was a recent phenomenon: two years before, during the 2001-2002 school year, the 22 schools that would eventually join the Impact Schools program were slightly less crowded than the average city high school. But while overcapacity at the average city high school grew only slightly between the 2001-2002 school year and the 2002-2003 school year, and actually declined between 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 as overcrowding was alleviated system-wide, average overcrowding in the schools that would be designated as Impact Schools continued to increase steadily.



¹ "\$51 Million Grant From Gates Foundation To Support Small, Dynamic High Schools To Boost Student Achievement: Press Release 259-03." New York City Department of Education Website. 2003. New York City Department of Education Office of Communications and Media Relations. September 17 2003. <http://www.nycenet.edu/Administration/mediarelations/PressReleases/2003-2004/9-18-2003-9-36-51-337.htm>



CONCLUSION

When the City of New York first explained its rationale for selecting schools that it believed would benefit from the Impact Schools strategy of increased police presence and more rigorous enforcement of school discipline, it noted that these schools accounted for a disproportionate share of the crime and disorder in the city school system. In a written statement, the Mayor’s Office also pointed out that the original twelve Impact Schools had above average suspension rates and below average attendance rates compared to high schools citywide. This report concludes that the 22 schools selected to participate in the Impact Schools program also shared some other distinguishing features.

Relative to the average city high school, the average Impact School had:

- More students over-age for their grade;
- A more heavily poor and Black student population;
- Less per capita spending on direct services to students and a smaller increase in this spending;
- A much larger student body;
- An increase in overcrowding even as city high schools overall saw less crowded conditions.

Is there a relationship between the rapid overcrowding of a school like Christopher Columbus, the tremendous proportion of overage students at a school like Walton, the low level of per student spending at a school like Franklin K. Lane, and the high levels of crime and disorder that led to their designation as Impact Schools? A more thorough study is necessary to determine the extent of a causal relationship, if any. What we can conclude, however, is that in addition to being “schools with some of the highest rates of disorder in the school system,”² the Impact Schools share a host of other challenges.

² Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. Press conference on Implementation Of School Safety Plan, January 5, 2004. Available at www.nyc.gov

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Originally called the Drum Major Foundation, DMI was founded by Harry Wachtel, lawyer and advisor to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the turbulent years of the civil rights movement. DMI was relaunched in 1999 by New York attorney William Wachtel, Harry's son, Martin Luther King III and Ambassador Andrew Young.

From releasing nationally recognized studies of our increasingly fragile middle class, the relationship between schools and communities and the impact of changing demographics on politics to launching an exciting and frequently-visited Web site that serves as a source of ideas and argument, DMI has demonstrated the strength of its mission and strategy.

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