



**Testimony of the New York City Department of Education  
on the Department's Policy on the Extended Use of School Buildings**

**Before the New York City Council Committees on Education,  
Youth Services and Public Housing**

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Good morning Chair Jackson, Chair Fidler, Chair Mendez and Members of the Committees on Education, Youth Services and Public Housing. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Education's policy on the extended use of school buildings. This policy governs the procedures for the use of school buildings, by both schools themselves as well as outside organizations, including community-based organizations (CBOs), beyond normal school hours and on days when school is not in session.

By way of introduction, my name is Veronica Conforme. I am a proud graduate of New York City public schools and I currently serve as the Deputy Chief Schools Officer for Operations in the Division of School Support and Instruction at the New York City Department of Education. The Division of School Support and Instruction, or DSSI, works to ensure that all our schools are provided with the academic, instructional, administrative and operational supports needed to help them advance their instructional priorities and drive student achievement.

In my role, I am responsible for the management and oversight of the administrative and operational supports provided by DSSI, including the administration of extended use permits. Prior to working at DOE, I held a number of positions in various non-profit organizations. As such, I am intimately acquainted with the extended use process from both ends of the spectrum and have a tremendous appreciation for the work of community-based organizations. I am also joined today by my colleague, John Shea, Chief Executive Officer for the Division of School Facilities (DSF). DSF is responsible for the management, maintenance, repair and safe operation of our 1,200+ school buildings and facilities.

As you are aware, extracurricular activities and after-school programs are an integral part of the school day and play an important role in the lives of our students. We share the Council's commitment to ensure that our kids have access to a rich variety of arts, sports, academic enrichment and other programs that complement our curriculum.

Our extended use policy is designed to encourage and foster these activities in schools. Along with programs run and sponsored by the Department, we have longstanding and deep-rooted partnerships with CBOs and other outside partners, many of whom operate programs in our buildings and play a significant role in the success of our students. In total, over 3,000 CBOs use our facilities every year. I would like to thank the Council for its continued financial support of the many CBOs and cultural institutions that work in our schools.



The Department's extended use policy is governed by State Education Law section 414, and has existed for more than 30 years. The rules and regulations for extended use have historically been included in our Manual of Standard Operating Procedures and have recently been codified in Chancellor's Regulation D-180, a copy of which is appended to the testimony.

Extended use permits must be submitted by all parties – both schools and CBOs – if there is planned use of a school building after school hours, generally from 3:30 p.m. onward during weekdays, as well as on days when school is not in session, including weekends and holidays. The permitting process ensures that space is allocated correctly, not overbooked, and that the appropriate arrangements are made to accommodate the building's use, including custodial, school safety and other operational supports.

First, let me address the extended use policy as it relates to schools and DOE organizations. Schools must submit an extended use permit, but they do not incur pass-through costs for the use of the building. Pass-throughs include custodial costs, which are outlined in custodial contracts, and security fees. Security is provided by the New York Police Department's School Safety Agents (SSA) and is required for all DOE-sponsored activities or events. The Department's central budget covers these expenses.

The following activities that benefit school communities are also funded centrally:

- Any school-related activities (e.g., enrichment, sports, clubs),
- PA and PTA meeting,
- Activities connected with Open School Week or Parent/Teacher Conferences,
- Public meetings of the Community and Citywide Education Councils (CEC),
- School Based Health Clinics,
- Beacon programs,
- Out-of-School Time (OST) activities,
- Official summer school sites, and
- Official PSAL games.

Now, let me turn to the specifics regarding the extended use policy and non-DOE organizations. All non-DOE organizations, including CBOs, must submit a permit to use school space. With the consent of the principal, these groups are able to use school buildings as long as the school does not need the space for a school-sponsored activity at the same time. Again, the extended use procedure is not new—CBOs and other community groups have been subject to our extended use provisions for many years.

During the immediate hours after school, from 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., school facilities fees are not charged, as other school activities often occur in the building during that time and custodial staff is on the premises already. After 6:00 p.m., when the building would ordinarily be closed, facilities fees are charged. The Department of Education uses all permit funds to cover custodial expenses. Community groups and CBOs are also responsible for security fees, which are charged



on an hourly basis. The organization will pay the Department to cover the costs and the Department will, in turn, pay the NYPD. Organizations do have the option of using an alternative security plan, which may not involve NYPD School Safety Agents, as long as the principal agrees.

Ultimately, the costs associated for keeping school buildings open after school hours must be accounted for in the City's budget, which is why we ask CBOs, and all other groups that use our facilities, to pay these basic pass-through costs. Given the number of community-based organizations that use our school buildings, extended use fees totaled \$16 million dollars citywide in FY 2010. Again, as meritorious as many of these organizations and activities are, the City simply does not have the ability to absorb those costs, especially in these difficult financial times when agencies have experienced several rounds of budget cuts.

To be clear though, the Department does not profit from extended use fees. We only charge organizations the pass-through costs for keeping the building open. And as you can see from the extended use permit application, appended to the testimony, the fees are quite reasonable. Whether \$2 per hour for a classroom or \$12 per hour for the use of an auditorium, these rates are, quite frankly, the best deal in town. Security fees, which are also billed at cost, can range from \$25 to \$43 per hour per SSA. The decision to bill at cost is intentional, as we want to encourage community partnerships, and we value the collective contributions and important roles that CBOs play in the lives of our students and neighborhoods.

This past summer, with the impact of a \$500 million cut from the State and the harsh economic environment looming, we carefully reviewed our extended use permit process as part of an overall budget assessment to ensure that resources stay where they belong -- in the classroom.

This analysis concluded that while most organizations have responsibly paid their extended use fees, others have been delinquent. Of the total \$16 million of incurred extended use costs, \$9.6 million has been paid and \$6.4 million remains outstanding. As a result, we have been working with CBOs to collect these outstanding fees and to ensure their extended use permits accurately reflect their use.

At the same time, in an effort to be as efficient and effective as possible, we originally planned to devolve money from the central budget that was allocated for schools' after-hours building use to the school-level for principals to manage based on a per capita formula. We anticipated this arrangement would be the best use of our resources and would be better for school communities.

However, based on feedback from our school leaders, we decided to manage the process centrally this year, while at the same time, we work with them to look for ways to make our extended use permit process as efficient and cost-effective as possible.

In the end, schools will be responsible for making sure all extended use permit requests reflect actual building use and the proper use of permits. Moving forward, networks will be working closely with schools in this regard.



In conclusion, our ultimate goal is to ensure that our extracurricular and after-school programs continue to thrive. At the same time, we are working to streamline our extended use permit process to ensure the most efficient use of space and resources, and we are going to use this school year to monitor and track extended usage closely. As I can personally attest, the Department, and the City at large, has greatly benefited from the contributions of community-based and non-profit organizations, and we look forward to continuing to partner with them on behalf of our students and school communities.

I thank the Committees for the opportunity to testify and welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.