



History of NYC school governance and Mayoral control and what should replace it

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School Boards, a.k.a., Boards of Education

- System of having separate school board or school committee elected directly by residents started in MA in 1826
- Vast majority of school districts in United States (>95%) have directly elected school boards, separate from other governmental agencies.
- Purpose: To ensure that a separate body is solely in charge of education and insulated as much as possible from political horse-trading.
- More than 700 school districts in NYS have elected school boards, in charge of appointing a Superintendent and approving spending priorities and policies
- Only two districts in NY state do NOT have elected school board: Yonkers and NYC

NYC school governance 1842-1996

- 1842-1873: separate borough school boards elected by voters
- 1873-1896: NYC Mayor appoints members of Central Board & local Ward trustees
- 1902-1970: Mayor appoints Central Board members; local district boards appointed by Borough Presidents
- 1966-70 – Experiment in decentralization where local School boards in 3 districts given enhanced authority
- 1970- 2002: Central Board has 2 members appointed by Mayor; 5 by Borough Presidents. Community School Boards in each district elected by voters

NYC School Governance 1996-2002

- 1996: Community School District boards have their authority over spending and hiring mostly removed; from then on, Chancellor appointed district Superintendents, could remove principals, and controlled nearly all district/school budgets
- 1998: “Green Book” for School Leadership Teams issued by then-Chancellor Crew: committees made up equally of parents and school staff with authority to devise school-based budgets and Comprehensive Education plan

2002: Bloomberg wins Mayoral control from Legislature

- Mayoral control established with expansive and unilateral power devolving to person only, with no local checks and balances. To be renewed or lapse in 6 years.
- Mayor appoints 8 members to central board (now dubbed Panel for Education Policy by Bloomberg) and 5 by Borough Presidents .
- Mayor also with power to appoint Chancellor. Bloomberg appoints Joel Klein, an anti-trust attorney with little education experience.
- Community school boards dissolved; Community Education Councils created, with only advisory authority, except for power to approve changes in school attendance zones.

Bloomberg and Klein: disruptive policies

- March 2004, Bloomberg dismissed 2 appointees on PEP & persuaded SI BP to fire his, because they were opposed to his policy of holding back 3rd grade students based on state test scores alone (later extended to all grades 3rd-8th).
- Klein institutes many confusing reorganizations of system; & District Superintendents disempowered by cuts to budgets and staff. He also tries to eliminate all SLT authority.
- DOE spends \$85M on ARIS, a data system to collect test scores and other student data; Aris later ditched as useless.
- School grading system system based primarily on student test scores; also later ditched as unreliable.
- By 2008, nearly hundred public schools closed, with hundreds of new small schools and charters put in their place and number of co-located schools doubled.

2008-2009: intense debate over renewing Mayoral control

- Lots of community opposition to renewing the system unchanged, as stakeholders feel shut out of system.
- Bloomberg along with Eli Broad, Bill Gates and others unknown finance a multi-million campaign to lobby & run ads to keep Mayoral control unchanged.
- In August 2009, mayoral control re-instated for another six years, with only a few changes
- PEP given approval power over contracts of more than \$1 million
- Educational Impact Statement and local hearings required before co-locations, school closures and other major changes in school utilization
- Yet PEP continues to act as a rubberstamp and approves all contracts, no matter how wasteful or corrupt, and to close and co-locate schools whenever proposed by administration

From 2009 to 2018, Mayoral control renewed every 1-3 years with lots of horse trading

- 2014- De Blasio makes deal w/ Gov. Cuomo to help fund PreK in exchange for DOE requirement to provide space for all new and expanding charters in public schools or pay for their rent— only district in state or nation with this onerous responsibility
- 2017-DeBlasio makes deal with Legislators to keep mayoral control in return for slowing down investigation into adequacy & substantial equivalence of education provided by ultra-orthodox Yeshivas; also agreed to increase # charter schools & speed up their rental payments
- 2018 –De Blasio pushes out one of his PEP appointees for voting against him on school closures, after promising never to do this.

June 2022 – Mayoral control tweaked & extended for 2 more years

- PEP expanded from 15 to 23 members; 13 appointed by Mayor; 5 by Borough Presidents, and 5 from each borough, selected by CEC Presidents.
- NYC Comptroller added as non-voting member
- Mayoral control bill linked to another bill passed by Legislature requiring NYC to lower class size to much lower levels in all grades, to be phased in over 5 years.
- Legislature asks State Ed to deliver report with comprehensive review and assessment of the overall effectiveness of mayoral control of New York City schools.

Debate over mayoral control now resumes as system to lapse or renewed in June 2024

- Mayor Adams very unpopular among most parents and teachers b/c of repeated budget cuts to school.
- State Ed holds well-attended hearings in all five boroughs; about 95 % of attendees speak out against continuation of current system as they say it shuts out constituent voices, leads to budget cuts, wasteful spending & other damaging policies, with PEP nothing but a rubberstamp.
- State Ed says will release their findings & recommendations to Legislature by March 2024

Myth #1 Mayoral control means more accountability

- The Mayor is elected only once every four years, and voters make their choices on many issues in addition to education.
- When Bloomberg asked what parents should do if they disagreed on how he ran the schools, he said “They can boo me at parades.”
- Often, Mayors go back on campaign promises.
- Bloomberg promised to lower class size in K-3 when first running for office, and yet by end of his term, class sizes in these grades had risen to highest levels in 15 years.
- Three different comptroller audits revealed that DOE during Bloomberg years had misused state funds meant for class size reduction.

Mayoral control means more accountability Part II

- During his campaign, De Blasio promised to lower class sizes in ALL grades, but once elected, reneged on that promise
- Currently, Adams resisting compliance with 2022 class size state law as mentioned by many at recent Mayoral control hearings.
- DOE under Mayoral control continues to violate many laws, regarding special ed services, bilingual services, and student privacy, among others.
- With expansion of charters, more & more students educated with public dollars in system with less accountability, run by private corporate boards

Myth #2: Mayoral control means less financial waste & fraud

- Community School boards had their control over spending & hiring eliminated in 1996, 6 yrs before Mayoral control established , and no examples of corruption after that date
- Many examples of even larger scale corruption under Mayoral control:
- 2002-2008: DOE consultant Ross Lanham stole more than \$3 million for internet wiring. FCC excluded the NYC from more than \$100 million of E-rate funds for many years as result.
- 2007-2011: DOE official colluded with a company, which overcharged for consultants by \$74 million. PEP rubberstamped contract despite series of DN articles pointing out potential fraud and waste.
- 2015: DOE proposed \$1.1B contract with company for internet wiring in February 2015, renewable to \$2B although it had been involved in Lanham scandal. Renegotiated contract to \$650M overnight when reported in media; then rubberstamped by PEP. (Later cancelled by City Hall & rebid at savings of more than \$163 million)
- 2015: Eric Goldstein, head of DOE Office of School Support Services from 2008 to 2018, renewed contract of company for chicken nuggets in return for a bribe; despite how product contained pieces of bone and metal with serious safety hazard to students

Myth #3: Test scores have improved under Mayoral control

Mayor Adams recently made this claim about 2023 increase in state test scores, though NYSED explicitly pointed out that “results from 2022 and 2023 are not comparable” since tests and scoring have changed.

Bloomberg repeatedly took credit for NYC rise in state scores 2002-2008, and yet they were not replicated in national exams (NAEPs); and in 2010 found to be result of rampant test score inflation.

Similar pattern during de Blasio years; proclaimed great improvements despite with NAEP scores flat or declining.

Graduation rates did increase during Bloomberg administration, but this phenomenon was seen nationwide.

Myth #4 Mayoral control is a more efficient system.

- When Mayors in charge of schools, they are often distracted or slow to decide.
- Example: De Blasio waited too long to close the schools in March 2020 after both LA and sF had done so with far fewer cases & 36 NY infectious disease experts sent a letter urging him to do so on March 12. a letter calling on the mayor to close all the public school;
- Only did so on March 15, after massive pressure from from public health officials, the business community, and teachers threatening a wildcat strike;
- Tom Frieden, former head of NYC Health Dept and CDC wrote that if NYC had adopted stronger safety measures a week or two earlier, including closing schools, eventual death rate might have been reduced by 50 to 80%.
- De Blasio delayed accepting advice of his School Diversity Advisory Group proposed in August 2019 to eliminate segregating gifted classes, involving testing of 4-yr olds;
- Waited more than 2 years to propose this in October 2021, at the end of 2nd term .
- Adams took office in January 2022, and easily reversed this decision.

Many large urban districts moving away from Mayoral control

- Detroit in 2017, and Newark in 2020 re-instituted elected school boards.
- In both cases, general acknowledgement that school governance has improved.
- Chicago is also moving towards an elected school board after nearly 30 years of mayoral control, with the first round of elections to take place this fall .
- Widespread recognition that Mayoral control no more accountable, or transparent and far less democratic than other school governance systems.

UFT proposal to amend Mayoral control

- Replace 3 mayoral appointees on PEP with appointees from Council Speaker, NYC Comptroller and Public Advocate;
- PEP should select 3 candidates for Chancellor for Mayor to select one, with 2-year term;
- Strengthen Maintenance of Effort Law, to ensure DOE budgets not cut unless city experiences revenue decline;
- CEC to screen candidates for District Superintendents and forward names to Chancellor
- Allow CECs to approve school co-locations and closures
- SLT provided authority to put forward list of principals to which one must be selected

Education Counsel Consortium proposal

- ECC a parent led group including many CEC and former CEC members
- Legislature should create a Commission to develop a new governance system by June 30, 2026, with phase-into begin in the 2026-2027 school year, with the transition complete on June 30, 2030
- Reduce the number of PEP members so that Mayor has 9 or fewer, keeping 5 Borough President appointees and 5 CEC-elected members
- Require contracts above \$5 Million be approved by the NYC Comptroller as well as the PEP
- Explicitly require CEC approvals for any school closures or other changes in school utilization include phase out or closure of zoned schools

Other possible options to reform current system and provide real checks and balances

- Allow City Council to make law when it comes to education policy; DOE only city agency not subject to city law.
- Alter PEP composition: 6 members appointed by Mayor, 6 members elected by parents directly, and 3 appointed by the City Council; City Comptroller, and Public Advocate
- Inspector General appointed by State Legislature to strengthen transparency and checks on corruption
- Ombudsperson to address and resolve parental complaints and provide recommendations to the Board and Chancellor on how services, policies, or procedures should be improved.

For more information...

- More details & citations in our Mayoral control testimony at <https://classsizematters.org/the-myths-surrounding-mayoral-control-and-what-we-need-instead/>
- Check out 2009 book we co-edited, *NYC Schools Under Bloomberg and Klein*, published in 2009, available at <http://tinyurl.com/BloomKleinbook>
- Or email us at: info@classsizematters.org