



Assembly Education

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NEW YORK - (10/14/21, 10:00 a.m., Public Hearing Room, 250 Broadway)

The Assembly Standing Committee on Education held a virtual public hearing on Thursday to examine best practices utilized by other school districts which may be implemented in the New York City School District. In attendance were Chair Michael Benedetto, and Assembly Members Alicia Hyndman, Amanda Septimo, Harvey Epstein, and Michael Reilly.

Benedetto began the hearing by explaining that he was simply looking for alternatives to the current governance structure of NYC schools. Benedetto said the main goal of the hearing would be to gather ideas, meet again in the Spring, then draft a bill on school governance. Benedetto interrupted legislators in their lines of questioning, and speakers during their testimonies, to emphasize this point.

Speakers generally expressed concerns over the timeline. Dr. Jeffrey Henig, a Professor at Columbia University, warned that changes to governance were risky and should not be done on a whim, as there were no clear studies or evidence to draw from on the effectiveness of different governance structures. Camille Casaretti of the Educational Council Consortium argued that the legislature should take more time and establish a commission to take on the issue of governance. Benedetto and Epstein asked why a commission was necessary, and Casaretti said that there should be more community participation and a greater focus on the repercussions of any changes. Septimo told her that a longer-term solution was impractical, as mayoral control was set to expire in June of 2022. Casaretti contended that the legislature had two years to analyze this issue and that there was simply not enough time.

Speakers had a variety of other complaints over the current governance structure, mayoral control of the NYC schools. Benedetto was quick to shut down criticism, though speakers tried to point towards the failures as a guide. Henig, Casaretti, and other speakers stressed that community members should have more influence over any changes made to the structure. Leonie Haimson, Executive Director of Class Size Matters, cited surveys suggesting that mayoral control was unpopular among voters. Haimson added that mayoral control had led to a significant waste of money as well.

To fix issues surrounding mayoral control, Haimson recommended the chancellor should be an experienced teacher, school boards should have less mayoral appointees, and requests for information should be quicker and easier. Legislators and speakers overall agreed that parents should have more say, and Hyndman hinted that NYC was too large and complex to have an effective centralized structure of school governance. Thomas Sheppard, the CEC Presidents' Representative for the NYC Department of Education, claimed that the mayor had overstepped his authority and that Community Education Councils (CEC) need greater power. Sheppard recommended that the legislature reorganize section 2590-G of the education law to improve upon the authority of CECs.

Henig claimed that there was no clear solution but urged that whatever structure the legislature chose should be consistent and have proper support from the community. Hyndman argued that no mayor would be willing to give up control of NYC schools, though speakers frequently asked for power to be spread to other officials, the city council, school boards, CECs, school learning teams, or basically anyone else in NYC.

Ryan Navarro / New York StateWatch

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