

Anger and Accusations Greet Budget Cuts

by Gail Robinson

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Image from [Bronx High School of Science](#) Students at Bronx High School of Science, slated to bear some of the budget's largest cuts.

For years, the city schools have not only been immune to budget cuts. They have seen their funding increase dramatically. Now, though, that has started to change, and the controversy over whether to cut, how much and where has touched off a heated debate. A number of City Council members, including Council Speaker Christine Quinn, have indicated they will not vote for any budget that includes cuts to the classroom.

Quinn said she could not "in good faith" support a budget that cut classroom spending. Acknowledging the straitened economic picture, said, "Even in that climate, even with that reality, there are some services that have to be protected."

Councilmember Lew Fidler agreed. "There generally a sense in this council that this budget is not going to pass if there's a dime of cuts in the classroom," he said.

The money at stake represents a tiny proportion of the school system's \$17.6 billion budget. But with schools still suffering from low achievement rates, advocates see any cut as unconscionable (as Mayor Michael Bloomberg himself [might say](#)) and a betrayal by the mayor of his pledge to remake the nation's largest public school system. In the last week, the debate has become even more contentious. The administration has sought to blame the state for the cuts, while state officials have blasted the city for trying to shortchange New York's poorest children and council members have accused the administration of "divisive" tactics.

Subtracting by Adding

By most measures, the cut is not exactly a cut. Overall, according to a statement by Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, funding for schools will increase by \$664 million in fiscal year 2009, with \$535 million coming from the state largely as a result of the settlement in the [Campaign for Fiscal Equity suit](#) over school financing. However, Klein said, basic costs for education are projected to rise by \$963 million next year because of contract agreements with teachers and other education department employees, and rising fuel, energy and special education costs. This leaves the city with a \$299 million gap in money for education. (The city has already reduced education

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spending this year from its anticipated level.)

Klein said he has identified some \$200 million in cuts in what the department calls "non-school spending" -- such as the central and district administrations. That leaves almost \$100 million to come out of spending for the district's approximately 1,200 schools.

Opposing the Cuts

Over the past several months, education advocates, many members of the City Council and other officials have adamantly opposed any cut in city education spending. In February the