

A Human Rights Alternative to Mayoral Control of NYC Public Schools

With Mayor-elect Eric Adams, we are entering the third generation of children educated under mayoral control which has proven to be, by any measure an utter failure. An utter failure particularly for Black/Latinx/Native American and Immigrant students, as well as those who are unhoused, in juvenile detention, as well as our children with special learning needs-- from the educationally and physically challenged to “Gifted & Talented” students of color. Keep in mind the fact that thousands of our “Gifted & Talented” Black/Brown students could be in the specialized high schools today were it not for racism.

The purpose of education is the full development of each child’s rich potential and *not* a place where a mayor’s privateer allies seek profit over free quality education. Instead, A human rights approach to public education and school governance would include children’s right to creative expression, emotional and social capacities, physical development, critical thinking habits and skills, as well as their academic competence.

The role of neighborhood public schools must be the social, cultural and educational anchor for a healthy community to be actualized. Neighborhood schools must be supported and strengthened as this anchor. They should be most accessible to students and parents, and most responsive to the needs of community and its elected officials.

A teacher’s work is to guide student learning. Real learning includes grappling with topics that have positive meaning to each of us as individuals as well as our family and our community well-being and development. Learning how to deal with conflicts in a positive manner is imperative to education as it addresses the goal of full human development. New York City’s public school motto, therefore, should be what the 19th Century Black Abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, said: “*We struggle to learn to learn to struggle.*”

This current pandemic has shown us— that *now* is the time to implement alternative forms of assessment instead of relying on biased high-stakes tests and screenings which are by definition, an inequitable and racist sorting of

students. Mayoral control and its high stakes testing industry collaborators love to profit from this proven bogus form of assessment of a child's intellectual development.

It will be more than 20 years of Mayoral Control re-enforcing a Eurocentric curriculum that-at best- marginalizes the majority of our public school children while normalizing white supremacist notions because the past two mayors and the incoming mayor have surrounded themselves with "experts" steeped in the now standard Eurocentric curricula and pedagogy.

As nationally recognized educator, Kathy Swope, has said about the centrality of "Multicultural education... it is not just including perspectives, insights and information from various cultures or groups . . . It's an ongoing process that empowers students to view the world from multiple perspectives and to understand the ongoing dynamics of this rapidly changing world . . . The anti-racist component is included when you talk about empowering students to make changes in the world, to make critical judgments about justice and equity, and not to be complacent about the status quo or about historical omissions and distortions."

What mayoral control blocks is parents' and community members' human right to participate in all decisions concerning them and their children. This is especially important in public education, which has such a pervasive influence on the quality of all their lives. The current variety of mandated constructs developed for parent engagement and involvement *has not* resulted in parents as partners and must be designed collaboratively by parents and community themselves. Mechanisms for parent community decision-making at all levels must be in place for these decisions to occur and take effect.

Mechanisms must be established to identify funding priorities at the school, community and city levels. Such mechanisms will challenge the priorities of the central bureaucracy and enrich debate.

In the human rights model, teachers and their unions have a special responsibility to become partners in the social justice reform of our inequitable educational and social institutions, especially those that affect the communities they serve.

Hence, the only way forward in this era is to have a school system built on human rights principles like a ***People's Board of Education***, an antiracist proparent schools' governance structure such that democracy *and* accountability are both the means and the purpose of decision-making with teaching, learning, and community participation.

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