

Testimony for Hearing on Mayoral Control
Friday, March 4, 2022
Rachel Posner

Good morning. I am a public school parent and veteran teacher in the NYC DOE, as well as an advocate for racial and social justice in public education. I am a member of PRESS NYC, the MORE Caucus of the UFT, and NYC Opt Out, among other groups fighting for equitable schooling and democratic leadership.

I would like to express my hope that the legislature will end the undemocratic, racially biased, disenfranchising, and harmful governance structure of mayoral control. The idea that somehow it was going to increase “accountability” to put one powerful individual, very far from the impact of the system, in charge of the entire NYC schools, which are 85% students of color living in situations where they don’t have access to resources or power, was short-sighted at best, but regardless of intent it has been tremendously damaging to the most impacted stakeholders.

As a teacher, I have experienced the complete erasure of my expertise and voice as major decisions have been made, both pre-COVID and especially during COVID, when we were never asked what we wanted or needed to educate the children we are responsible for.

As a parent, I have watched so many of my peers feel utterly ignored and abused by a system where the only seats they supposedly have at the table are in Community Education Councils that have no real authority to make decisions - and whose election processes are warped by the inequities baked into the system.

It is no coincidence that the only places in the US that have abolished democratic school governance are the cities that are predominantly poor and Black and Brown. We must go by the demands in the resolution proposed by the Coalition to Finally End Mayoral Control, pasted below:

<https://www.nycmayoralcontrolnot.org/>

WHEREAS, Mayoral Control transferred powers from public school parents, educators, schools staff and the school communities to a single politician, and;

WHEREAS, Mayoral Control has eliminated the first rung of grassroots democracy commonly enjoyed by parents in nearly all school districts in New York state and the USA, effectively disenfranchising NYC parents and students, 70% of whom are poor and 85% of whom are Latinx, Black and Asian, and;

WHEREAS, Mayoral Control has been the method used to impose education reforms on New York City schools without the approval of parents or school-based staff, and frequently in the face of large public demonstrations opposing such “reforms,” including but not limited to:

- the closure of comprehensive and vocational high schools;
- the criminalization of student misbehaviors through “zero tolerance,”
- imposition of high-stakes testing and “value-added” assessment measures for all students, pedagogues and schools in place of a child centered pedagogy;
- the normalizing of co-located schools, push-in of charter schools and privatization;
- the large increases in spending on administration and legal staff to impose unpopular reforms and to defend these reforms from challenges;
- the contracting out of technology, and professional development services such as highly paid international consultants, often without transparency, bypassing local expertise, along with questionable results, and through many no-bid contracts;
- the lack of transparency and oversight regarding hiring policies which reversed previous gains and tended towards the disappearing of Black and Latinx classroom teachers;
- the push-out of senior teachers through assignment to the Absent Teacher Reserve and without due process, the punitive use of “Rubber rooms;”

- the elimination and/or reduction of civics, arts, music, foreign languages, athletic programs, vocational courses and adult education;
- the increasingly difficult burden on parents to advocate for students with IEPs to ensure they receive legally mandated and timely services;
- the decades long creation of chaos in school bus transportation;
- the continued neglect of infrastructure affecting air quality, contamination of drinking water, asbestos and lead paint residue despite large increases in the budget from state, city and federal sources amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars;
- the refusal to comply with legal standards for class sizes, even following class size reduction mandates issued from subsequent lawsuits;
- the racist decline of acceptance in what had already been an abhorrently sparse existence of Black and Latinx students attending Specialized High Schools and Gifted & Talented programs;
- the inequitable resources available to parents of MLL (Multilingual Learner) students, and the disparate learning outcomes of their children enrolled in ENL (English as a New Language) classes; particularly in schools located in the most marginalized communities;
- the punitive use of ACS (Administration for Child Services) against involved parents who challenged school administrators and/or DOE directives;
- the inadequate and confusing response to the COVID pandemic, and;

WHEREAS, Mayoral Control in NYC schools was instituted by the NYS Legislature 20 years ago and has been renewed without a detailed, comprehensive audit of its finances, or an assessment by parents and school based educators as to the effectiveness, or lack thereof of the reforms instituted, and;

WHEREAS, such a comprehensive and public review of Mayoral Control as stated above clearly falls under the Legislature's fiduciary duty of oversight and is furthermore, urgently needed in order for the people to make informed decisions as to how to replace Mayoral Control with a human rights system of democratic school governance and local control, therefor;

BE IT SO RESOLVED that the Bill on Mayoral Control not be attached to the Budget bill, and;

BE IT SO RESOLVED that the NYS Legislature form a Joint Committee composed of Assembly persons and Senators representing New York City by February 15, 2022, to conduct an AUDIT of the NYC Department of Education, which will;

- ***Take open public testimony (not by invitation only) on the effectiveness or lack thereof of the so called "reforms," spending, and educational policies enacted under Mayoral Control, and;***
- ***Hear specific proposals from rights-holders on how we, the people, may establish a human rights system of democratic school governance and local control such as is enjoyed by school districts throughout the state of NY and the nation;***
- ***Make a Report to the NYS Legislature with all data and findings acquired from the NYC Department of Education made available through a public, searchable database no later than June 1, 2022.***

Submitted by the NYC Coalition to Finally End Mayoral Control 2022
www.nycmayoralcontrolNOT.org

Thank you for your time,
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