

Testimony - Mayoral Control
Hosted by Liz Krueger
Delivered September, 18, 2008

I'm **Robyn Hatcher** I'm a public school parent and Co- chair of the housing, human services and youth committee of Manhattan Community Board 5

Mayoral Control. One of the inherent problems with this issue for me, is the language being used to describe it. Control means to limit, or restrict somebody or something, to exercise power or authority over something. Not a very inviting description to attach to a system designed to deal with our youngest citizens. But unfortunately a description that too aptly applies to some of what has been happening in the past 6 years.

I was PTA president of my son's elementary school before Mayoral control, so I know first hand how thick that BOE red tape could be and I do believe that some things are better with the new system. But the children and families in NYC deserve more than just better than. They deserve the best possible and I strongly believe that Mayoral Control should not be renewed without substantial reforms. Two areas I feel strongly about are 1) The DOE's lack of transparency and accountability and its resistance and inability to hear and respond to community input. 2) the reliance on traditional standardized testing to assess both schools and the mayors performance.

For the first issue, I'll be putting on my community board hat. As chair of Human Services and Youth committee, I am amazed at the fact that whereas all other city agencies make themselves available to meet with the community boards and other community leaders, the DOE is conspicuously absent from these meetings. What that implies to me is that the DOE feels it has no reason to hear what anyone has to say since only they (the DOE) and the mayor have control over what happens in our schools. The children attending these public schools are our children. I believe that the opinions, observation and experience of parents and community leaders need to at least be heard, acknowledge and maybe even taken into consideration!

I serve on one of the largest Community boards in Manhattan. It spans USN to CPS, Lexington Ave to 8th Ave. And anyone who has been in midtown lately knows how residential building in that area is skyrocketing, yet my community board has NO PUBLIC Schools. Where are the families who are moving into all these new coops and condos expected to send their children? To the already over crowded schools in the adjoining CBs. And while on the subject of overcrowding, the money that NYC has received to reduce overcrowding has NOT been spent on this issue! Some may argue that these wealthy parents will send their children to public school. Apparently this is what the chancellor expects and would actually prefer but that is not what research has been showing. The wealthy families moving into the midtown and downtown areas are flooding into the various high performing public schools creating part of the overcrowding issue and adding to the inequity of the system.

At a March 6th 2008 "Who Rules the Schools" meeting, Commissioner Joel Klien remarked that one of the benefits of mayoral control was the alignment between the Mayor and the budget and the mayor and the chancellor. What I would like to see is an alignment between the Mayor and

City Planning and the mayor and the School Construction Authority so that as residential building expands, construction of new schools expands accordingly.

Now as a parent, who has spoken to many PS teachers and administrators, before I can support this renewal, I need to be assured that there will be ways to insist on more transparency and more input by the community, parents and people who have real experience in education.

Undeniably mayor Bloomberg is intelligent, an excellent businessman and strategist and he probably really does want to improve our schools. But, I don't think the mayor would hire a plumber to operate in the surgical unit of a hospital, so I find it hard to understand why he hired a lawyer to run an educational system. Schools cannot be run like a corporation. It does not work to spend thousands of dollars on strategists and analysts who know little about education to evaluate school performance. And though I realize and agree that assessment tools are necessary, it doesn't work to force teachers and students to submit to repeated instructionally insensitive standardized testing just so the Mayor can have a metric to quantify his results. We know that data from these standardized test can be and has been manipulated to fit public relations mandates.

How else can we see how our schools are doing? Create more instructionally supportive testing. In that same March 6th speech Joel Klien talked about the public school providing equal educational opportunity, I truly believe the only way to assure equal educational opportunity is to explore the extensive research done by studies like the Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment and the work done around Social and Emotional learning. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning <http://www.casel.org/> and the George Lucas Educational Foundation, <http://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning>, research shows that promoting social and emotional skills leads to reduced violence and aggression among children, higher academic achievement, and an improved ability to function in schools and in the workplace. If the success of mayoral control continues to be assessed by tests scores, I strongly believe that new tests need to be developed. I am saddened by the amount of students who are not getting the type of education that will prepare them for the future, I'm saddened by the amount of teachers and administrators who will be forced to manipulate data in order to save their jobs and or their schools. And I'm saddened by the students who will lose interest in the educational process because there is no room for creativity or process learning because their teachers are forced to teach to the test.

I know that the NY city public school system can work. My son graduated from PS 116 elementary school, NYC Lab middle school and will graduate this year from Stuyvesant HS. He benefited tremendously from the talented and gifted program at PS116, a program that I hear has come under attack by many in this new system. That deeply saddens me. Gifted children have specific needs that cannot and should not be ignored. They too deserve equal educational opportunity.

So to conclude yes, some things are better under this new form of governance and I believe it should be renewed but only with many of the reforms identified by the recent commission. Maybe if we can move from Mayoral **control** to Mayoral **governance** our school system will truly be able to achieve the results we all so dearly want and need.

