



New York City Council Education Committee Hearing on Mayoral Control

Submitted Testimony by Annie Nelson, Policy Analyst

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On behalf of Children's Aid, thank you to Chair Dinowitz and the New York City Council Committee on Education for the opportunity to submit testimony about Mayoral Control of New York City Public Schools.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people and no limits to their potential. By offering a comprehensive continuum of services throughout childhood, we prepare young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full- and part-time staff serve more than 36,000 children, youth, and families across over 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted, neighborhood-based spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need.

As part of our counterattack on the obstacles that threaten kids' achievements in school and in life, Children's Aid has been operating community schools in partnership with New York City Public Schools for over 30 years. Today, we operate nineteen community schools – eighteen in partnership with New York City Public Schools and one charter school. Fifteen of our community schools also have after-school programs that we operate in partnership with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) – and four of our schools have early childhood centers, supported either directly through Head Start or passed-through Head Start DOE Contracts. Additionally, as a New York City foster care agency, we also provide targeted academic support to students in the child welfare system, coordinating services across ACS and NYCPS.

The students and families we serve face significant barriers to educational opportunity, including chronic absenteeism, learning loss, food and housing insecurity, and unmet health and mental health needs. These challenges reflect broader systemwide realities: more than 700,000 New York City Public School students — roughly three out of four — are economically disadvantaged, and 154,000 are experiencing homelessness. Because our work spans schools, communities, and coordinated services across multiple city agencies, we see firsthand how school governance structures shape the City's ability to align supports and respond effectively to student needs.

At a high level, we believe the City can and should harness the combined capacity of government agencies and community-based organizations to support children and families and promote holistic well-being. Achieving strong outcomes at this scale requires sustained, cross-sector coordination. When paired with clear accountability and meaningful community input, mayoral control can help align resources, accelerate decision-making in times of crisis,



strengthen interagency collaboration, and elevate family and community engagement. Over the last two decades, we have seen mayoral control facilitate initiatives that have advanced family and child wellbeing and narrowed opportunity gaps, including the development of Universal Pre-K and the scaling of the community school strategy.

At the same time, we know the promise of a high-quality education for all remains unfulfilled for many New York City families and communities. Currently, only 24% of economically disadvantaged students are proficient in Math—roughly thirty six percentage points below peers who are not economically disadvantaged—with similar gaps seen along lines of race and ethnicity, multilingual learner status, and housing stability. And, our current governance model has fallen short in meaningfully engaging families and community members in decision-making about how to address these disparities. Families, educators, and community members — particularly in historically under-resourced neighborhoods— continue to report feeling excluded from key decisions, and existing participation structures like the Community Education Councils remain limited in accessibility and influence.

We believe that even the citywide education initiatives that have delivered measurable benefits for students would be stronger with deeper community engagement and partnership. Early and sustained family and community input builds trust, helps ensure programs are responsive to neighborhood needs, and, ultimately, reduces access barriers and maximizes impact. For example, while initiatives such as Universal Pre-K and Summer Rising have reached tremendous scale, they continue to face challenges in fully aligning program design and delivery with community needs, resulting in many families missing out on the benefits of these programs.

As City leaders examine the merits of mayoral control, it is important to examine why the current model was adopted, where it has produced measurable benefits, and where it requires strengthening. Accordingly, this testimony addresses:

- The historical context that shaped New York City’s current school governance model
- Examples of how mayoral control has enabled successful large-scale, cross-agency education initiatives
- Ongoing gaps in community engagement, transparency and oversight
- Recommendations to strengthen mayoral control, including scaling the community schools strategy, enhancing oversight mechanisms, and improving interagency collaboration to better align services with student and community needs

Together, our proposed reforms would help ensure that New York City’s public school system includes community priorities, operates transparently, and delivers coordinated supports that help all students thrive academically and developmentally.

Historical Context and Rationale for Mayoral Control

Reviewing the historical context and rationale for our current governance model helps us understand both the system's promise and where it's fallen short. Prior to the adoption of mayoral control in 2002, the City experienced two distinct governance approaches: a centralized "City Board" structure followed by a highly decentralized system in place from 1969 through 2001.

Under the City Board model, public schools were governed jointly by a central board appointed by the mayor and local boards appointed by either the mayor, the central board, or other public officials. Because this model gave almost all authority to political appointments (with inadequate community representation) and the public school system significantly disadvantaged students of color and low-income backgrounds, a group of Black and Puerto Rican parents organized for community control of the schools. The push for community control was a demand for stronger democracy and a transformation of the relationship between parents and the NYC Schools.

While parent organizers did not successfully achieve full community control of schools, in 1969 the legislature passed Article 52-A of New York Education Law, a compromise reorganizing New York City's public-school system into a central board and community school districts. The central school board—composed of two mayoral appointees and representatives appointed by each of the five borough presidents—was responsible for key functions including appointing the Chancellor, formulating the district budget, approving new schools, and overseeing the city's high schools and special education system. The city's 32 community school districts—each governed by an elected nine-member community school board—managed elementary and middle schools, including appointing superintendents and principals.

While this model expanded local participation, it also facilitated fragmentation and inconsistency. Citywide decision-making was often slowed by political disputes, and voter participation in community board elections remained low. In many districts, political clubs or special interests frequently dominated decision-making, limiting accurate representation of broader community priorities. And, school performance and student outcomes continued to show significant disparities gaps along lines of race and class. Critics argued that the decentralized model made it difficult to implement coherent citywide education policy.¹

When Mayor Bloomberg secured legislation in 2002 granting the mayor authority to appoint the Chancellor and a majority of the citywide school board (and limiting the authority of the community school boards), many were hopeful we'd see a governance structure more

¹ [Mayoral Control of New York City Schools Final Report](#)



conducive to coordinated leadership that would close achievement gaps. While we have seen instances where mayoral control has facilitated effective coordination at a scale that would likely not have occurred under the decentralized model, we've also seen exclusion of the same parent and community voices that previously called for governance reform. Reviewing both the successes and shortcomings of this governance model is essential for systemwide progress.

How Mayoral Control Has Enabled Citywide Coordination and Scale

The examples below illustrate what is possible when mayoral control supports cross-agency coordination, integrated services, and community-driven strategies.

1. Early Childhood Education: Setting the Foundation

A powerful example of what mayoral control can make possible is the creation and rapid expansion of universal Pre-K in New York City. Before Bill de Blasio's mayoral administration, there were approximately 19,000 students enrolled in full-day Pre-K. Within eighteen months of him taking office and establishing Universal Pre-K as a top policy priority, roughly 70,000 children were enrolled, and nearly every 4-year-old whose caregiver applied was offered a seat.

Delivering universal Pre-K required more than additional city appropriation — it was made possible through sustained cross-agency coordination. The expansion depended on rapidly growing the early childhood workforce, opening and approving classroom space across public schools and community-based organizations, establishing consistent quality standards, and conducting citywide outreach and enrollment efforts. Implementation also required coordinated action across multiple city entities responsible for facilities, licensing, health and safety approvals, and contracting. Under mayoral control, these agencies were able to operate under a shared mandate and timeline, enabling faster execution and more integrated problem-solving than would likely have been possible under a more fragmented governance structure.

As an agency that provides holistic early childhood programs to children from 0 to 5 years old, we have seen the benefits of this shift. Mayoral control allowed for NYC's early childhood programs to align with our public school system and set the strong educational foundation that children need to build healthy habits for life-long learning.

2. Community Schools: Scaling A Strategy That Works

Mayoral control has also supported the successful expansion and sustainability of community schools across New York City. The community school strategy transforms schools into hubs where educators, families, students, and community partners work together to strengthen conditions for learning and healthy development. Community schools rely on partnerships with community-based organizations, like Children's Aid, to deliver integrated services tailored to each school community. Each site is supported by a full-time community school director who



works with school leadership and staff to align services and instructional programming with student and family needs, conduct asset and needs assessments, and ensure supports are coordinated across the school day and extended learning time.

Under mayoral control, the City built one of the nation's most comprehensive community school systems. Mayoral leadership facilitated the creation of the Office of Community Schools, which provides central oversight, standards, and infrastructure to guide consistent implementation across the city's entire public school system. Starting with 45 schools in 2014, the city's public school system now includes 419 community schools serving roughly 173,000 students. Scaling to this level required centralized authority to align agency priorities, direct funding, coordinate cross-system supports, and monitor implementation fidelity.

Cross-agency coordination was also essential in the initial development of the Office of Community Schools (OCS). For example, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) managed the initial selection of community-based organization partners; the Office of School Health coordinates with OCS to provide school-based health centers; and the Department of Homeless Services partners with schools serving students in temporary housing. This level of cross-agency integration relies on the centralized authority mayoral control provides.

The city's efforts to scale the community school strategy within New York City Public schools has achieved meaningful results. A recent analysis found that community schools outperformed comparison schools across several key indicators over the last decade. Graduation rates increased 13.5 percentage points more than the citywide average (25.1 vs. 11.6). English Language Arts proficiency grew 3.8 percentage points more than the citywide average (22.9 vs. 19.1), and math proficiency grew 8.2 percentage points more (26.7 vs. 18.5). Community schools also experienced a smaller increase in chronic absenteeism than the citywide average during and after the COVID-19 pandemic — rising 4.3 percentage points compared to 9.8 percentage points citywide.

The expansion of community schools illustrates how mayoral control can support the scaling of integrated, evidence-based approaches by aligning leadership, funding, and cross-agency capacity around student and family needs.

3. Foster Youth and Students in Temporary Housing: Supporting Vulnerable Students

Under mayoral control, the city has also made progress in coordinating supports for students involved in foster care and those experiencing homelessness. More than 7,000 students in New York City Public Schools spend time in foster care each year.² Under mayoral control, the city has strengthened coordination among child welfare providers, ACS, and NYCPS to meet these students' needs. In 2023, New York City Public Schools created the Office of Foster Care, a

² [Family Law Quarterly Vol. 57, Nos. 2&3](#)



dedicated unit that supports cross-system coordination of academic and related services for these students.

Federal policy changes have contributed to increased oversight and support requirements for these populations, but mayoral control has enabled deeper operational integration between ACS and NYCPS that might otherwise have been more difficult to achieve. The city has taken important steps — including data-sharing agreements and expanded social work supports in shelters — to better support students experiencing homelessness or foster care involvement.

Takeaways from These Successes

These examples demonstrate the value of a governance structure with the authority and capacity to scale evidence-based, needs-driven initiatives across a school system as large and complex as New York City's. While each effort faced implementation challenges—and would have been even stronger with deeper community input and engagement—the scale and impact achieved would have been far more difficult under a fragmented governance model. For that reason, we believe the path forward is not to dismantle mayoral control, but to strengthen and refine it.

Opportunities for Stronger Inclusion and Accountability

While mayoral control has enabled important systemwide initiatives, more work is needed to ensure school governance is consistently inclusive, coordinated, and transparent and accountable to the communities it serves.

First, existing engagement structures offer limited meaningful opportunities for family and community engagement. The Panel for Education Policy (PEP)—the body responsible for approving major policy, budget, and school governance decisions—has 23 voting members, a majority of whom are appointed by the mayor, and the chair is also mayor-appointed. Although recent legislation requires that most PEP members are parents and that the PEP have two non-voting student advisory members, the overall structure still concentrates decision-making power within mayoral appointees. This limits the PEP's ability to function as an independent channel for community voice.

Meanwhile, other participation structures, such as Community Education Councils (CECs) and School Leadership Teams (SLTs), provide important forums for input but hold little formal decision-making authority. These roles are also unpaid and time-intensive, which can make participation difficult for working families and can skew representation toward those with greater time and resources. As a result, the communities most affected by system-level decisions often have little opportunity to provide input; a 2024 assessment by the New York State Education Department found that most members of the public who have testified on the subject report not feeling heard or included in the New York City public school system's decision

making process.³

Second, coordination between NYCPS and other agencies and community-based organizations remains inconsistent and fragmented. Families rely on a continuum of services delivered through partnerships among multiple agencies and nonprofit providers—including 3K & Pre-K, COMPASS and SONYC after-school programs, and Summer Rising—yet poor coordination of these programs create frequent access barriers. Disconnected data systems, duplicative reporting requirements, uneven guidance, and misaligned timelines create administrative burdens for providers and make services harder for families to navigate. These coordination gaps are especially visible in cross-agency programs that depend on shared enrollment systems, staffing, guidelines, and accountability.

By example, Summer Rising would be better equipped to meet family and community needs with stronger inter-agency coordination and clearer guidance for community-based providers. As one of the only free summer programs heavily promoted through NYC Public Schools, Summer Rising is a lifeline for working families and students. As a provider of Summer Rising, we have seen firsthand how misalignment between NYCPS and DYCD systems creates confusion for staff and families and disrupts service delivery. Centralized enrollment systems that do not align with DYCD platforms, unclear staffing responsibilities between NYCPS and CBO staff, late planning timelines, site relocations, and delayed contract registration and payment repeatedly limit providers' ability to deliver high-quality programming and respond to family demand. We also hear directly from families that many would prefer greater flexibility to enroll in center-based community programs when academic intervention is not needed. Ultimately, strengthening coordination mechanisms between NYCPS, DYCD and CBOs would improve program quality and ensure program design matches community need.

Finally, current oversight mechanisms lack the authority, transparency, and capacity needed for meaningful accountability. The Panel for Education Policy (PEP) is responsible for approving all contracts over \$1 million—a role that requires timely, detailed information to ensure reviews are substantive and that contract registration translates into smooth and reliable vendor payment. However, the PEP does not consistently receive the system-level financial and operational data necessary to independently evaluate major budgetary and procurement decisions. As a result, members are limited in their ability to exercise informed judgment, and public transparency around how contracts are awarded and resources are allocated is reduced. These constraints are especially concerning given recent instances in which NYC Public Schools has been cited for procurement rule violations.

These challenges are interconnected. **Family engagement is strongest when decision-making is transparent, participation is accessible, and services are coordinated across agencies and partners.** Similarly, cross-agency collaboration is most effective when it operates under clear

³ [Mayoral Control of New York City Schools Final Report](#)

oversight and is guided by sustained family and community input. Strengthening family engagement, cross-agency collaboration, and independent oversight would build trust, improve service delivery, and ensure mayoral control fulfills its promise of equitable, citywide education governance.

Recommendations for Strengthening NYCPS Governance

While we support an extension of mayoral control, the current model must become more inclusive of community and family voices and more transparent in its operations. The following recommendations outline steps to achieve this goal:

1. Scale the Community School Strategy

Expanding the community school strategy is one of the most effective ways to pair centralized governance with meaningful local engagement. Community schools are designed to incorporate family and community voice into school planning and to respond to neighborhood-specific needs through integrated academic, health, and social supports. As a result, community schools offer a strong counterbalance to concerns that centralized governance produce one-size-fits-all education solutions disconnected from local context.

Although community school providers have historically focused on high-poverty neighborhoods and students most affected by systemic inequities, the strategy promises to benefit all students and families. Scaling this strategy would strengthen family engagement and allow community schools to continue serving as hubs of integrated academic, health, and social services for students and families across the city.

To fully embed and sustain the strategy within NYCPS, we recommend:

- Expanding the amount of Community Schools in New York City, beginning with an additional 100 elementary schools by 2028.
- Appointing a Deputy Chancellor or other senior leader dedicated to Community Schools to elevate cross-system coordination and accountability.
- Increasing staffing and operational capacity within the Office of Community Schools to support quality, consistency, and scale across sites.

2. Enhance Oversight and Meaningful Engagement of Community Stakeholders

Given the scale and complexity of New York City's Public School System, we believe that school system leaders should be able to operate efficiently and with limited bureaucratic barriers. At the same time, concerns raised by families and community members over the past two decades make clear that stronger mechanisms for oversight and meaningful stakeholder engagement are

needed.

Currently, the primary oversight body for NYCPS is the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP), and the primary avenue for community and family engagement are the Community Education Councils (CEC) School Leadership Teams (SLTs). However, in its current form, the PEP lacks the resources and composition to deliver true accountability. Despite being tasked with reviewing contracts and overseeing major budgetary and policy decisions, members are not consistently provided with timely and comprehensive financial and programmatic information needed for independent evaluation. In addition, because a majority of members are mayoral appointees, the panel is limited in its ability to act objectively.

At the same time, CECs and SLTs offer limited opportunities for families and community members to meaningfully engage with key decision makers within NYCPS. District leaders should strengthen engagement with these bodies to ensure that a broader range of community perspectives informs decision-making. These forums must also become more accessible and inclusive by reducing barriers to participation and expanding structured opportunities for student voice. Doing so would help ensure that engagement efforts more accurately reflect the full diversity of families, educators, and young people across the public school system.

We urge City leaders to consider ways to increase engagement across the system without compromising operational effectiveness, including the following:

- Reducing the number of mayoral appointees on the PEP and allowing the panel to select its own chair, strengthening independence without undermining the system's ability to operate cohesively.
- Ensuring that the PEP, Community Education Councils (CECs), and the public have regular access to comprehensive, timely information on NYCPS spending, enabling transparency without imposing duplicative reporting burdens.
- Providing PEP members with training and increased capacity to review contracts and understand nonprofit service delivery, equipping them to exercise meaningful oversight while supporting efficient decision-making.
- Creating more structured and meaningful opportunities for student participation in school governance, including formalized avenues for youth engagement in SLTs and CECs.

3. Strengthen Cross-Agency Collaboration, Especially with DYCD

Coordination across NYCPS, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD),



Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and other agencies should be strengthened to improve service access, reduce administrative burden, and better align resources around student and community needs. Fragmented processes and inconsistent communication across agencies can complicate and delay service delivery for families and create inefficiencies for community-based providers. Disconnected data systems, in particular, require organizations to duplicate reporting across multiple platforms, diverting staff time from direct services and limiting the City's ability to measure outcomes across programs.

Stronger interagency coordination would make cross-agency programs such as Summer Rising more equitable, accessible, and responsive, while improving shared accountability.

To improve cross-agency collaboration and efficiency, we recommend:

- Streamlining and integrating interagency data-sharing and reporting systems to reduce duplicative provider reporting and improve outcome tracking.
- Standardizing and coordinating communications to providers and partners across agencies so that guidance is timely, consistent, and aligned.

Conclusion

Mayoral control has enabled New York City to launch and scale major, cross-agency education initiatives that have been transformative for students and families, including Universal Pre-K and the community schools movement. We believe the most effective path forward is to strengthen — not abandon — mayoral control by building in clearer accountability mechanisms, expanding avenues for community voice, and improving coordination across agencies and community-based partners. The recommendations outlined in this testimony are intended to support a governance model that is both capable of operating at scale and responsive to the communities it serves.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to these issues and welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as city leaders consider updates to the governance of New York City Public Schools. Please feel free to contact Annie Nelson, Policy Analyst, at anelson@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.