



**Testimony of NYC Schools Chancellor David Banks
Before the New York State Senate Standing Committee on New York City Education &
New York State Senate & Assembly Standing Committees on Education:
Hearing on the Governance of the New York City School District**

Friday, March 4, 2022

Introduction

Good morning, Chair Liu, Chair Benedetto, Chair Mayer and all members of the State Senate Committees on Education and New York City Education, as well as the members of the State Assembly Committee on Education. My name is David Banks, and I have the great privilege of serving as the Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify on the governance of the New York City school district.

First, I want to thank the hard-working employees and families of New York City public schools who have overcome unprecedented challenges and changes in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the world. I am deeply proud of our parents, teachers, principals, school staff, food service workers, custodial engineers, nurses, school safety agents, and bus drivers, who overcame intense adversity to serve our students.

On behalf of Mayor Eric Adams and the nearly one million public school students of New York City, I would also like to extend our thanks to all of you, our elected officials, for your leadership and advocacy. Your work with our schools, families, and advocates has not only strengthened Mayoral Accountability over time but also significantly advanced family engagement in ways that have been crucial for our children.

I am a product of New York City Public Schools through and through as a student, school safety officer, teacher, founding principal of two different schools, leader of a network of schools, and staunch advocate for students of color. My views on education policy have been shaped by more than three decades of conversations with families, fellow educators, and students. Let me be clear, I remember the previous system, and I can confidently tell you that Mayoral Accountability is the most successful and effective system of school governance that we can provide for our students.

During this testimony, I look forward to sharing why I believe that.

Thanking the State Legislature

First, let me thank you for your actions on several vital fronts.

Thanks to the New York State legislature, every NYC public school from every zip code is now receiving 100% Fair Student Funding, which amounts to over a \$600 million increase in aid



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going directly to school budgets. That is historic and a testament to this legislature's leadership and commitment to New York City Schools.

Thanks to the New York State legislature, every NYC public school in every zip code now has the resources to hire a full-time social worker to better meet the needs of our students. Over 500 social worker positions were budgeted for this year alone through an investment of over \$80 million. This would not be possible without the State's leadership and support.

Thanks to the New York State legislature, NYC public school students will be offered a meaningful and holistic summer experience far more robust than in the past, incorporating both academic and recreational opportunities. That is coupled with Mayor Adams' recent announcement of a historic \$79 million investment to increase SYEP opportunities to reach over 100,000 of our young people.

Thanks to the New York State legislature, resources are in place to ensure that every NYC public school student receives an internet-enabled device to supplement their learning experience. We have also made the process simpler and fairer for families to obtain a device if they need one. We ship them directly to schools once we hear more devices are needed, which removes the obstacle of families having to fill out a centralized bureaucratic form. We have shipped hundreds of thousands of devices to schools, and families will continue to receive that support.

Finally, thanks to the New York State legislature, the NYC Department of Education is in the process of adding additional community schools, which research has shown improved student attendance and academic outcomes. As of today, we have 317 community schools, up from 266 the previous school year. By next school year we will have over 400 community schools — a huge increase in a very short period of time. As you are keenly aware, community schools integrate key wraparound supports from community-based organizations, advancing our goal of meeting the needs of the whole child. From addressing food insecurity to expanding school-based healthcare services, we are deeply committed to this work and are immensely grateful for the State's support.

Mayoral Accountability and Positive Results

So let's turn to the issue of Mayoral Accountability and why I strongly support its continuation. First, it produces results. While we clearly still have much work to do as I outlined in my vision speech on Wednesday, under Mayoral Accountability, New York City has:

- Created 90,000 Early Childhood seats;
- Developed and implemented the successful Community Schools program that independent researchers have found significantly raised attendance and academic performance;
- Produced the highest graduation rates in New York City history across all demographic categories;



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- Vastly expanded opportunities for all students, including an expansion of programming in Advanced Placement, computer science, CTE, multi-lingual learning, and enrichment activities, including sports and after-school.

In addition, Mayoral Accountability has enabled us to direct more resources than ever before to our schools. New York City's schools are fully funded for the first time in history because our elected officials and community partners know who is clearly accountable for investing those resources effectively. I am deeply grateful to everyone here, including Senator Robert Jackson, for making this dream a reality.

Mayoral Accountability and COVID-19 Response

A second reason why I strongly support Mayoral Accountability is that it enables effective coordination of city agencies, as our response to the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated. Just in the past two months since I've become Chancellor, we've been able to work with other New York City agencies to implement our "Stay Safe, Stay Open" plan during the Omicron wave. This has included: distributing nearly 15 million rapid tests to students and staff; providing over 800,000 KN-95 masks to staff members; significantly increasing in-school testing; and more quickly identifying and isolating positive cases. This has resulted in a reduction of positivity rates from 16% at the beginning of January to below 1% since the start of February. Our attendance rates climbed from 65 percent the day I took office to nearly 89 percent this week. This success is a direct result of Mayoral Accountability.

Throughout the past two years, Mayoral Accountability has provided the flexibility required for municipal agencies to quickly adapt to problems and coordinate a unified response to the pandemic. In the early days of Covid-19, DOE worked closely with the City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Health and Hospitals Corporation in ways that would have been impossible in a decentralized system. That includes the one-of-a-kind, in-school vaccination initiatives the city undertook under my predecessor and long-time colleague Meisha Porter, which were imperative in ensuring our students' safety and allowing them to access in-person instruction over the past year. In the months ahead, as we make a renewed push to get our students and families fully vaccinated, I urge you to keep in mind the role Mayoral Accountability plays in making those opportunities possible. Most other U.S. school systems have not been nearly as ambitious or effective as we have at in-school vaccinations.

These pandemic-related examples are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to coordinating with other agencies to best serve our students. Working with the NYPD, the Department of Transportation, and the Parks Department, we not only ensure the streets around our schools are safe, we collaborate to expand access to outdoor space and opportunities for our students during the school day. Providing services for our Students in Temporary Housing requires constant coordination with multiple city agencies. And helping our families' access healthy food, after-school programming, childcare, and other city resources are all easier thanks to mayoral accountability.



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Mayoral Accountability and Family Empowerment

The third main reason I support Mayoral Accountability is its value in truly engaging effectively with our families. There has been some progress in recent years on that front that I believe we are poised to take to another level. Going forward, the New York City Department of Education will be making sure that our families are genuinely empowered in every respect, surfacing their expertise to enable all of us to educate and support their children more effectively. Research shows that of all the factors that determine positive student outcomes, family engagement is at the top of the list.

Parents know their children. We know that when our expertise as school educators meets with the influence of families, magic happens: children succeed not just academically, but physically, emotionally, and socially. We will be engaging with families in policy creation and implementation procedures at all levels. We are also going to be mindful and intentional about the importance of timeliness in our engagement. I do not want to create policy where families have not been part of the process.

In this spirit, I want to share that while my team is obviously committed to the engagement mandated for Panel for Educational Policy meetings, we want to go further. I am troubled by the fact that far too often parents are forced to wait until after midnight to be heard by decision makers. This is not transparency, and it must change.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank you, our elected officials, for the extension to changes of the Open Meetings Law. This change has been important to increasing parent participation. Starting in the early days of the pandemic, and throughout the course of transitioning from in person to virtual meetings, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in attendance throughout many parent leadership meetings. The ability of families to be able to access meetings from their home has eliminated some of the barriers that existed in attending these meetings in the past.

I recently participated in one of our regularly scheduled Chancellor Town Halls for CEC 8 up in the Bronx. As I know many of you have experienced, those meetings sometimes see very little in-person turnout, because of the obstacles I just described. But for this virtual town hall, we saw over 300 people log in and engage in some form. This is not an anomaly; we hear from our parent leaders all the time that virtual opportunities have made it much easier for parents to engage.

Having access to virtual meetings has given many parents the opportunity to attend meetings that they could not have before. In addition, parents can access several meetings in an evening all throughout our city that would never be possible if they had to travel to do so. The virtual meetings have brought interactions and information directly to our family's homes, enabling them to share their concerns and ideas as well as receive information to help their children.



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Our Families and Community Empowerment division will also be supporting superintendents, school leaders, and other school staff with professional development to find ways to permanently embed families' voice in their school communities. That includes supporting governance structures like Parent Associations, PTAs, School Leadership Teams, and Citywide Councils so they can provide policy recommendations that work for our schools and the system as a whole. Beyond these formal partnerships, we'll all be accountable for building relationships in the community, and that especially includes engaging the voices of our students.

Chancellor's Broad Vision

Successful family and parent empowerment and engagement is a key part of my vision for our schools. Part of that is providing our students and their families with an educational experience that actually works for them and addresses their needs. As I laid out in my blueprint speech on Wednesday at Tweed, I also intend to:

- Streamline our organization and focus everyone on supporting schools.
- Develop high quality care and education for children from birth to five.
- Use proven phonics-based literacy instruction so that each one of our students is able to read by third grade.
- Adopt new screening methods to identify at an early age dyslexia and other conditions so we can respond to them far more effectively.
- Create new and deeper collaborations with partners in the private and non-profit sectors with the overriding goal of ensuring long-term economic security for each and every student while committing that every student will leave high school with a diploma AND a pathway to a good job and career.
- Use technology to facilitate the ability of our schools to share best practices and learn from each other.
- Build on successful initiatives to support the social and emotional needs of our students and families after two years of this traumatic pandemic.

These transformations *will* happen under my leadership. I can say that with confidence because under Mayoral accountability, I know I have the resources needed to turn this vision into a reality.

We are still dealing with the remnants of the past world before Mayoral Accountability was adopted. Corruption, patronage, and inequity ruled the day, and our students suffered greatly. That is evident in some of the glaring disparate outcomes we still see, especially for communities of color. It was not an accident to see schools in wealthier zip codes resourced greater than communities with higher needs. We are still paying the price of these inequities.

Conclusion



In my speech earlier this week, I emphasized that genuine transformation requires close collaboration with our elected officials, community-based organizations, education advocates and school communities. Together, we are going to build a better system through hard work and building real trust. With my plan and centralized City Hall governance, I know that we can do this, and I look forward to you all holding Mayor Adams and myself accountable.

To be blunt, I would not have accepted the position as Chancellor if not for my faith in Mayor Adams AND his having Mayoral Accountability. That is the only way we can effectuate the kinds of bold changes we need to make to advance a more just, fair, and equitable school system. Please understand that engagement is not just a slogan for me. It is in my DNA and an applied practice. The level of access to my administration, and to me personally, is unprecedented, and will remain that way. I share that with you because I understand that with accountability comes responsibility to the constituencies we all serve. We will make bold changes to better meet the needs of students, in partnership every step of the way.