

CAMPAIGN For BETTER SCHOOLS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE ON GOVERNANCE OF THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Campaign for Better Schools is a diverse coalition of more than two dozen parent, youth, community based and education advocacy organizations from all five boroughs of New York City. The Campaign for Better Schools supports the concept of Mayoral Control, but disagrees with the way it has been implemented. The reforms and policies that have been put in place as a result of mayoral control have not led to the turn-around of schools in some of New York City's highest-need communities. For instance, the achievement gap between African American and Latino students and white students in obtaining Regents diplomas has not budged, and graduation rates for immigrant students learning English has actually dipped under mayoral control. In addition, mayoral control has led to parents, students and communities being shut out of important decisions that affect the quality of education students receive.

The reforms outlined in this proposal will make mayoral control of schools workable by strengthening the decision making process by which education policies and reforms are developed, and by restoring the trust that families and communities put in the school system. These recommendations were developed through a rigorous, year-long process that involved numerous discussions with national and local education experts, and parent, student and community organizations in neighborhoods throughout New York City. It is a community-driven proposal, developed by parents, youth and community groups.

CHECKS & BALANCES

Panel for Education Policy (PEP)¹

The PEP should have a narrow majority of members appointed by the City Council or other elected officials, and a minority of members appointed by the mayor.

PEP members should serve for set terms of a relatively short duration (3 years or less) and have full voting rights.

The PEP should select a Chair who sets meeting agendas

Chancellor

The mayor should appoint the Schools Chancellor

The Chancellor should not be a voting member of the PEP, but may serve as an ex-officio member.

The Chancellor's power to issue rules and regulations should be subject to existing laws requiring public notice and opportunity for public comment prior to issue.

Criteria and Selection of PEP Members

The PEP should be diverse geographically (representatives from all boroughs).

The members of the PEP should reflect the school system's diversity.

The PEP must include multiple community representatives. Community representatives should be defined as parents, students and representatives of community based organizations.

¹ The Panel for Education Policy is the legal entity known as the Board of Education in state law.

Powers of the PEP

The Chancellor should have the power to propose the Department of Education's (DOE) operating budget and the five-year capital plan. The PEP should have approval power over the annual DOE operating budget and five-year capital plan.

The Chancellor should propose changes in education policies. The PEP shall have the power to approve all chancellor-proposed decisions about standards, policies, objectives, and regulations related to educational achievement, student performance and school safety.

The PEP should approve large DOE procurement contracts.

PEP Operations

The PEP should operate with an open public process. As such all PEP meetings should be held publicly, on a regular monthly basis. All decisions should be made publicly, by roll call vote. Notices and agendas of PEP meetings should be widely disseminated publicly, in multiple languages, at least two weeks in advance. PEP meetings should be held in venues large enough to accommodate large public attendance and appropriate interpretation services shall be provided at all meetings. The PEP should solicit public comment on all voting issues.

The PEP should be given resources for its own staff so that it can adequately prepare for meetings.

TRANSPARENCY

The Independent Budget Office (IBO) should be given legal authority to report on all aspects of the City school district including DOE's finances, school performance, student achievement, student safety and shared decision making at the school level.

Sufficient funding should be provided to the Independent Budget Office to support their new monitoring and reporting functions.

The IBO should:

- Be guaranteed full and timely access to all NYC DOE data;
- Annually compile, produce, and widely disseminate school system student demographics and achievement outcomes, as well as annual analyses of school system resource allocation and fiscal expenditure;
- Use methodologies, benchmarks and indicators recommended by national agencies and expert researchers to produce the annual set of required data reports, and make their methodologies, benchmarks and indicators public;
- Carry out annual analyses of critical school system education policy issues and issue their findings in widely disseminated public reports.

The law should be clarified to make the DOE's finances completely open and available to the City Comptroller for financial oversight and auditing purposes.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Center for Parent and Student Service and Empowerment

An independent, publicly funded, Center for Parent and Student Service and Empowerment should be created to outreach, train, and support parents and students in New York City Schools.

Structure:

- Publicly Funded

- Independent of DOE

Responsibilities should include leadership development, such as:

- Providing training and ongoing support for current members of Parent Associations (PA), School Leadership Teams (SLT), Community District Education Councils (CDEC), District Leadership Teams (DLT), the Citywide Council on High Schools (CCHS), and the Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE); topics should include:
 - a) *baseline knowledge of:* central DOE structure and operations, school budget procedures, state and city structures and policies that impact education; and
 - b) *skills-building:* meeting facilitation, tools for parent outreach and leadership development.
- Conducting outreach to parents and students on the process for getting involved in these bodies and other basic tools for navigating the school system;
- Providing capacity building opportunities for parent coordinators;
- Holding conferences and events to educate parents and students about how to get more involved

School Level

The role of parents and high school students, on the school leadership teams should be strengthened. Student representatives should be selected through vote of student body.

Principals should be required to develop school based budgets in consultation with School Leadership Teams and ensure that budgets are aligned with schools' Comprehensive Education Plans (CEP).

Principals should be required to hold public meetings to report on school finances and student performance, and to discuss plans for meeting CEP benchmarks and budget targets.

As in past C-30 processes at the school level, parents, high school students and others, including community stakeholders should be authorized and empowered to interview and make recommendations for candidates for principal and assistant principal.

District Level

District superintendents should be responsible for supervising principals and providing administrative oversight of schools in their district. They should have access to all schools in their district as well as access to all school records to carry out their evaluations effectively.

Superintendents should be empowered to address issues regarding school choice, discipline (suspensions, expulsions, etc), language access (parents, ELL students), special needs, and shared decision-making.

Superintendents should hold public meetings to report on district performance and discuss plans for improvement of district schools.

The Chancellor should appoint district superintendents in consultation with the Community District Education Council (CDEC), Presidents' Council and District Leadership Team.

District superintendents should be supported by sufficient staff to carry out their duties.

The Citywide Council on High Schools should be codified in state law, as are the thirty-two Community District Education Councils and the Citywide Council on Special Education.

A process of opening, closing, re-siting and re-configuring of any school in a community school district, in which:

- a. DOE must give reasonable notice of its intent to open, close, or re-site any school to the CDEC and the CCHS (in cases involving high schools) or the CCSE (in cases involving District 75 schools);
- b. an impact study and needs assessment is prepared by the DOE and submitted within a reasonable timeframe to the CDEC and the CCHS or CCSE where applicable, detailing the necessity for the opening, closing, or re-siting action;
- c. a public hearing is called and held by the CDEC and the CCHS or CCSE where applicable, with reasonable public notice, to discuss the DOE's proposal, needs assessment and the implications and impacts of the proposed action;
- d. a vote of approval or disapproval of the proposed action is held by the CDEC and the CCHS or CCSE where applicable;
- e. an appeal to the PEP may be made, by either the Dept. of Education or one member of the PEP;
- f. a final decision, of approval or disapproval of the proposed action, is made by the PEP in public session.

Steering Committee Member Organizations

ACORN

Advocates for Children

Alliance for Quality Education

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Center for Arts Education

Child Care, Inc.

Chinese Progressive Association

Citizens' Committee for Children

Coalition for After-School Funding

Coalition for Asian American Children & Families

Cypress Hills Advocates for Education

Education Voters of New York

El Centro de la Hospitalidad de Staten Island

Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project

Haitian Americans United for Progress

Highbridge Community Life Center

La Union

Make the Road New York
Metropolitan Russian-American Parent Association
NAACP
National Center for Schools & Communities
New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee
New York City Coalition for Educational Justice
New York Civic Participation Project
New York Immigration Coalition
Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition
Queens Congregations United for Action
Urban Youth Collaborative