



Independent Democratic Conference

# School Lunch Flunks



*An Investigation into the Dirtiest New  
York City Public School Cafeterias*



November 2016

## INTRODUCTION

On May 23, 2016 New York City television station WPix 11 published data on health violations accumulated by schools during the 2014-2015 school year. The data, obtained through a Freedom of Information request to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) revealed evidence of mice inside schools during more than 400 school visits by health inspectors. Hazards included live roaches 61 times, 42 schools without soap and cold water for lunchroom staff to wash their hands, and 61 schools lacking the proper thermostats to measure food temperature.<sup>1</sup>

Parents expressed outrage to the press about being left in the dark about inspection results, and the New York City Department of Education (DOE) Chief of School Support Services Eric Goldstein vowed to work with DOHMH to make information associated with these health inspections more accessible to parents. However, since the release of the data, the DOE and DOHMH have failed to make public a plan to better inform parents of these inspection results.

In the meantime, other health related hazards in school cafeterias have gone public. On September 16, 2016 various publications including the New York Daily News reported on a green substance found in school pizzas.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, this caused the DOE to temporarily suspend pizza as a school lunch option for students. On October 21, 2016 the pizza option was made available to students again, but according to the New York Daily News, school pizza was again eliminated as a lunch option after another discolored slice was found at a school cafeteria on November 9, 2016.<sup>3</sup>

The Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) believes that it is imperative that parents are properly informed about the state of food safety at their children's school cafeteria. And while the NYCDOE publicly promised to work with DOHMH to make the data on school cafeteria inspections accessible to parents, that pledge has yet to be fulfilled. As a result, the IDC is ready to take action to ensure parents are well informed about the quality of their children's lunchrooms. The IDC will introduce legislation that will require that DOHMH inform the public about the cleanliness of school cafeterias in the same manner it informs the public about restaurants, which would require that each school cafeteria receive a letter grade that is made public to all parents by posting it in the school and by including this information with the existing school score cards created by the DOE. The IDC believes that this transparency will force cafeteria administrators to clean up their act. We expect our kids to get A's and we should expect the cafeterias that feed them to work just as hard to make the grade.

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, M. (2016). "Critical health code violations found at several NYC school cafeterias." Retrieved from <http://pix11.com/2016/05/23/critical-health-code-violations-found-at-several-nyc-schools/>

<sup>2</sup> Chapman, B. (2016). "NYC schools pull pizza from lunch menu after suppliers deliver green slice." Retrieved from <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-schools-pull-pizza-lunches-finding-green-slices-article-1.2795526>

<sup>3</sup> Chapman, B. (2016). "Pizza cut from NYC public schools again after another unsightly slice surfaces." Retrieved from [http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/pizza-cut-nyc-public-schools-bad-slice-surfaces-article-1.2865009?utm\\_source=Master+Mailing+List&utm\\_campaign=9cb39e10f3-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2016\\_11\\_09&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_23e3b96952-9cb39e10f3-75495621](http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/pizza-cut-nyc-public-schools-bad-slice-surfaces-article-1.2865009?utm_source=Master+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=9cb39e10f3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2016_11_09&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_23e3b96952-9cb39e10f3-75495621)

### **Key Findings**

- From NYC Fiscal Year (FY) 2013-14 to FY 2015-16 the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has conducted **8,541 inspections** of school cafeterias.
- The number of violations issued has increased by **17%**, from **6,958 in FY 13-14 to 8,114 in FY 15-16**
- The number of inspections has also risen, from **2,740 to 2,976, a 9% increase.**
- The number of cafeterias inspected has risen by **4%**, from **1,318 to 1,377.**
- The number of violations found per inspection has risen on average from **2.54** in FY 13-14 to **2.73** in FY 15-16.
- The number of inspections that would be graded at an “A” has **declined** from **87.88%** in FY 13-14 to **85.62%** in FY 15-16.
- The number of inspections that would be graded at a “B” has **increased** from **10.4%** to **13.27%**.
- There are **29 schools** that have consistently earned a score during the past three academic years that would have always returned a “B” or “C” letter grade.
- **61 schools** in 2015-2016 were inspected more than once, and never earned a score that would have returned an “A” letter grade.
- Violations for conditions that can lead to vermin infestations and violations issued for evidence of mice are two of the five most common violations issued against school cafeterias.
- **31** cafeteria inspections in FY 15-16 earned scores that would have led to a “C” grade.
- We found **30 schools** throughout the City that had at least one “B” or “C” level inspection in each of the three fiscal years examined.
- IDC staff identified **61 schools in the FY 15-16** school year that had a “B” or “C” grade in every inspection they had during this period. This was up from 32 schools in FY 14-15 and 40 schools in FY 13-14.
- Inspectors gave out **442 mice related violations to 320 different school cafeterias** in FY 15-16.
- **Inspectors found 400 mice excreta** during one inspection of the cafeteria for the Sixth Avenue Elementary School in Manhattan.
- In 2015-16, inspectors gave out a **155 violations for flies to 136 schools.**
- Inspectors in March 2016 found **130 flies** present at Franklyn D. Roosevelt High School in Brooklyn.
- **Four schools** in the city had evidence of **rat activity** present in FY 15-16.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***DOHMH Food Safety Inspections***

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) is responsible for conducting annual inspections of New York City public school cafeterias. Similar to inspections DOHMH conducts across restaurants in New York City, schools are given a score based on how well they follow City and State food safety requirements. Inspectors check for food handling, food temperature, personal hygiene, facility and equipment maintenance and vermin control. Violations are classified as either critical or general. Critical violations generally deal with issues that can directly affect food safety, such as the presence of vermin, cooking food to the incorrect temperature, or a failure by staff to use the correct food handling methods. General violations deal with broader issues, like the general cleanliness and maintenance of a location. Critical violations can also be classified as public health hazards if the inspector feels they present a clear and pressing danger to public safety. Each violation earns a certain number of points. The points for a particular violation depend on the health risk it poses to the public. Inspectors assign additional points to reflect the extent of the violation. A violation's condition level can range from 1 (least extensive) to 5 (most extensive). At the end of the inspection, the inspector totals the points and this number is the inspection score.<sup>4</sup> The higher the score, the worse the school performed during the food safety inspection.

In the case of school cafeteria inspections, the data received from DOHMH indicates that there are two inspection programs: a pre-permit inspection program for new schools before are operational; and a cycle inspection program for existing schools, which occur at least once per year and are broken down into three inspection types. The first type is an initial inspection, which all operational New York City public schools go through at least once per year; the second type is a re-inspection, which the DOHMH conducts within two weeks of an initial inspection if a violation poses a public health hazard or if the school has accumulated an egregious number of violations; and a final compliance inspection for persistently poor performing schools. Because parents would be most concerned about schools their children already attend, the IDC analysts focused on cycle inspection program data scores associated with the three types of inspections.

### ***Public Letter Grades***

Unlike restaurant inspections, school scores are not converted into letter grades that are made public. For restaurants, dining facilities that score between 0 and 13 points during their initial inspection are awarded an "A" grade. Those accumulating 14 or more points have the ability to ask for a re-inspection. They are given a "grade pending" sign and are re-inspected typically one month after the initial inspection. Restaurants going through a re-inspection are given a second opportunity to obtain an "A" grade, if the dining facility scores between 0 and 13 points. However, restaurants failing to meet the requirements of an "A" grade during re-inspection are awarded a "B" if they accumulate between 14 and 27 points, or a "C" if they amass 28 or more points. Staff examination of the inspections data found that DOHMH will conduct re-inspections of cafeterias,

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (2012). "How we score and grade". Retrieved from <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/rii/how-we-score-grade.pdf>

but only if the inspection initial inspection would have earned a “C.” None of the results are made public, so parents have no idea that the cafeteria their children are eating at was found to be as clean as a “B” or “C” level restaurant.

### **DATA TRENDS FOR SCHOOL CAFETERIA INSPECTIONS 2013-16**

IDC staff poured through three fiscal years’ worth of inspections of school cafeterias conducted by DOHMH. During that period, DOHMH conducted 8,541 different inspections, including pre-permit inspections, cycle inspections, re-inspections and enforcement inspections. Cycle inspections made up the overwhelming majority of those inspections. DOHMH groups the violations by each New York City Fiscal Year (FY), which runs from July 1 to June 30, so FY 15-16 for example, will cover all inspections conducted between July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016.

#### *General Breakdown of Inspection Results*

<b>Fiscal Year:</b>	<b>FY 13-14</b>	<b>FY 14-15</b>	<b>FY 15-16</b>
Cafeterias Inspected	1,318	1,384	1,377
Total Inspections	2,740	2,825	2,976
Inspections Per Cafeteria	2.08	2.04	2.16
Total Violations Issued	6,958	7,292	8,114
Violations Per Inspection	2.54	2.58	2.73
Critical Violations	1,161	1,242	1,378
Critical Violations per Inspection	0.42	0.44	0.46
Percentage of Violations labeled Critical	16.69%	17.03%	16.98%

As the table above shows, the number of violations has increased significantly in the past three fiscal years, from 6,958 to 8,114, a 17% increase over the FY 13-14 period. During that same time, the number of cafeterias being inspected and the number of inspections themselves have also increased, but those increases (A 4% increase in cafeterias being inspected and a 9% increase in total inspections) have both been smaller than the increase in violations issued. For this reason, the number of violations per inspections have risen during this period, both for violations in general as well as for the number of critical violations being issued. The number of inspections per cafeteria have also gone up. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of total violations labeled critical between FY 13-14 and FY 15-16, though the latest numbers are better than in FY 14-15.

DOHMH classifies violations using various codes. Codes can refer to a single type of violation or to a related group of possible violations. There are 67 different codes given for the different types of violations that are scored by DOHMH. Of these 67 codes, five made up the majority of the scored violations issued to school cafeterias in each of the three fiscal years examined.

***Most Common Scored Violation Types***

VIOLATION CODE	Violations FY 13-14	Cafeterias in FY 13-14	Violations FY 14-15	Cafeterias in FY 14-15	Violations FY 15-16	Cafeterias in FY 15-16
<b>10F</b>	3,760	1,030	4,212	1,099	4,986	1,114
<b>10B</b>	652	422	578	380	646	421
<b>08A</b>	500	318	527	314	559	399
<b>04L</b>	423	298	368	283	442	320
<b>10C</b>	427	291	311	242	225	194

The most commonly issued violations fall under the **10F** code. This code refers to violations dealing with the poor maintenance or improper construction of surfaces not used in food preparation (walls, floors) or equipment not used in storing or preparing food. Dusty floors and stained walls are common examples of 10F violations, which make up more than half of all the violations issued in any one fiscal year. These are considered general violations.

The next most common code is **10B**, which concern issues of the poor disposal of liquid wastes, the possible cross-contamination of potable water sources with waste liquids, or improperly installed or maintained condensation pipes. These are considered general violations. **8A**, which we discuss in greater detail later in the report, deals with violations that make pest infestations more likely. These are usually considered general violations, though some can rise to the level of critical violations. **4L** is the code for evidence of mice activity. These are considered critical violations. This type of violation was the fourth most common in FY 14-15 and FY 15-16 and the fifth most common in FY 13-14. The final most common scored violation fall under code **10C**, which refers to violations dealing with insufficient or inadequate lighting. The data shows that there has been a significant (47%) decline in this type of violation even as the total number of violations increased.

***Inspection Outcomes***

Percentage of Inspections	FY 13-14	FY 14-15	FY 15-16
A - 13 or Fewer points	87.88%	87.50%	85.62%
A - 0 points, No scored violations	20.66%	21.17%	18.65%
B - 14-27 Points	10.40%	11.15%	13.27%
C - 28 or more Points	1.72%	1.35%	1.11%
Violation for Vermin/Pest Conditions	14.96%	14.12%	14.99%

The data shows that most inspections conducted in school cafeterias return scores that would equal a grade of “A” for a commercial restaurant. A significant percentage of inspections do not find any

scored violations at all. Unfortunately, the data also shows a disturbing downward trend in these numbers. The percentage of inspections that would be graded an “A” has fallen by two full percentage points between FY 2013-14 and FY 2015-16, as has the percentage of inspections that found no scored violations at all. The percentage of truly terrible inspections that would yield a grade of “C” has also declined. What we see is an increase of almost three full percentage points for inspections that would return a “B” grade. This increase in mediocre inspection results is something that we must fight to turn around.

### *Perennially Poor Performing School Cafeterias*

A deeper dive into the school cafeterias that would return a “B” or “C” grade reveals that there are 29 schools with cafeterias that have had “B” or “C” level inspections every fiscal year that we examined. These are school cafeterias with perennial problems of poor food safety inspection performance. It is time for our city government to be more transparent, and make this information available to parents and guardians. It is unacceptable that students in 30 schools across New York City have attended a school with a cafeteria that would have earned a “B” or “C” on their school food safety inspection three years in a row.

School Name	FY 13-14 Inspection Score (Grade)	FY 14-15 Inspection Score (Grade)	FY 15-16 Inspection Score (Grade)
ASTORIA COMMUNITY CENTER LEADERS...	16 (B)	22 (B)	18 (B)
BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND...	14 (B)	22 (B)	15 (B)
BROOKLYN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL	17 (B)	19 (B)	15 (B)
COMMUNITY VOICES MIDDLE SCOOU	14 (B)	15 (B)	19 (B)
FRANCIS LEWIS HIGH SCHOOL	19 (B)	27 (B)	20 (B)
GED PLUS @ Chelsea Hudson Guild	20 (B)	26 (B)	14 (B)
GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL	16 (B)	22 (B)	21 (B)
HILLCREST HIGH SCHOOL	16 (B)	15 (B)	17 (B)
I.S. 126 QUEENS	15 (B)	15 (B)	15 (B)
I.S. 239 BROOKLYN	25 (B)	31 (C)	14 (B)
I.S. 318 EUGENIO MARIA DE HOSTOS	15 (B)	15 (B)	14 (B)
I.S. 51 STATEN ISLAND	14 (B)	20 (B)	30 (C)
I.S. 72 QUEENS	16 (B)	17 (B)	16 (B)
J.H.S. 141 QUEENS	14 (B)	18 (B)	14 (B)
JHS 210 ELIZABETH BLACKWELL	48 (C)	19 (B)	39 (C)
LONG ISLAND CITY HIGH SCHOOL	14 (B)	14 (B)	24 (B)
M.S. 144 BRONX	20 (B)	17 (B)	18 (B)
NORTH QUEENS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL	14 (B)	18 (B)	14 (B)
P.S. 156 BROOKLYN	15 (B)	15 (B)	14 (B)
P.S. 21 BROOKLYN	17 (B)	24 (B)	17 (B)
P.S. 243 BROOKLYN	19 (B)	15 (B)	40 (C)
P.S. 287 BAILEY K. ASHFORD	14 (B)	15 (B)	26 (B)
P.S. 298 BROOKLYN	14 (B)	14 (B)	15 (B)
P.S. 306 QUEENS	15 (B)	15 (B)	21 (B)
P.S. 307/M.S. 313 BROOKLYN	23 (B)	18 (B)	20 (B)
P.S. 35 QUEENS	16 (B)	15 (B)	15 (B)
P.S. 398 BROOKLYN	20 (B)	16 (B)	19 (B)
P.S. 81 BROOKLYN	14 (B)	18 (B)	17 (B)

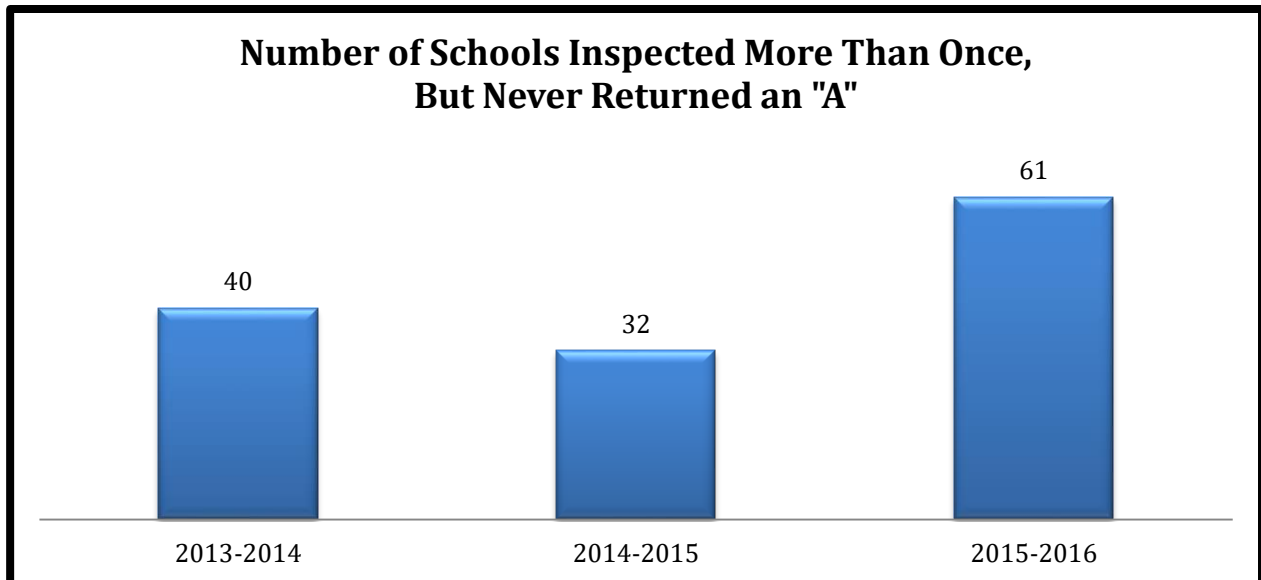
P.S. 86 QUEENS	18 (B)	19 (B)	20 (B)
P.S. 91 BROOKLYN	14 (B)	16 (B)	14 (B)

J.H.S. 210 Elizabeth Blackwell, which is located in Ozone Park, Queens, is a good example of some of what we see at the schools above. The first inspection in FY 13-14 returned a score of 8, good enough for an “A.” The following inspection was disastrous – with the total score coming in at 48, including two violations for evidence of mice. This prompted a re-inspection a month later, which scored 19 points, including yet another violation for evidence of mice, enough for just a “B” grade. The first inspection of FY 14-15 scored 19 again, and again evidence of mice were found. The second inspection for the fiscal year was better, with a score of 9, good enough for an “A” again. The first inspection of FY 15-16 scored 19 again, and the mouse problem continued, with 6 mouse excreta found. The second inspection during this fiscal year, in the early part of March 2016 was another disaster, with a score of 39, well into “C” territory. Seventy-seven mouse excreta were found during this inspection. Within three weeks the re-inspection came. This time the score was 26, enough for a “B,” but barely. This time only 10 mouse excreta were found. This school was inspected eight times during these three fiscal years. Out of those eight inspections, two would have brought in an “A,” two would have received a “C,” and four would have been graded at a “B,” including both re-inspections following the “C” grades.

IDC analysts also looked into the number of school cafeterias that go through more than one food safety inspection during an academic year and never achieve a score to that would return an “A.” These schools are also considered a perennial food safety problem for students. During the 2013-2014 school year, 40 school cafeterias were inspected at least twice and never earned a score that would have returned an “A”; during the 2014-2015 academic year, 32 school cafeterias were inspected at least twice and never earned a score that would have returned an “A”; and during the 2015-2016 school year, 61 school cafeterias were inspected more than once and never earned a score that would have returned an “A.”

One school that exemplifies this is I.S. 72 in Jamaica, Queens. This school has been inspected six times during the last three fiscal years, twice during each period. Every single one of these inspections would have returned a grade of “B.” Both inspections during FY 13-14 had violations issued for evidence of mouse activity, and during one of them inspectors also saw a couple of roaches. In FY 14-15 both inspections turned up mouse activity and again, inspectors found roaches during one of them. Both inspections during FY 15-16 would have been graded “B” as well. This final year did break the pattern though – mouse activity was found only during the first inspection of the period. The second inspection turned up live roaches yet again.





*“C” Cafeterias in the 2015-16 school year.*

As explained in the section “School Health Inspections,” schools are given a score based on how well they follow City and State food safety requirements. The higher the score, the worse the school performed during the food safety inspection. For restaurants, dining facilities that score between 0 and 13 points are awarded an “A” grade, those with a score between 14 and 27 are awarded a “B” grade, and dining facilities with more than 28 points are given a “C” grade. **After sifting through the 2016-2016 data, the IDC found 31 schools with a final food safety inspection score above 28 points; in other words, 31 C rated schools. And 23 of those 31 schools had violations associated with pests and vermin.**

School	Date of Inspection	Inspection Score	Violations	Types of Pests and Vermin
CSI H.S.	3/30/2016	28	9	Mice excreta
Franklin D. Roosevelt HS	3/9/2016	41	14	Filth flies, fruit flies
Fredrick Douglass Academy	7/17/2015	28	11	Mice
I.S. 211 Brooklyn	12/9/2015	40	13	Roaches, Mice
I.S. 227 Queens	9/18/2015	32	7	Mice
I.S. 51 Staten Island	10/6/2015	30	9	Mice
In-Tech Academy MS/HS 368	5/5/2016	28	14	Mice
JHS 210 Elizabeth Blackwell	3/14/2016	39	7	Mice
John Bowne HS	2/3/2016	29	6	
Linden Learning Center (PS 213)	11/13/2015	31	5	Mice
New Explorers and Bronx Leadership	4/20/2016	29	6	Mice
P.S. 100 Queens	3/18/2016	41	7	Flies
P.S. 104 Queens	7/13/2015	37	8	Flies
P.S. 152 Gwendoline N. Alleyne	2/2/2016	28	6	Flies
P.S. 16 Staten Island	9/22/2015	44	9	Mice, Roaches
P.S. 18 & P.S. 278 Paula Hedbavny	1/11/2016	28	1	
P.S. 18 Staten Island	1/27/2016	32	6	
P.S. 191 Brooklyn	12/9/2015	32	3	
P.S. 205A	3/30/2016	33	7	Mice
P.S. 214 Queens	7/9/2015	31	8	Roaches

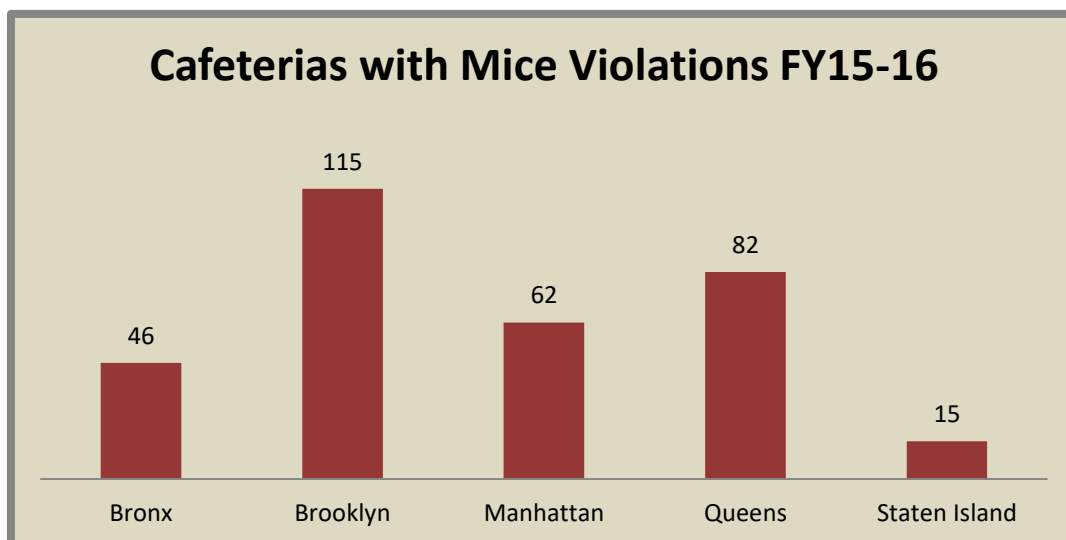
P.S. 243 Brooklyn	3/11/2016	40	9	Mice
P.S. 257 Brooklyn	2/2/2016	34	8	Mice
P.S. 33 Chelsea Prep	7/9/2015	35	7	Mice, Roaches, Flies
P.S. 361	7/30/2015	46	6	
P.S./IS 192 Brooklyn	12/16/2015	31	15	
P.S./M.S. 29	4/20/2016	28	9	
P.S./MS 147 Queens	4/11/2016	48	8	Drain flies, Mice
Ralph McKee Vocational HS	3/9/2016	35	9	Mice
Sixth Avenue Elementary School	1/26/2016	41	12	Mice
The Peck Slip School	4/20/2016	32	2	Mice
United Cerebral Palsy Hearst	1/6/2016	28	1	

***Vermin and Pests Violations in School Year 2015-2016***

Violations for the evidence of specific pests or vermin like rats, mice, roaches, or flies in a school cafeteria are rightfully considered critical violations by DOHMH. These critical violations come in various violation conditions – the Department will grade finding a few mice excreta in an isolated portion of a cafeteria as being a less serious problem than finding massive amounts of mice excreta near where food is stored. DOHMH also issues violations under the classification of “pests” for conditions that are conducive to pests or failing to implement the correct pest control features or actions. Violations under this classification can be categorized as both critical or general violations.

Mice:

The most common violation for vermin given out is for evidence of mice. This evidence is almost always in the form of mice excreta found by investigators. Sighting of live mice are rare or non-existent. In 2015-16, inspectors gave out **442 mice-related violations to 320 different school cafeterias.**

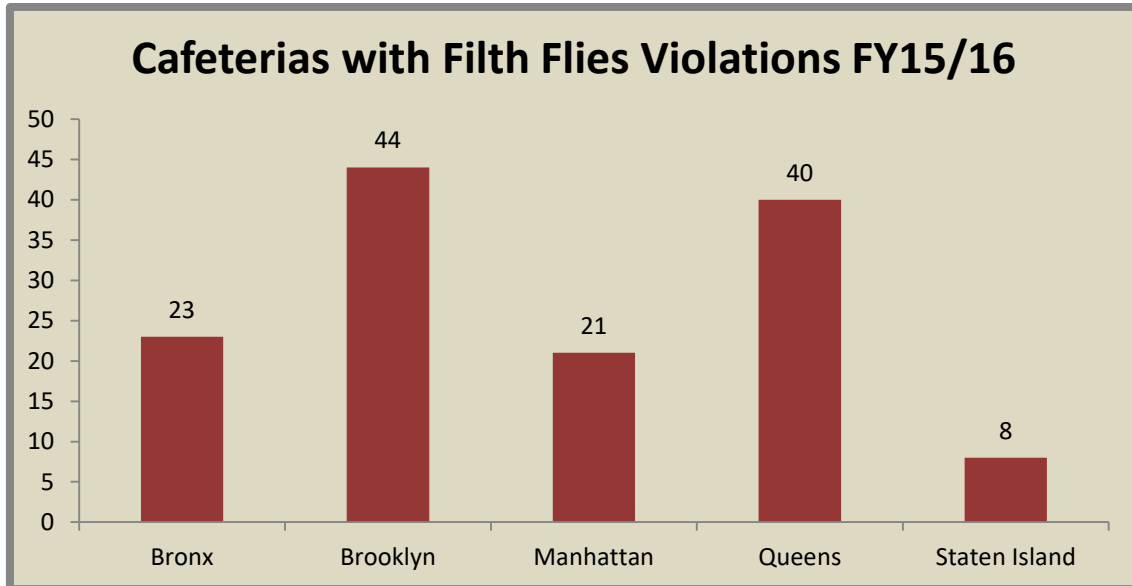


The Sixth Avenue Elementary School in Manhattan had the most serious mice outbreak found – in one inspection they were issued with six different mice-related violations, with two of them classified as condition 5, the most serious. Inspectors in January 2016 found an estimated 400 mice

excreta in various parts of the cafeteria. The Peck Slip School, again in Manhattan, also received a condition 5 mice violation when inspectors found 190 mice excreta in various parts of the building.

Filth Flies:

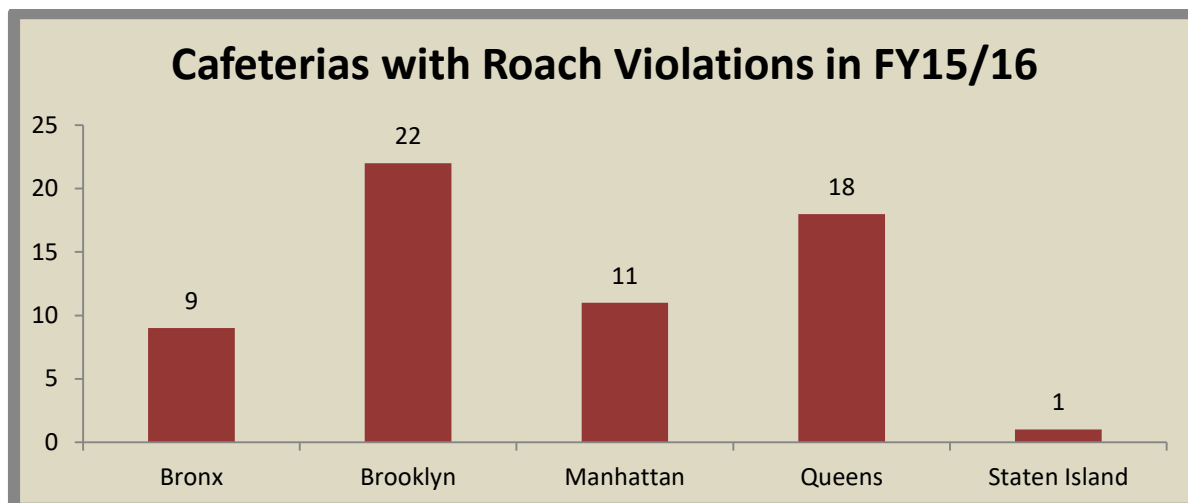
The second most common violation for vermin is given for evidence of flies. In this case, inspectors are confronted with the actual flies themselves. In 2015-16, inspectors gave out a **155 violations for flies to 136 schools.**



Three schools were issued violations for flies that were rated to be condition 5. Inspectors in March found 130 flies present at Franklyn D. Roosevelt High School in Brooklyn. An inspection also in March found 101 flies at P.S. 100 in Queens and an April inspection found 95 flies at P.S./M.S. 147 in Queens.

Cockroaches:

Violations for cockroaches are less common than those for flies and mice. As with flies, inspectors usually witness live cockroaches present in a cafeteria, instead of going by evidence of their presence. In 2015-16, inspectors issued **64 violations for cockroaches to 61 school cafeterias across the city.**



No school cafeterias were issued any condition 5 roach violations in this latest year of data, but two, Brooklyn Academy Of Science And The Environment & International HS At Prospect Heights and P.S./I.S. 284 in Brooklyn were the two schools given condition 4 roach violations. Inspectors found 10 live roaches, including several near the food handling section, at the former school, and 15 live roaches at the later location.

#### Rats:

As with their smaller rodent cousins, violations for rat activity are generally issued because inspectors find evidence of rats, like their excreta, instead of finding actual rats present. In 2015-16, four schools were issued violations for evidence of rat activity. Those four schools were:

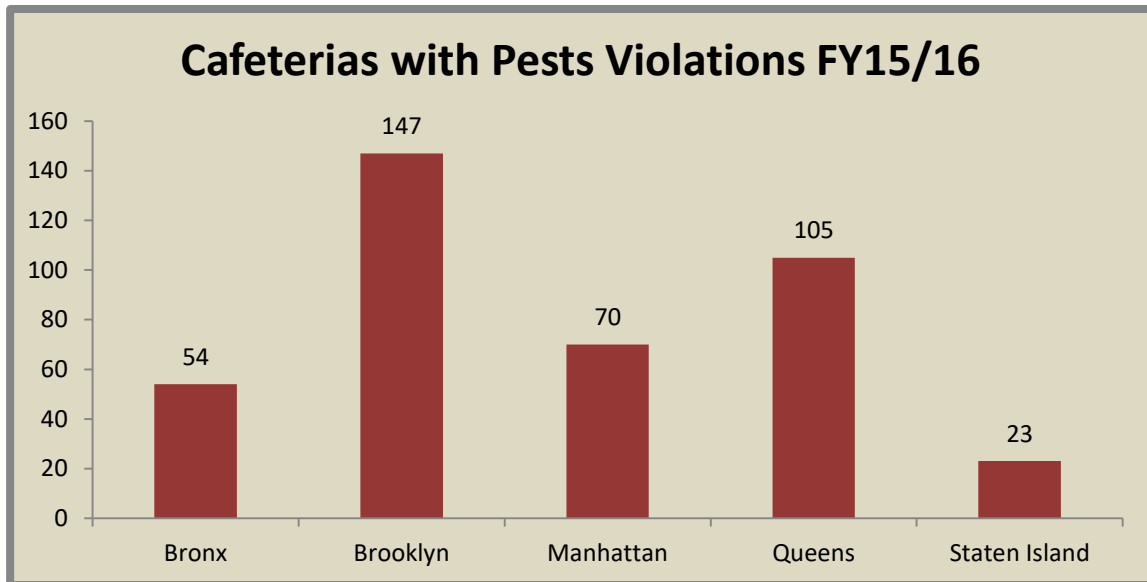
- I.S. 218 in Manhattan, found in January 2016
- P.S. 197 in Brooklyn, found in January 2016
- P.S. 25 in the Bronx, found in November 2015
- P.S. 78 in Staten Island, found in March 2016

#### Other Creatures:

DOHMH will also issue violations for other types of animals found in cafeterias. No cafeterias were issued such a violation in FY 15-16. FY 14-15 saw violations issued for the presence of ants and a cat.

#### Pests:

As noted previously, violations under the classification of “pests” are given for a variety of conditions that are conducive to pest and vermin infestations. In 2015-16, inspectors issued **559 violations for Pest conditions to 399 schools across the city.**



I.S. 98 in Brooklyn was issued seven different pest violations in one inspection in November 2015, for issues like holes found in several walls, gaps between walls and the ceiling that would allow pests to get through, and the accumulation of dried food waste behind equipment, which would create the conditions that would attract pests like mice to a location.

### LEGISLATIVE SOLUTION

Our analysis of the data provided by DOHMH following our FOIL request shows that while the vast majority of cafeteria inspections receive grades that would equal an “A,” the number of inspections that fail to get an “A”-level score has increased over the past three years. This is a deeply disturbing trend. Our analysis shows that certain schools have perennial issues with vermin and other issues that threaten the safety of the food being provided to students. The lack of transparency allows certain cafeterias to coast while doing a poor job at cleaning up their acts.

New York City implemented a program of transparent grading for its tens of thousands of restaurants to ensure that the public would vote with their feet and provide an incentive for restaurants to clean up. Given that DOHMH utilizes the very same numerical grading procedures when inspecting school cafeterias, the question becomes: Why we would be less transparent with these results than we are with restaurants? After all, parents and kids don’t get a choice of which school cafeteria they can eat at during lunch time. In this situation, being transparent becomes more important, not less.

For these reasons, the IDC will introduce legislation that would require that:

1. New York City school cafeteria numerical food safety inspections scores be converted into a letter grade; cafeterias receive an opportunity to receive an “A” letter grade after a re-inspection if they fail to score an “A” during their initial inspection, much like restaurants currently do.

2. The grade be made public in two forms. First, the final grade be posted in a space in the school that is visible to all parents. Second, the final letter grade be added to the school quality reports that are annually published by the New York City DOE.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over a million students within the New York City school system rely on school cafeterias for their breakfasts or lunches every single school day. Parents expect these cafeterias to be sanitary and safe. Unfortunately, they have no way of knowing whether this is in fact the case, because information about the outcome of inspections of cafeterias is not made public. This stands in contrast to the transparency provided to the public when it comes to inspection results for the tens of thousands of restaurants in this city. It begs the question why the city is more transparent about the performance of private restaurants than with its own performance in keeping those kitchens we utilize to feed students clean. The IDC poured through thousands of inspections records of cafeterias over the past three city fiscal years and found that while the majority of cafeteria inspections led to scores that would equal an “A,” more and more school cafeterias are failing to meet the grade. We also found schools that perennially fail to get an “A” and that have constant issues with mice or other vermin, and parents have no way of knowing this. The IDC believes that parents deserve to know about the cleanliness of the school cafeterias where their children dine as much as they deserve to know about the cleanliness of any private eating establishments they may choose to eat in with their family. For that reason, the IDC will introduce legislation that would require the DOHMH to publicly grade school cafeterias as they do restaurants, and require the DOE to make these letter grades public and available to parents, both by posting them in schools in a place visible to the public and by including the information in the school quality reports annually published by the Department.