

**BENJAMIN J. KALLOS**  
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May 10, 2021

Bill de Blasio  
Mayor  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Meosha Porter, Chancellor  
Department of Education  
Tweed, 52 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10007

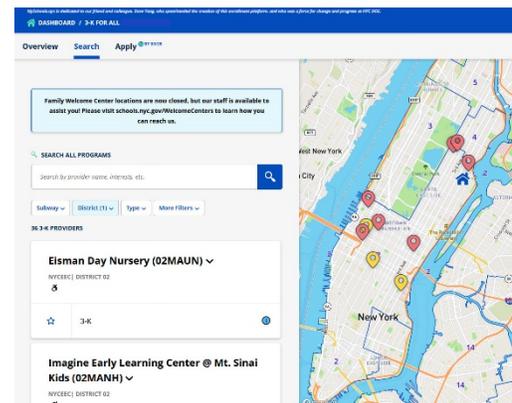
Nina Kubota, President  
School Construction Authority  
30-30 Thomson Avenue  
Queens, NY 11101

Dear Mayor de Blasio, Chancellor Porter, and President Kubota,

We are now less than 3 weeks away from the May 28 deadline for parents to apply for 3-K, and there are too few 3-K options for School District 2, which covers much of Manhattan. In order to take on this immediate crisis, please (1) direct public schools to make space available, (2) lease and build out new pre-kindergarten centers to accommodate 3 and 4-year-olds, and (3) open contracts for expansions by existing providers and applications from new providers.

We have a long history of working together to find and secure providers and spaces to accommodate the need for pre-kindergarten on the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island. After seven years of fighting for universal free pre-kindergarten to serve three and four-year-olds on the Upper East Side, I am grateful for the expansion to every neighborhood in the city for the 2021–22 school year. At the announcement, I noted our partnership, and the need to work together to find new seats. However, since then, despite work on the part of my office, we have not received any information as to your progress, or any sign of the same level of cooperation we've had in the past that successfully secured more seats for our children.

We are less than three weeks away from the May 28 deadline for parents to apply for 3-K, and there are only 36 providers in School District 2, which runs from the southern tip of Manhattan to East 100<sup>th</sup> Street. There are no providers below 23<sup>rd</sup> street or on Roosevelt Island, and only one on the Upper East Side. There are 2,966 four-year-olds enrolled in pre-kindergarten in District 2 as of the [2019 – 2020 school year](#), which should provide a reasonable expectation for the seat need we will have for three-year-olds.





### ***Direct Public Schools to Make Space Available for 3-K***

Declining enrollment in our public schools during the pandemic offers an opportunity to fill these seats with three-year-olds.

This school year saw a [4% decline in enrollment](#), a loss of 43,000 students, with pre-kindergarten down 13% and kindergarten down 9%, across the city. Neighborhoods in Manhattan were among the [hardest hit by families leaving the city](#) during the pandemic, leading to elementary schools in District 2 losing students at a higher-than-average number, according to [Chalkbeat](#). Two elementary schools in District 2 lost more than 20% of their enrollment: P.S. 234 lost 171 students (-26.76%) and P.S. 89 lost 104 students (-23.11%). On the Upper East Side, P.S. 158 Bayard Taylor lost 130 students (-16.19%) and P.S. 290 Manhattan New School lost 101 students (-17.50%). Upper East Side elementary schools and K–8 lost a combined total of 543 students. Although we might expect some of these students to return, a portion of these 543 seats could accommodate 3-K and could meet half the neighborhood’s need for this September.

Many of these schools have shared concerns that existing pre-kindergarten seats were underfunded, and that public health guidance during the pandemic has been inconsistent and changed from day to day with little warning from the Department of Education, including changes relating to the 6-foot rule, 3-foot rule, meals, and indoor spaces. These concerns have left public schools reticent to welcome a new 3-K program.

To address these concerns, the Mayor and Chancellor must increase funding for 3 and 4-year-old students in public schools, expand funding to cover overhead, and provide immediate clear and consistent guidance on reopening this coming school year. Furthermore, the Mayor and Chancellor must mandate that public schools that have seen declines in enrollment accept new 3-K classes on at least a temporary basis until enrollment is stabilizes.

### ***Lease and Build Out New Pre-Kindergarten Centers to Accommodate 3 and 4-year-olds***

The Department of Education and the School Construction Authority can and must fill large empty storefronts with pre-kindergarten centers.

New York City faced a blight of empty storefronts even before the pandemic. Ever-rising rents have even begun forcing out national chains and big box stores, leading the [Center for Urban Future to begin studying the phenomenon](#) more than a decade ago. While many chains have a small footprint, some have very large footprints that can accommodate pre-kindergarten centers including Duane Reade which closed 64 locations, Rite Aid which closed 10 locations, and many others.

On the Upper East Side, we’ve built out three new pre-kindergarten centers. One was built as part of new construction, another was added to a building that already contained a public school, and the last involved the conversion of a former garage to a new school. We’ve proven the model works here and all over the city.



**BENJAMIN J. KALLOS**

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL MEMBER  
DISTRICT 5, MANHATTAN

Our office has submitted multiple large vacant storefronts, from all over the neighborhood, but we have not received updates from the Department of Education and the School Construction Authority. Please provide an immediate response for the locations provided and a list of other sites in consideration.

The time is now to fill our vacant storefronts and build out the infrastructure our city's working families need in order to care for their children.

***Open Contracts for Expansions by Existing Providers and Applications from New Providers***

Our community-based organizations that are both non-profit and for-profit can help us address immediate and long term need for 3-K. The Department of Education must immediately open contracts for existing providers to expand, and new providers to join the free pre-kindergarten program.

Many community-based providers who already offer free pre-kindergarten in partnership with the Department of Education have multiple locations. Often, each location is structured as its own corporation to limit liability, despite common ownership and operations. The Department of Education has taken the position that these providers cannot add seats from additional locations. This must be immediately corrected. Existing providers should be able to add additional seats at any locations under common ownership or operations. We need the seats now.

There are many community-based providers who never participated in universal pre-kindergarten, in part because of a low reimbursement rate per student and a failure by the Department of Education to account for overhead costs, such as the high cost of rent in Manhattan. Mayor de Blasio recently announced full funding for indirect rates for city-contracted non-profits. In a similar vein, community-based providers should be able to submit CPA-certified financials to demonstrate overhead costs, such as Manhattan rent. The Department of Education should provide additional funding to cover the share of rent devoted to these programs and increase per-student funding.

Without enough seats in our public schools and our existing community-based providers, the Department of Education must immediately open the contracting process for new providers with an expedited timeline to open by September.

Between filling seats in existing public schools, leasing vacant storefronts, expanding seats with existing providers and adding new providers, we have a shot at getting the 3-K seats we need for this September, but we must act now.

Sincerely,

Ben Kallos  
Council Member  
District 5