



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 4, 2016

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS TESTIMONY ON MAYORAL CONTROL

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning Education Committee Chairman Marcellino, Ranking Minority Member Latimer, New York City Education Subcommittee Chairman Felder, and all Senators present.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to testify today about the importance of extending Mayoral Control of New York City's schools.

I want to thank our Schools Chancellor, Carmen Fariña, for joining me. If there's anyone who best understands our schools and knows what's best for our students, it's our Chancellor.

Chancellor Fariña and I began working together fifteen years ago, when I served on the local school board in Brooklyn's District 15 and she was the district superintendent.

As of today, she has spent half a century in education – as a teacher, a principal, a superintendent, a Deputy Chancellor, and as Chancellor for the past two years. There is no one I trust more with the education of NYC's 1.1 million public school children.

And that's not only because of her tremendous experience, but because she sees every child as her own child.

This afternoon we are here to discuss Mayoral Control – the proven tool that cuts through the corruption, chaos and dysfunction that, for too long, pervaded our educational system.

Mayoral Control is the best and most efficient way our City can support our students and our schools. It sends a loud and clear message: the buck stops with the Mayor.

Chancellor Fariña has said of her 50 years in education: "I have seen every way of governing schools – decentralized, centralized, school boards, regional – I've done it all."

And with that perspective, she has acknowledged that without Mayoral Control, she wouldn't have been able to create the ambitious goals or make the positive changes she has made. Simply put: the Chancellor couldn't have done her job the way it must be done.

I am proud to be Mayor of the city with the largest school district in America. And I share the Chancellor's feeling that every child is our child – whether they attend a district school, a charter school, or a parochial school.

That's why in addition to all our efforts to lift up our public school children, we have partnered with dozens of charter and parochial schools on Pre-K, afterschool, and professional development programs.

Giving our children a quality education is giving them the best chance at the American dream.

The numbers bear this out. Today a college graduate earns \$1.1 million more over the course of her lifetime than her counterpart with only a high school diploma. In New York City, a college graduate is nearly three times less likely to struggle with poverty.

This is why we know that we must do more. We know that we must provide the right resources, the best classes, the strongest teachers. And we know that there is no time to waste.

We know all of this because in the decades before Mayoral Control, time WAS wasted.

We've seen what happens when there is no singular vision for education in our city.

Our children suffer.

For too long, red tape prevented our students and our schools from making real and steady progress.

One school superintendent reported to one of thirty-two 9-member community school boards, while high schools separately reported to a 7-member Board of Education appointed by 6 different entities. Frankly, that sounds like a math problem, not an educational solution.

In 1989, the *New York Times* Editorial Board, arguing for an overhaul of a decentralized school system, wrote: "The system has not worked well. Lines of authority are confused, and sometimes illogical. Bureaucratic layers have multiplied rather than decreased. Parents and community groups, feeling shut out by professional politicians and special interests, shun school board elections."

I remember this, and I imagine those of you who have deep roots in New York City do as well – the patronage, the delays, the inefficiency, the deep inequities in our students' outcomes, the absence of clear authority, and the lack of commitment to do anything about any of it.

The good news is that change did come, buoyed by a diverse coalition of support that has only grown over time. Today, voices that transcend party lines and stretch across our business, faith, nonprofit and labor communities come together in common cause.

This is a consensus issue: Mayoral Control works.

It's no wonder the fight to make New York City schools accountable to the city's chief executive has been waged by mayors for more than 40 years. I give the Bloomberg administration

tremendous credit for achieving a goal sought for decades by leaders of every political persuasion.

Mayor Beame believed in Mayoral Control, all the way back in the 1970s. The following decade, Mayor Koch sought legislative control of the Board of Education, and proposed the mayor be held personally accountable for the state of the school system.

In 1991, Mayor Dinkins pushed further, making a bid for the authority to appoint a majority of members of the Board of Education.

Later, Mayor Giuliani said, with his characteristic directness, that – and I quote – “the board system makes no sense.” Once he left office, he admitted that his biggest regret was not being able to secure mayoral control of the City’s public schools.

And just last year, Mayor Giuliani voiced his support for our Administration’s effort to renew mayoral control, calling it “a matter of intellectual honesty.”

Finally, while Mayor Bloomberg became the first mayor to achieve Mayoral Control, he also became the first to face the daunting possibility of having it disappear. Before Mayoral Control was set to expire in 2009, he said “the alternative is too devastating to contemplate.”

He was right. We cannot go back to how things were.

Why are so many New Yorkers united in this conviction?

Because we now have over a decade of hard evidence that Mayoral Control works.

First: Under Mayoral Control, more students are graduating.

If you look at our city’s graduation rate before and after Mayoral Control became law fourteen years ago, the trend is astonishing.

In the 2001-2002 school year, which ended just weeks after the law was enacted, the city’s graduation rate was 50.8%. Just over half of the students in our public schools graduated – a number that had been nearly stagnant for a whole decade.

Operating under Mayoral Control, Mayor Bloomberg’s administration made some important gains. By the end of the 2013 school year, 66% of our students were graduating.

And we have built on that progress. In the last two years, we have seen a 4.5% gain, leading to the highest graduation rate our city has ever seen: 70.5%.

That all adds up to a 20% increase over 13 years. That’s a remarkable achievement by any measure, but it’s really extraordinary considering that our students are held to some of the toughest standards in the nation.

But we are not stopping now. Our goal is to ensure the graduation rate rises to 80% over the next 10 years.

We also need to be invested in what happens to our students after graduation day. Before Mayoral Control, no one even bothered to measure how many of our graduates go to college.

Now, we are measuring. And more and more high schoolers graduating means more and more are going on to college. The proportion of students going to college today actually exceeds the number that had graduated at all before Mayoral Control was instituted.

And fewer students are dropping out. Eleven years ago, 22% of kids dropped out of high school. Last year, it was 9%. And while that's still too high, it's a striking indication of the progress our City has made.

While there is more to do to close opportunity and achievement gaps, we're seeing improvement across the board.

More of our Latino students, black students and Asian students are graduating.
And fewer of our Latino students, black students and Asian students are dropping out.

Second: Under Mayoral Control, attendance is improving. In fact, at 92.2%, citywide attendance is at the highest level in the past decade.

Third: Under Mayoral Control, academic performance is improving.

For the second year in a row, and the first full year on our watch, our students' test scores are up in both English and math.

We believe, of course, that tests are important. But tests are just one important thing, not the only important thing. Truly understanding a student's progress means carefully looking at multiple measures.

Fourth: Mayoral Control enables the innovation that changes lives.

I came into office in January 2014 committed to giving New Yorkers free, high-quality universal Pre-K.

Three months later, on April 1, 2014, the State legislature enacted its budget, which included critical funding for Pre-K – and on behalf of all New Yorkers, I thank you for that.

From there, we moved quickly. Five months later, by the start of the school year, we had expanded free, full-day, high-quality Pre-K to more than 53,000 4-year-olds across our city – more than doubling the number of children getting a high-quality jumpstart to their education.

Such an ambitious vision, such a unified effort, and such a meaningful outcome for the whole city could not have happened without Mayoral Control.

We had the tools – the distinct authority and direct ability – to marshal City resources efficiently and effectively.

Quickly and systematically, our facility, inspection, and oversight agencies – the Department of Buildings, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Fire Department – collaborated to get 245 new NYC Early Education Centers ready, and to ensure that every Pre-K site met the highest health and safety standards.

And we made 300,000 individual calls to parents through a streamlined community outreach effort.

This year, 68,500 children are on the path to lifelong learning through Pre-K. That's more than triple the number who had seats before I took office, and more than the entire school district of Boston.

Pre-K does so much for parents, too, sparing them the cost of private pre-school or daycare and giving them the time to work to support their families.

Of course, I must again acknowledge the critical funding that has made Pre-K for All a reality. The State will reap the benefits of its investment many times over as our children grow up to build the city and the state of the 21st century.

At the elementary level and beyond, we've launched 130 Community Schools based on the philosophy that public education must serve the Whole Child, Whole School, and Whole Community.

Community Schools address challenges our children face inside and outside the classroom.

Each Community School offers free vision exams and glasses so kids can see the board, thanks to our homegrown eyewear company Warby Parker. Each provides resources to care for the physical and mental health of their children. And each offers a distinct lineup of other services, such as ESL classes for families so parents can help kids with their homework.

Mayoral Control has also enabled us to take aggressive action to turn around 94 of our lowest-performing schools – schools that have been in the bottom 25% in terms of test scores and graduation rates for 3 years in a row. We call these our "Renewal Schools."

And instead of giving up on them by closing these schools, we decided to stand up for them and provide the support they need for a second chance.

That means an additional hour of instruction every day, more professional development for teachers, and afterschool and summer programs for students. These 94 Renewal Schools have also been integrated into the strong Community Schools initiative I just described.

We're already seeing signs of broad progress. Most notably, from March 2015 to March 2016, attendance went up and chronic absenteeism went down.

We consistently call parents to ensure they know their child's attendance record, meet with students to encourage them to stay on track, designate staff members to work with children individually, and do whatever it takes to get kids to school.

However, I have said from the beginning that we would not hesitate to close schools if, after implementing a host of reforms and providing meaningful new resources, we did not see improvement in three years. From the beginning we've also reserved the right to close schools even sooner if they do not make necessary progress.

And DOE is now in the process of closing four schools and merging 25 others.

All across the city, our teachers and parents are hungry for innovation, finding new and creative ways to teach and learn. That's why we developed our PROSE schools program, based on the principle that a school can reach new heights when it has the flexibility to figure out how best to serve its kids.

At PROSE schools, that means suspending union work rules and DOE regulations so educators can develop new models for the best and most effective instruction.

And now, our 126 PROSE schools are true laboratories of learning. At Michael J. Petrides School on Staten Island, which I had the pleasure of visiting last May, students can take classes that mimic either the large lectures or small seminars they will encounter in college.

At Middle School 390 in the Bronx, the school schedule has been reworked with an aggressive focus on honing students' reading and writing skills. Now, students have an independent reading period at the beginning of each day and a writing period at the end of each day.

These are not only affirmative steps to change the school day and our school system. These are things that couldn't have happened just a few years ago. Mayoral Control made it possible.

We look forward to seeing what more our PROSE schools have in store for our students in the years to come.

And just as we believe learning shouldn't stop when the school bell rings, our commitment to our students doesn't end when the school day does.

So we vastly expanded our afterschool program for middle schoolers to give every one of them MORE opportunities to explore their existing interests and discover new ones. This means their parents spend LESS time worrying about their child from the time school's out to the time they finish work. Today, there are more than 110,000 middle schoolers in after school – more than double the kids enrolled in 2013.

Now, I always say that parents are the first and last teachers of our children. They must be partners in everything we do. And Mayoral Control is helping us achieve that.

We've made parent engagement a top priority, all the way to the highest levels of the DOE. From the 40 minutes of weekly dedicated parent time we've given to every teacher to Chancellor Fariña's Saturday meetings with our Community Education Council Presidents, each educator at DOE is involved in reaching out to parents.

At some schools, this might take the form of a “homework dinner,” where teachers and parents brainstorm strategies over a meal, or an informal meeting specifically for bilingual parents, so they can share their concerns in their native language.

We’ve also added two parent-teacher conferences each school year, for a total of four. During conferences, many schools invite the student to lead the discussion of their progress with their parents and teachers.

This new approach is yielding positive change. In the first four months of this school year, parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences has increased nearly 38% from a year ago. Some schools have reported 100% parent attendance at their conferences!

And thanks to our multilingual “Raise Your Hand” campaign, hundreds more parents have run for a seat on their Community Education Council, or C-E-C. In 2013, 729 parents applied. Last year, that number increased 75%, to 1,290.

We deeply value the input of our CECs. And we go beyond what the law requires in listening to and acting on their feedback.

Consider school co-locations, an issue which is understandably sensitive for parents and school communities.

When a co-location comes before a CEC, we deploy Deputy Chancellors, as well as Panel for Educational Policy members, to go directly to that school, do walk-throughs with parents, meet with parent leadership, and make sure we understand all concerns.

And, in several instances, this meaningful parent feedback has led us to change our plans.

Now, every time parents drop off their children at school, they are entrusting our teachers with so much. And that is why we are also intently focused on ensuring our teachers are the best they can be.

There’s no question that the vast majority of our teachers are devoted to their students and their schools – and are good at what they do. But we want our good teachers to become GREAT teachers. And now we have established the professional development programs to help that happen.

We also recognize that there are some teachers who should not be in the profession. From January 1, 2014 to March 31, 2016, we helped guide 1,361 teachers out of the New York City school system.

Now, I’ve told you what we’ve already achieved with Mayoral Control. But there is still much more we must do to help every child in every zip code reach their full potential.

We call our vision Equity and Excellence. And it comes with bold goals and the resources and commitment necessary to meet them.

Over the next 10 years, we will reach a high school graduation rate of 80%.

Over the next 10 years, we will increase the proportion of college-ready students from fewer than half to two-thirds.

Over the next 10 years, we will work to make sure all students are reading at grade level in third grade.

In the next 6 years, we will give every 8th grader the opportunity to take algebra.

In the next 5 years, we will give every high schooler the chance to take a variety of AP classes.

In the next 2 years, we will give every middle schooler the opportunity to visit a college campus.

And in September, we will begin something revolutionary, something that's never been tried before.

In two of our most underserved communities – the South Bronx's District 7, covering Port Morris, Mott Haven, Melrose and the Concourse; and Central Brooklyn's District 23, covering Brownsville, Ocean Hill and parts of East New York, every single 6th through 12th grader will have their first meeting with their Single Shepherd this fall.

The Single Shepherd is a cross between a guidance counselor, a mentor, and a life coach. They will stick with their kids for years, developing strong relationships with children and their families, and providing access to the academic, social, and emotional support students need to succeed. They'll step in when things are tough and make sure all our students are progressing toward their academic goals.

This is the kind of intense and dedicated support that students in many schools often take for granted. But we know what it will mean for those who really need it. And if we see that it works, we'll expand it to support more of our students in more communities.

And because Computer Science is literacy for the 21st century, we have committed to providing Computer Science for All. That means giving a computer science education to every public school student within 10 years – making us the largest school district in the nation to do so.

This will be a profound advancement. Right now, fewer than 5% of our public school students have an opportunity to take computer science, and until recently those who did had been clustered in just a few high-performing schools.

Hundreds of thousands of good jobs will be accessible to those with coding and other essential skills. These jobs also demand the subtler qualities that are cultivated by computer science learning, like teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.

In the words of Chad Dickerson, the CEO of Etsy, "This is a huge step forward for New York. As a Brooklyn-born company, we understand how important it is to educate and inspire the next generation of technologists, and to cultivate a workforce that will build New York's tech community for decades to come."

Mayoral Control puts in place the building blocks that will ensure our students and this city can compete in a world that demands quality education more than at any other time in our history.

What's more, Mayoral Control allows us to invest in our schools with greater fairness – and with centralized coordination and allocation of our resources.

For decades, there was a dynamic in our system where many schools serving the children of the poorest neighborhoods received less funding than schools in better-off areas. We believe that we must right that wrong.

That is why we are investing more than \$160 million a year to raise the level of funding across all of our schools to an average of 91% of the Fair Student Funding standard. And with the increase in State support this year, we will ensure no school is funded at less than 87%.

Starting in September, all our Renewal and Community Schools will be at 100% of that standard.

If we get a similar increase in aid from the State next year, we will grow that commitment to \$310 million a year, raising the average to 92.5% by Fiscal Year 2018, with no school below 90% of the Fair Student Funding standard.

Of course, our goal is to get every school funded at 100% of the Fair Student Funding standard. And if there is consistency in State contributions moving forward, we intend to get every school at 100% by Fiscal Year 2021.

This is just one more example of what Mayoral Control can help us give to our children.

Today I'm asking for a seven-year extension of Mayoral Control, the same length as its original authorization in 2002.

This is not a partisan issue or an ideological issue. This is an issue on which we've had an astonishing amount of agreement and cooperation, from business, from educators, and from government on both sides of the aisle. This is an issue that requires us to leave our politics behind so that we can move our schools forward.

If we were to end Mayoral Control and dismantle our current governance system – the stable and consistent system that already helped our children make such important progress – we would undermine the opportunities of young New Yorkers to grow, thrive, and participate in our city and our world.

With Mayoral Control, New Yorkers get to hold one person accountable. One person who lays out a vision, who is elected on the basis of the voters' belief in that vision, and – if that vision does not meet the voters' expectations – one person who faces the consequences in the next election.

So, as that person:

For the sake of those students, and for our parents, our families, our educators...and for the sake of our city and its future, I ask you: continue what works.

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