

The following is my testimony regarding mayoral control of public schools:

As a former public school teacher in NYC and as an educator of 20+ years, I support revoking the mayor's hold on public schools in New York City.

Schools are complex ecosystems that vary by location. Educators and parents are best positioned to identify needs and guide school policy. I was teaching at PS 59 in Brooklyn when Mayor Bloomberg instituted sweeping reforms, including changing our curriculum. It's been nearly 20 years, but I recall with perfect clarity what a complete disaster the Lucy Calvin's writing program was. It appears someone in the mayor's office heard great things about it, and forced it on every school. I don't doubt they thought they were doing us a favor by imposing what they thought was best for us. Unfortunately, the program depended on a set of experiences the students in my school had difficulty accessing. <https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2020/01/27/lucy-calkins-reading-materials-review> The school had to hire a writing coach to help us adapt the program appropriately for our population. We had a similar experience with the math program. In the mean time, the children who were exposed to these programs struggled and learned less.

Sadly, forcing inappropriate curriculum on school populations wasn't the only bad policy resulting from mayoral control of schools. The mayor jumped on the Bill Gates Foundation's ill-advised notion that making small schools within larger schools would improve performance. There was very little evidence to support this idea at the time, and it is now regarded as a failure. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/02/10/bill-melinda-gates-have-spent-billions-dollars-shape-education-policy-now-they-say-theyre-skeptical-billionaires-trying-do-just-that/>

Handing undue decision-making powers to mayors makes it easier to implement bad decisions like those outlined above because the mayor can disregard disempowered voices of dissent (and experience) and simply enact bad policies. There has been ample evidence of this during the pandemic.

Teachers and students really don't need a politician who is concerned about popularity and re-election making masking, vaccine, and COVID testing decisions for them. It is critical that public health and schooling decisions be made with the best interests of students and staff at the forefront. Sadly, in the current climate of politicized COVID response, we cannot trust an elected official to follow science and enact policies in the interest of public health. These decisions should be made by experts in education and public health with significant input from those affected by policies.

Thanks for considering my testimony.

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