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Testimony of Deputy Chancellor Kathleen Grimm

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Mayoral Control

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Good morning Speaker Silver, Chairwoman Nolan and members of the Education Committee. I am Deputy Chancellor Kathleen Grimm, and we are pleased to be here today to discuss the Department's efforts to address overcrowding under Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein. In order to support all of the gains in student achievement that the Chancellor just outlined, our students need appropriate facilities in which to learn. Before we review the details of the new Five Year Plan, I'd like to take this opportunity to review with you our capital accomplishments in this administration so far.

- 55,000 new seats in progress or completed from the current plan
- 18 new school buildings opened last fall
- 34,000 seats will come on-line over the next three years
- We've built hundreds of new science labs and libraries since 2004
- We have wired classrooms in nearly all schools for Internet access and we've also equipped them with wireless technology
- We have 2300 capital improvement projects in approximately 900 school buildings that will be completed through this current capital plan
- We've created 229 new small schools and charter school organizations since 2005, many of them in newly opened buildings or building that have undergone capital restructuring projects
- We are transforming 25 large, failing high schools into campuses of smaller schools, which are producing higher graduation rates

- All schools which began design in January 2007 and after are green-designed schools.

These accomplishments are a credit to the State Legislature which granted mayoral control AND subsequently provided the capital funding to make this all happen.

When we got here in 2002, we inherited a bifurcated capital and facilities management system. Prior to mayoral control of the school system, the School Construction Authority (SCA) and the Division of School Facilities (DSF) were separate entities with overlapping duties, little coordination and no accountability. Capital and facilities projects often ran behind schedule and over-budget, with lots of finger-pointing when things went wrong.

Mayoral control enabled us to bring all divisions that had any responsibility for capital planning and facilities management under one roof. Both the SCA and DSF now report to me, and we have established clear lines of responsibility for each. Now, the management of the Department of Education's Capital Program has been consolidated under one agency, the SCA, while DSF is responsible for maintenance, repair and safe operation of all facilities under the jurisdiction of the City's school system. By making the SCA completely accountable for the Capital Program, we have been able to improve management of the construction

process, reduce school construction costs by simplifying design standards, and increase competition among contractors. We also revived the Educational Construction Fund (ECF) as a part of our capital efforts, which facilitates comprehensive neighborhood development by constructing mixed-use real estate projects which feature new school facilities.

Under the new and improved SCA, we released an ambitious \$13.1 billion Plan (FY2005 – 2009) in November 2003, half of which was funded by you. This is the largest plan in the Department's history, which is for the first time based entirely on need and is aligned with our Children First reforms. We all know that everyone wants new schools, but there simply aren't enough dollars to meet all of our school construction goals. That said, we have made great strides in addressing capacity constraints in the parts of the City with the greatest overcrowding, and, as I mentioned earlier, improving our facilities to support the instructional needs of our students.

To avoid the pitfalls of previous plans we instituted an annual amendment process. Reviewing the plan regularly has allowed us to catch emerging needs quickly, so we can make changes as necessary. Most importantly, it gives us an opportunity for public comment and input from many levels. As part of our annual amendment process, we now do three things:

- 1) **Survey our buildings** every year to assess the most severe needs. This is known as our Building Condition Assessment Surveys (BCAS), where we send architects and engineers to each of our 1200+ school buildings to walk through with school principals so we have the most current information about the state of our buildings.
- 2) **Update our enrollment projections** every year. We pull together information from our demographers, who make enrollment projections five and ten years out. We then overlay information we obtain from the Department of City Planning, the Department of Health, and the U.S. Census, which give us data on housing starts, rezoning efforts, birth rates, immigration rates and migration rates. This helps us to stay on top of shifts in student enrollment, so that we can make adjustments based on where there may be an increase in student population in one part of the city or a decline in another part.
- 3) **Undertake a public review process** with the Community Education Councils (CECs), elected officials, and community groups. Every year, we send out a form to every CEC asking them if they want to conduct a public meeting or hearing on the Plan, and we make a presentation to each one that requests us. We brief the City Council by borough delegation every year, and attend other meetings as requested by elected officials. We also meet with community groups by request.

Each of these steps has made the Plan far better to manage, and has made the Plan more transparent than it has ever been. We will continue this annual process and we want to work with you to seek ways to improve it.

In early November, we released the proposed FY2010-2014 capital plan, and this week we just released the proposed amendment. This proposed plan is \$11.3 billion, with two major components:

- 1) \$5.2 billion for capacity. This includes the construction of 25,000 new seats, funding for replacement facilities whose leases are expiring, and charter partnership projects.
- 2) \$6.1 billion for capital investment. This includes our Capital Improvement Program (CIPs), funding for our Children First Initiatives such as campus restructurings, physical fitness projects and science labs, and mandated programs like remediation and building code compliance.

This plan does acknowledge our current economic realities, and as such our capital budget and its spending power are reduced from previous years. Even with reduced resources, this plan proposes the creation of 25,000 new seats (8000 of which are being rolled over from the current plan). These seats, coupled with more efficient use of existing space, are projected to address the overcrowding identified at a neighborhood level within districts. The current economic situation forces us to be more strategic with our resources and more efficient with our existing space, and will require us to work together to make tough decisions in the best interests of our children.

We took what we learned from the current plan and incorporated it into the next one. For instance, through our public engagement process, we heard from various communities and from you that planning at the school district level was not sufficient, and that we needed to examine specific neighborhoods for unique needs and pockets of overcrowding. We have folded this into the new FY2010 – 2014 plan and have tailored proposed projects to meet specific community needs. The inclusion of a new middle school in the Highbridge section of the Bronx is a product of ongoing discussions we have been having with families and community members, who pointed out to us that Highbridge is uniquely situated with limited public transportation access.

Also in the current plan, we developed a form for CECs to prioritize projects in their respective districts. We found this extremely helpful and as a result have been able to include many of their prioritized projects in the plan via our annual amendment process. Because this has been so useful, we are in the midst of developing a similar form for elected officials, so that we are better able to process your priorities and input.

A key part of this plan is our “facilities realignment work.” As I said before, especially in this time, we have to insist on responsible use of our resources. This means looking at overcrowding and enrollment trends, parent demand for particular programs, and school performance -- and then making adjustments

to how the facilities are used. This has meant opening new school options within our school buildings that have excess space, relocating schools from overcrowded buildings into under-utilized buildings, reconfiguring grade levels within a school, and adjusting zone lines. These are never easy decisions, but often, they are the most expedient, responsible means to solving problems such as over-enrollment while maintaining high educational standards.

Even with the improvements we have made with public engagement around the capital plan, we acknowledge that we need to do more in this area. In District 2, for instance, at the suggestion of all the elected officials who represent it, we have instituted a “war room,” modeled after Borough President Marshall’s recurring school construction meeting in Queens, which meets regularly to discuss the crowding issues and to identify viable solutions. And just last week, Speaker Silver hosted a meeting and tour of classroom space at Tweed – which, at his suggestion, will be home to two incubating schools that will serve the families of this neighborhood beginning in the fall.

The Chancellor spoke of our partnership with parents in Sunset Park and the work of our Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy. In District 19 in Brooklyn, we successfully moved PS 65, commonly known as the Little Red Schoolhouse, from two separate locations into one, newly constructed site, after getting input from school officials, parents and community members at the District Leadership Team meeting. We need to do more of this type of

collaboration throughout the City to ensure we are best addressing the needs and concerns of the families we serve.

Dealing with overcrowding issues, it is important to keep in mind that the capital plan focuses on the physical transformation of the DOE physical plant, with a long term perspective on demographics, enrollment, and educational innovation. As we continue this long term work, we simultaneously are focused on the current use of space by different school organizations, planning space and enrollment in a way that puts educators in the best possible position for success. We are working hard to ensure that these efforts proceed in tandem and with a great deal of public participation and input.

We are proud of all that we have accomplished so far, and there is still much more to do. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and we are happy to answer your questions.