



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
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Students from Families Seeking Asylum

Update on the City's Response

November 2022

**\$12 million for the 5,500+
newcomer children and youth
that have entered the public
school system since July**

Over the past several months, more than 19,000 asylum seekers have arrived in New York City, including more than 5,500 students who have entered the public school system. These children – who have little English proficiency, varying degrees of grade level

readiness, possible special education needs, and extreme trauma to overcome – need extensive academic and social-emotional support. For generations, New York City’s public schools have served as critical vehicles to help immigrant students learn English, become New Yorkers, and develop the skills, knowledge, and relationships they need to thrive here.

To help schools provide the necessary supports for these new students, the NYC Department of Education (DOE) announced last week an allocation of nearly \$12 million to public schools with at least 6 newly enrolled students living in temporary housing.¹ These schools will receive \$2,000 per student available immediately via School Allocation Memorandum 65 (SAM 65), as part of the City’s “Project Open Arms.” Schools with between one and five newly enrolled students will not receive new funding from SAM 65.

DOE does not track immigration status for students; however, it does collect housing status information at enrollment and is therefore using the number of newly enrolled students in temporary housing since July as a proxy for students from families seeking asylum. DOE has indicated that the new SAM 65 funding is being allocated in addition to the Fair Student Funding (FSF) these schools should receive as a result of higher student enrollment at the midyear adjustment (MYA) based on the register numbers finalized on October 31, 2022. The SAM 65 funding is meant to provide additional immediate social-emotional, curricular and extracurricular support to new multilingual learners. It can be used for per diem or per session staff, but cannot be used to hire permanent staff members.

The Comptroller’s office prepared this analysis of SAM 65 to assess what is currently known about where these new students have enrolled in school and the budgets of those schools, and to prompt strategic thinking about the resources and attention necessary to help these students succeed.

Students are concentrated in a small percentage of schools

According to DOE, a total of 369 schools (out of the City’s total of 1,588 public schools) are receiving a SAM 65 allocation, representing 5,851 students. More than 70% of these schools are elementary or K-8 schools, 15% are middle or 6-12 schools, and 15% are high schools including 4 transfer high schools.

Newcomer students are heavily concentrated in a small number of districts and schools, most likely in close proximity to shelters where families are being placed (Figure 1). DOE data shows that the 15 schools with the largest numbers of newcomer students have more than 17% of newcomer students enrolled while representing only 4% of the 369 schools. The Bronx and Queens have the largest number of schools with at least 6 students from families seeking asylum and the greatest numbers of these new students, particularly in Districts 9 and 10 in the Bronx and Districts 24 and 30 in Queens (Figure 2). Large concentrations of students also exist in schools in District 2 in Manhattan.

Placing students, especially elementary and middle school students, in the schools near the shelters where their families are placed fits with longstanding New York City education policy that students' first option is generally a neighborhood school. Traveling long distances or relying on bus transportation for families with young children carries multiple difficulties, especially for families new to the city.

At the same time, however, it means student assignment, especially at the elementary school level, bears little if any relationship to a school's preexisting capacity – bilingual teachers, dual language programs, social emotional and wellness supports – to meet these students' needs. There are schools designed to provide supports to recently arrived students. However, it is not at all clear that the elementary schools with large numbers of new students have the relevant programs or capacities to build on, or that they will have the near-term funding, coaching, professional development, and best practice sharing to help them rise to this challenge.

As the city moves beyond standing up emergency measures in response to the arrival of asylum seekers in NYC, the geographic data make clear that enrollment efforts must be expanded and centered on student and family needs, school capacity, and pre-existing programming such as dual language and ELL transfer programs.

Budget analysis of schools receiving a SAM 65 allocation shows significant funding gaps

Of the 368 schools receiving funding through SAM 65 that receive their base funding through Fair Student Funding (one school is a District 79 school that is funded outside of the FSF formula), 83% had their budgets cut by DOE last June for this school year, and 36% had an FSF budget cut of 10% or greater.²

While SAM 65 will provide a welcome boost to school budgets, the analysis shows that significant funding gaps will remain for many schools. The recent preliminary enrollment figures released by DOE show that enrollment declines this year were smaller than forecast, making it likely that many schools with newly enrolled students are already operating on underfunded budgets. Unlike FSF, which can be used to hire permanent teachers, social workers, counselors or paraprofessionals, the available staff titles covered by SAM 65 are restricted to per diem and per session staff as well educational consultants.

Furthermore FSF may not be enough for some schools to fully support their new students. The FSF MYA occurs in two tranches—the first at the end of November and the second in January/February. While schools with higher register numbers than DOE's forecast should receive 75% of their FSF increase by the end of November (25% is typically held back until January/February), it is not unusual that the information relevant to needs weights such as special education and English as a new language is not finalized until after the October 31 enrollment deadline. As a result, schools with newcomer students may not receive that needs-based funding until the second MYA in January. For all schools, including those now held harmless under DOE's new policy for under enrolled schools, it is unclear whether schools will continue to

receive full FSF funding for newcomer students enrolled after October 31, since grade weight FSF funding is typically limited to enrollment at the October 31 deadline.

A conservative estimate of the FSF funding for newcomer students – taking into account weights for grade, poverty, English as a new language, and for the transfer schools, a weight for heavy graduation challenge – is approximately \$39 million. This calculation does not include additional funding for special education, as incoming students must be assessed before those needs are known, nor does it include the heavy graduation challenge/over the counter enrollment weight that newcomer high school students may ultimately receive. Additionally adjustments to the FSF collective bargaining amounts that schools receive on top of the weights is not included in this estimate.

On average, the difference between the SAM 65 allocation for these 368 schools and the estimated value of the FSF for these students is \$73,000 per school—enough to pay one new full-time educator, social worker or mental health worker.³ For some schools that saw large FSF cuts this summer and are welcoming large numbers of new students now, SAM 65 cannot make up for that loss in FSF, especially if they must wait until January for a significant amounts of new FSF funding to fill critical staffing positions.

A middle school in District 2 saw a cut of over \$2 million in FSF this year. The school has welcomed 61 newcomer students. While it is receiving a SAM 65 allocation of \$122,000, the Comptroller's office estimates the school should receive more than three times that allocation – \$435,000 in FSF value for these students. An elementary school in Queens, which saw a cut of over \$500,000 in FSF this year, has 70 new students from families seeking asylum. The \$140,000 they are receiving from DOE via SAM 65 is over \$300,000 less than what they ultimately should receive in FSF.

Conversations with school leaders make it clear that increasing staff is what schools need to support their newest students. Rather than require these schools to potentially wait until this winter to hire the ENL teachers and bilingual social workers that they need, the Comptroller's Office recommends the following immediate steps:

- Schools with students from families seeking asylum should be prioritized now for the full FSF funding their enrollment entitles them to, not just 75%.
- DOE should allow principals to use SAM 65 to hire permanent staff.
- DOE should provide full ongoing funding to schools for newcomer students that enroll after October 31.

The time for more strategic thinking is now

As New York City schools outstretch arms to our youngest newcomers with a welcome befitting this city of immigrants, the DOE must develop a comprehensive plan for schools that are supporting new students from families seeking asylum. It is imperative that DOE meets this unique challenge with a plan to provide schools with full FSF for these students now so principals can hire the teachers, social workers and support staff needed. And it should come with the

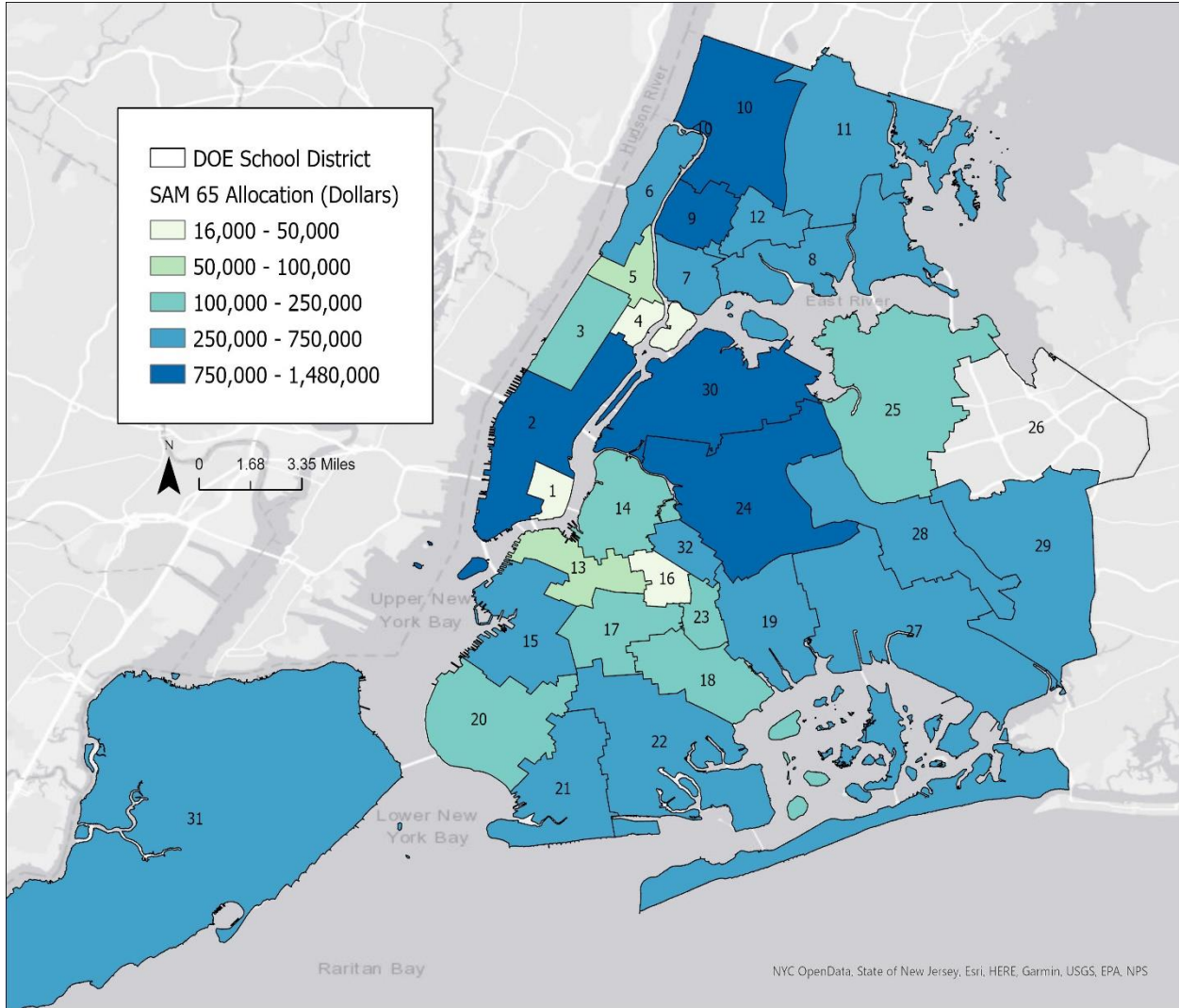
coaching, professional development, and sharing of best practices to help schools spend those resources (as well as pre-existing ones) most effectively.

Going forward, the arrival of students from families seeking asylum has highlighted how under resourced our schools are when it comes to supporting our highest need students. As recently recommended by the Fair Student Funding Working Group, DOE should add and fully fund a weight for students in temporary housing (STH) as well as a concentration weight which would provide additional funding to schools with the highest concentrations of needs including students in poverty, students with disabilities, English language learners, students in temporary housing and students in foster care. These weights do not currently exist in the FSF formula.⁴

Finally, the enrollment method DOE is using to place newcomer students in schools should take both student and family needs and school capacity, programming and funding into consideration moving forward. This requires increased transparency on the student intake process, the methods being used to determine where students are placed, the screens DOE is using to assess students' academic, mental health and other needs, and the work being done to enable schools to meet those needs.

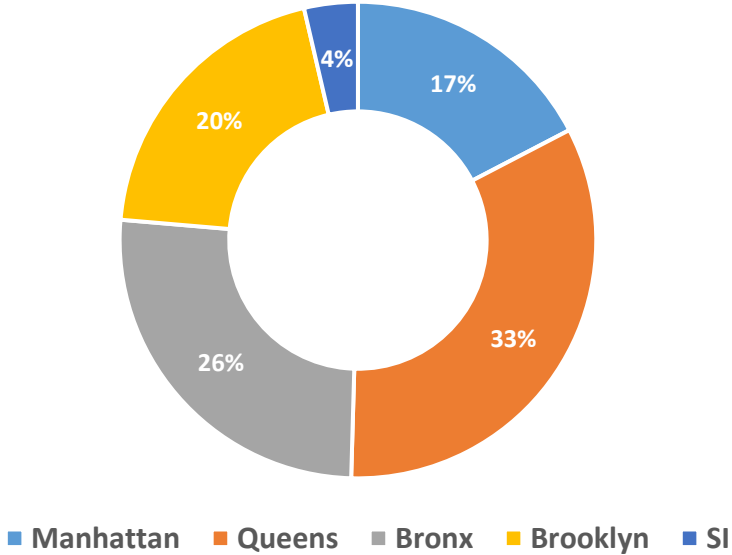
Appendix

Figure 1: District Level SAM 65 Allocation



Source: NYC Department of Education

Figure 2: Distribution of 5,851 Newcomer Students Across NYC



Source: NYC Department of Education

Endnotes

¹ [New York City Department of Education School Allocation Memorandum 65](#)

² [Comptroller's Analysis of DOE School Budget Cuts](#)

³ [United Federation of Teachers DOE and City Salary Schedules](#)

⁴ [Fair Student Funding Working Group Final Report](#)