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THE SENATE
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Dear Parent:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on the renewal of mayoral control of public schools. It is one of the most important issues the state legislature must address this session, and I wanted to tell you my thinking on the issue.

Having spoken to hundreds of parents and visited dozens of schools, I believe there has been much good work in the schools over the last seven years. The challenge now is to build on the progress by maintaining clear mayoral accountability while increasing transparency and parental input. This is how we can best work together to deal with critical issues that have been raised -- from overcrowding to special education to enrollment -- and improve schools for all students.

That's why I introduced two pieces of legislation in the Senate that would increase transparency, accountability and parental engagement. Bill S.3912, based on an idea put forward by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, would create the Uniform Parental Engagement Procedure, under which Community Education Councils would be consulted about significant changes in school use, school siting and the opening and closing of schools. The bill would also would make Borough Presidents responsible for training and support of the CECs. The other bill, S.5384, would make the Department of Education a city agency for most purposes, with more transparent spending, budgeting and contracting practices, and increased oversight by the Comptroller, Public Advocate and City Council.

As you are no doubt aware, the legislature must act to renew mayoral control of the schools before June 30, or the system will revert back to the former Board of Education--a structure under which no one was ultimately responsible for the performance of the schools, and students suffered as a result. When the Assembly passed a school governance bill, sponsored by Speaker Silver, I evaluated it in the context of my long-stated goals of preserving the mayor's accountability while increasing parental involvement and transparency. I concluded that, while it may not be the precise bill I would have written were I starting from scratch, the Assembly proposal best accomplished the important goals parents have expressed to me and incorporated many of the ideas I put forward in my own pieces of legislation. That's why I joined as a co-sponsor of the Assembly bill, sponsored by Frank Padavan in the Senate.

The bill improves school governance to:

- Require superintendents to work out of real offices in the district, be a resource for parents, and play a role in supervising principals and assistant principals;
- Involve CECs in recruiting and recommending candidates for superintendents;
- Ensure that CECs play a role in making decisions on opening and closing of schools and significant changes in school use and create a more transparent process citywide;
- Grant the comptroller the authority to conduct full audits of the schools, just as any city agency; and
- Place stringent new regulations on the Department of Education's procurement policy.

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These improvements will give parents a better structure for input and engagement and make the Department of Education more transparent and accountable than it was in the first version of mayoral control. I have heard from literally hundreds of parents in my district, who have weighed in on all sides of this issue. I appreciate hearing from you about it, and more than anything I respect how personal and fundamentally important these concerns are to thousands of families whom I represent in the Senate.

I encourage you to keep in touch with me about your concerns about the schools, not only when we debate such global questions as mayoral control but whenever you have a question or concern, no matter how personal or how local. Thank you for listening to my perspective, and I hope you will continue to contact me about yours.

Sincerely,

Daniel