

**Year Two Report on The Campaign for Better Schools:  
Outcomes of the Mayoral Control Debate –  
Changes to NYC School Governance Legislation and  
Long-Term Effects**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 1995, the Donors' Education Collaborative (DEC) has supported a range of groups—advocacy, organizing, research and policy groups—who advocate for, or whose members come from, diverse constituencies concerned about public education in New York City (NYC). DEC has also encouraged collaborations among these types of groups to leverage their influence on education policy at the Department of Education (DoE), city and state levels. The groups, consisting of youth, parents and community leaders, operate in all five NYC boroughs. Some focus solely on education issues, while others have multi-issue agendas. They include groups of African-American, Asian and Latino populations, as well as immigrant and refugee populations.

In anticipation of the June 2009 sunset of mayoral control of the NYC schools, and the passing of new legislation that would maintain, change or end mayoral control of the NYC schools, DEC wanted to encourage a robust public debate about school governance. Such debate was notably absent in 2002 when Mayor Michael Bloomberg was first granted mayoral control of the schools.

In December 2007, DEC provided a planning grant to the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), with the understanding that in collaboration with the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), the Community Involvement Project of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (CIP), and the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), they would design a campaign to ensure that a wide range of parent and community voices were part of any public discussion of the future of mayoral control. Following six months of planning, these initiating groups received a DEC grant to build a broader collaborative that would mobilize parents, youth and community members to participate in the mayoral control debate, with the hope that their voices would help inform the forthcoming mayoral control legislation. The grant period extended from July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009, the date for sunset of the state legislation that initially established mayoral control of NYC schools.

Following six months of planning, in May 2008, the four initiating groups invited an additional 20 organizations to a retreat to discuss building a coalition that would draw up a platform for NYC school governance characterized by a continuation of mayoral control, but with significant changes in three key areas: greater checks and balances on the mayor's authority, greater transparency of financial and achievement data, and greater public participation in decision-making. (See Appendices B and C for more on the initiating groups and a list of Campaign member groups.) Following the retreat, the initiating groups constituted themselves as a Coordinating Committee, along with New York ACORN and Make the Road NY (MTRNY), and the larger group of all the organizations became the Steering Committee.

This grant provided DEC with an opportunity to take a fresh look at the impact its grant making strategy was having on the broader NYC educational policy environment. DEC invited Research for Action, working in collaboration with Professor Jeffrey Henig of Teachers College, to evaluate the initiative for that purpose. The evaluation has been conducted in two parts. A Year One Report, covering the period May 2008-May 2009, focused on the political environment in which the Campaign emerged, how Campaign members worked jointly to create a platform for making changes to mayoral control, their success in gaining visibility and legitimacy for their positions, and the role of DEC's funding in building the capacity of the Campaign to be a player in the mayoral control debate. The Year Two Report covers May 2009-May 2010 and continues the story of the

Campaign and its impacts both on the NYC school governance legislation and on the city's long-term educational and civic environment.

## Study Framework, Research Questions and Methodology

The overall question that this study seeks to answer is:

In what ways does DEC's sustained investment in advocacy, organizing, research and policy groups that include and advocate for minority and immigrant families contribute to a broader public understanding and a richer, more informed, and more democratically responsive debate about NYC school governance and policies?

This question is raised in the context of the significance of "civic capacity" for the sustainability of school reform. A community that has civic capacity may be defined as one in which groups work across sectors to identify a shared agenda and mobilize to provide the human and financial resources needed to forward that agenda.<sup>22</sup> Considerable research has suggested that school districts in cities in which significant civic capacity is present are those in which reforms are most likely to be sustainable.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, research indicates that civic capacity can be enhanced when civic coalitions include low-income groups, often minority populations in urban settings, because the education agenda is more likely to reflect the needs of these populations, represent the aspirations of their communities, and be sustained as it becomes embedded in a broader community agenda.<sup>24</sup> The impact of DEC's support of the Campaign can be analyzed with a focus on whether the Campaign succeeded in its policy goals, but it also can be seen within the larger concept of civic capacity and whether DEC funding has made a contribution to the longer term development of such capacity to exercise an ongoing role in school reform.

The final report, therefore, addresses the following research questions:

1. How did the political environment evolve during the legislative negotiations, and what internal and external hurdles did the environment create for the Campaign as it sought to influence the legislation on mayoral control of NYC schools?
2. Which groups were projected by the media, political and civic leaders, and education advocates to be the most influential in shaping the legislation before the Campaign's entrance into the mayoral control debate? How did these perceptions change after the new legislation was passed? What was the strategy of the Campaign for gaining influence, and how did DEC's support help the Campaign build its visibility and power?

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<sup>22</sup> Gold, E. Simon, E., Cucchiara, M., Mitchell, C. & Riffer, M. (2007). *A Philadelphia Story: Building Civic Capacity for School Reform in a Privatizing System*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action; Stone, C. N., Henig, J.R., Jones, B.D. & Pierannunzi, C. (2001). *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

<sup>23</sup> Stone, C. N., Henig, J.R., Jones, B.D. & Pierannunzi, C. (2001); Henig, J. R., Hula, R. C., Marion Orr, & Pedescleaux, D. S. (1999). *The Color of School Reform*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Clarke, S. E., Hero, R. E., Sidney, M. S., Fraga, L. R., & Erickson, B. A. (2006). *Multicultural Moments: The Politics of Urban Education Reform*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Portz, J., Stein, L., & Jones, R. R. (1999). *City Schools and City Politics*. Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas.

<sup>24</sup> Henig, J.R. & Stone, C. N. (2007). Civic Capacity and Education Reform: The Case for School-Community Realignment. In R. A. Rothberg (ed.), *City Schools: How Districts and Communities Can Create Smart Education Systems* (pp. 117-136). Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

3. What were the expectations of the media, political and civic leaders, and education advocates for the legislative outcomes before the debate? How did the final legislation reflect the Campaign's platform, and how can the legislative outcomes be explained in light of expectations, the Albany context, and the Campaign's strategy?
4. What are the long-term effects of the NYC school governance debate and consequent legislation on the educational policy environment and on the potential for civic capacity for influencing, supporting and sustaining education reform? What was the impact of DEC support of coalition development on civic capacity?

### *Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis*

Political and policy events are complex, contingent, and often are the result of multiple causes. No research design concerning such events can disentangle lines of responsibility for why things unfold the way they do with the precision and reliability that we ascribe to laboratory experiments. Randomized field trials, quasi-experimental designs, and large-sample quantitative analyses narrow the range of credible, rival interpretations but themselves depend on assumptions and can rarely determine unequivocal causality regarding a specific historic event such as we are addressing here. Our collection and use of qualitative data involves careful descriptive analysis, paying attention to issues of sequencing and applying informed judgment to rule out less credible explanations. This analytical perspective is not intended as a substitution for quantitative approaches, but rather is the best way to proceed to understand and learn from the impact of DEC's coalition funding strategy.<sup>25</sup>

To examine the research questions for this study we used a pre/post design. We interviewed observers of NYC education policy, Campaign member groups, representatives of the other groups in NYC representing parents and/or community, and key state and city policy makers—once before the debate heated up, and then again several months after the new legislation was passed. (Appendix A lists the categories and number of interviewees, as well as observations conducted and documents reviewed.) Our purpose was to determine how the Campaign's emergence and efforts altered the views of key education stakeholders as to which groups would be strong players in the mayoral control debate and what outcomes were possible and likely. Based on this design and the methodological assumptions outlined above, we have made informed assessments about the extent to which the outcomes of the mayoral control debate were influenced by DEC's funding and the Campaign. In addition, we closely tracked media coverage of the groups, individuals, and issues involved in the mayoral control debate and legislative negotiations, and reviewed relevant public opinion polls. These sources gave us important additional insight into the dynamics of the debate and its outcomes. Finally, we observed Campaign meetings and activities in order to deepen our understanding of the political environment and Campaign strategies for affecting the debate and legislative outcomes.

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<sup>25</sup> King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press; Weiss, C. H. (2002). What to Do Until the Random Assigner Comes, In R. Boruch & Mosteller F. (Eds.), *Evidence Matters*. Washington DC: Brookings. King, Keohane, and Verba, in one of the most respected books on research methods, put it this way: "Even if explanation – connecting causes and effects – is the ultimate goal, description has a central role in all explanation, and it is fundamentally important in and of itself. It is not description versus explanation that distinguishes scientific research from other research; it is whether systematic inference is conducted according to valid procedures" (34).

Once completed and transcribed, all interviews and observation field notes were read in their entirety by team members, as well as coded by broad themes identified in team meetings as salient to the focus of this study. We used qualitative data analysis software (Atlas ti) to code the data by theme, which then allowed us to look across interviews for commonalities and variation in perspective. This content analysis enabled us to sort the multiple points of view in play and was the basis for our interpretation of events. Team discussions throughout the research and writing process, as well as multiple readings by team members of draft sections of the report, refined our analysis. The research team was multi-disciplinary, bringing perspectives and expertise from political science, anthropology and education to our examination of events and outcomes. In addition, we included Campaign members in the interpretive process through individual discussions and group feedback sessions where we presented our findings for critique and reaction, and through their feedback to drafts of our reports. The report, therefore, draws on the perspectives of multiple respondents and reflects a synthesis of the research and analysis by multiple researchers. An addendum to this report, *Mayoral Control and the Media: The Campaign for Better Schools and Other Actors in the Public Lens*, explains how we tracked media coverage and made findings based on our media analysis.

### DEC's Contribution - Taking a Long-Term View

In planning for an evaluation of its grant making, DEC had the prescience to extend the evaluation one year beyond the legislative decision (to May 2010), rather than ending the study when Campaign funding ended. This extended evaluation period provided the opportunity to examine some long-term effects of DEC's grant making—although all the effects might not be fully apparent until the next mayoral election and/or the sunset of the current iteration of mayoral control legislation in 2015.

The Year One report shows that the trust and relationships generated by past joint work provided the social capital among the coalition groups needed to manage the inevitable tensions between their desire to hold to principles and the need to be pragmatic about policy recommendations in their platform—which called for continued mayoral control, but with significant changes. In the Year Two report we see that this tension extended to the heated mayoral control policy environment in Albany where the Campaign needed to be flexible in its strategy in order to gain policy “wins.” We argue that the Campaign's strong focus throughout the debate on the concentrated power of the mayor contributed to openings for legislative changes that now provide parents, youth and community leaders with new handles for exercising their influence – and are beginning to show their potential to serve as checks and balances on the mayor's authority – even though the legislation did not alter the mayor's power advantage on the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP). The Campaign's strong focus on Bloomberg's concentration of power strengthened the hand of legislators who were also concerned about the extent of the mayor's authority and the disempowerment of parents. The Campaign's strategy of leading with challenges to the PEP opened the larger question of how mayoral control could be improved by increasing transparency and public participation, and was agile enough to maximize Campaign influence in these areas. Furthermore, the vigor and visibility of Campaign groups gained them recognition as legitimate representatives of parent and community voices. The final legislation's new avenues for public participation, the public mobilization spurred by the mayoral control debate, and significant media attention to the issues raised in the debate has altered the political dynamics in the city, providing voice to alternative ideas about education reform, including those in which parents collectively might play a more vital role. The Campaign groups

emerged from the experience of the debate and legislative negotiations with increased sophistication in state politics, and a commitment to work together again in the future to support each other.

## Overview of Year Two Report

In the following chapters of this report, we continue the story of the Campaign for Better Schools that we started in the Year One report:

- Chapter 2 looks back and reviews the key accomplishments of the Campaign up until May 2009, and then examines the Campaign's strategies and activities that unfolded in the period from May 2009 to May 2010. The chapter presents interview and media analyses that reveal the external and internal hurdles the Campaign faced as the debate moved from NYC to Albany.
- Chapter 3 compares the legislative outcomes with the Campaign's platform, to show the ways in which the legislation aligns with or deviates from the Campaign's recommendations for change. In examining the legislative outcomes, this chapter discusses the expectations of a range of observers of education in NYC and what actually happened, and then analyzes the outcomes in light of the atmosphere in Albany and the Campaign's strategy.
- Chapter 4 takes a longer view of the effect of the mayoral control debate. Media analysis, as well as interviews conducted post-legislation, show that legislative outcomes to which the Campaign contributed have potential for instigating stronger democratic practices of public participation in the education arena. The analysis also indicates that the Campaign's accomplishments have potential for affecting public participation in other areas of city politics as well.
- Chapter 5 reviews the findings and revisits the implications of DEC's strategy of sustained support for education advocacy group collaborations, including increased sophistication about working on policy issues in a high visibility, fluid environment; the potential for future mutual support; and greater civic capacity to promote responsive, effective and equitable schools.

## Chapter 2: The Story of the Campaign and the Hurdles It Faced

When DEC made an award to four of its grantees in January 2008 to form a coalition and plan a campaign that would insert parent and community voice in the mayoral control debate, no one could have predicted the twists and turns the political environment would take. Many believed it was a long shot for a coalition representing grassroots constituencies to contest the politically and financially well-resourced mayor of NYC, who was determined to preserve as his legacy mayoral control of the schools, along with his wide-reaching education reforms. Moreover, in November 2008, Mayor Michael Bloomberg decided to extend term limits and run for a third term. This turn of events altered the game. Suddenly, the coalition faced a new political reality: the mayor was not just preserving his legacy, but now showed his intent to maintain active control of the education system in order to deepen and ensure the sustainability of his reform agenda. Public irritation with the extension of term limits and concern about Bloomberg's concentrated power, however, also increased the mayor's vulnerability, a consequence about which a number of his advisors had warned him. Rather than focusing on school governance as defined in the law, the debate now centered on the Bloomberg-Klein approach to school governance. Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein had argued that, in establishing a more central authority to govern the schools, they were pursuing a "civil rights mission" with reforms that would expand educational opportunity to children who had been least well-served in the public education system and would substantially improve their outcomes.<sup>26</sup> The Campaign contested Bloomberg's and Klein's top-down leadership approach and implicitly their appropriation of the civil rights mantle, as well as their claim to speak for a silent majority. By organizing to include parent, community and youth voices in education policy-making, the Campaign was upholding the ideal of democratic participation in public institutions, and asserting that education as a civil right must be embedded in the social movements of those who are to be the beneficiaries.

In our Year One report, we identified the Campaign's accomplishments as of early May 2009, after the Campaign had completed its platform and was continuing its outreach to gain visibility and influence for its positions. In this section, we review the important findings from the Year One report before picking up the story of the Campaign in Year Two. Figure 1 provides a summary of the Year One report findings.

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g., Gootman, E. (2009, March 6). Times Topics: Joel Klein. *New York Times*. [http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/k/joel\\_i\\_klein/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/k/joel_i_klein/index.html).

## Year One of the Campaign: A Review of Its Accomplishments

**Figure 1 Accomplishments of the Campaign During Year One, May 2008-May 2009**

### **Solid Foundation**

- Worked together in the past as a coalition with DEC support
- Brought complementary organizational purposes and skills to coalition efforts
- Built on existing mutual trust in developing their platform

### **Strong Infrastructure**

- Effectively used DEC support to hire staff to coordinate their efforts
- Developed an efficient but consultative decision-making structure
- Built media and research capacity

### **A Strategic Approach**

- Used a balance of principles and pragmatism to guide their positioning
- Established a widely agreed upon framework for the debate: checks and balances, transparency and public participation

### **Visibility and Legitimacy**

- Achieved visibility for their platform among media, policy makers and community members
- Recognized by the media as a key voice in the mayoral control debate among those groups representing parents and community
- Influenced framing of issues in the mayoral control debate

### **Constituency Building**

- Represented diverse array of skills, geography, ethnicity, immigrant experience and age
- Deepened constituents' understanding of education issues and of both local and state politics
- Included new groups, which gained coalition experience and expertise with education issues

### *A Solid Foundation*

DEC's prior sustained support to the initiating groups, both for their work as separate organizations and for their collaborative work, had created a solid foundation for the Campaign for Better Schools. The four funded groups built on their previous coalition efforts in planning the collaboration and the Campaign. The debate over mayoral control was not the first time they had joined their different skills as organizations—constituency building, advocacy, research, and policy expertise—to develop an informed, strategic campaign. They believed their history and experience as DEC grantees had built their capacity to plan and work together around complex issues. Without DEC support, some or all of the initiating groups agreed, they might have expended some resources on the issue of mayoral control, but the DEC funding ensured that they would both come together early as a coalition and engage more deeply with the issues throughout the Campaign. The groups were able to build on their previously established mutual trust to tackle key issues and come to consensus on a platform much earlier and more efficiently than might otherwise have been the case.

In past campaigns, for example coalition work around the education budget or the CEJ's Lead Teacher initiative, the groups and the teachers' union had formed powerful alliances. In this case, however, the coalition decided not to invite the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to participate. Randi Weingarten, UFT President, was bound to be a powerful player in the mayoral control debate and in Albany, but the groups believed that the Campaign agenda to increase parent and community voices in policy making might differ from the interests of the union and its teacher constituency. The Campaign could not predict the UFT's position, and so could not count on the UFT to stand behind the platform for change it would be developing.

### *Strong Infrastructure*

DEC's investment also benefited the Campaign by providing the necessary resources to hire staff who could coordinate the efforts of the member groups, since each group had its own core priorities to attend to as well. The Coordinating Committee formed by the initiating groups along with New York ACORN and MTRNY, assisted by Campaign staff, planned and led monthly meetings of the larger set of groups forming the Steering Committee. The Coordinating Committee brought all key decisions to the Steering Committee for deliberation. The constituency-based groups then consulted with their members before coming back to the Steering Committee to give approvals. A staff coordinator charged with facilitating communication and coalition-building kept the consultative platform development process moving ahead through both committees, as well as in working groups and subcommittees of the whole. Two community organizers on staff worked closely with the Campaign's advocacy and constituency-based groups and conducted outreach to the formal district structures for parent participation. In addition, DEC funding was used to hire a media consultant to supplement the coalition's own expertise in developing messages, timing actions and press conferences, and positioning itself with the media. The Campaign also had DEC support to do research and targeted analyses of key policy issues—looking at mayoral control in other cities and the relationship of mayoral control to student achievement gains were two examples—that the Campaign could use to challenge the administration.

### *A Strategic Approach*

From its inception, the Campaign sought to balance principles and pragmatism in positioning itself on mayoral control. Although Campaign members shared a strong concern about the unchecked

power of the mayor under the existing legislation, they were also sensitive to the political climate in which any alternative was seen as a return to the previous governance system, widely criticized as lacking clear lines of accountability. Campaign leaders took the strategic position to advocate for *continuing* mayoral control, albeit *with significant changes*. In this way, Campaign members sought to strike a middle ground and ensure they would be perceived as “in the game.” Early research conducted by the Campaign had indicated that mayoral control in other cities did not always give the mayor the kind of lock on authority that Bloomberg had through his absolute control of the PEP. The Campaign’s knowledge of alternative models allowed them to pursue an informed strategy of calling for major change to the PEP, and position itself as a voice for change in the context of continuing mayoral control. As media coverage showed, by May 2009, the Campaign was a firmly established player sought after as a legitimate challenger to the Bloomberg-Klein approach. The three-pronged framework of the Campaign platform—increased checks and balances, transparency, and public participation—resonated not only with member groups, but also with the media, legislators, the Public Advocate, and other parent groups participating in the debate.

### *Visibility and Legitimacy*

By May 2009, the visibility of the Campaign was growing, and the debate in the media, among policy makers, and in the community reflected many of the major points in the Campaign’s platform. Although there were other groups that also claimed to represent parents, including Learn NY and the Parent Commission, the media frequently turned to the Campaign when it was looking for a parent perspective. (See the Year One Report and the accompanying Media report for a detailed analysis of media coverage of the Campaign and other groups in the mayoral control debate.) Moreover, our media analysis indicated that the framing of the issues around mayoral control was increasingly aligning with the Campaign’s platform. For example, by spring 2009, discussion of checks and balances increasingly focused on whether PEP members would have term limits or serve at the pleasure of the mayor, as well as whether the mayor would appoint a majority of the PEP members.

### *Constituency Building*

The Campaign derived strength from the wide array of groups it brought together and its resulting representation of constituencies important to public education in NYC. The diversity of participating groups contributed critical skills to the Campaign—including strategic thinking, constituency building, and research. The coalition base of the Campaign had citywide breadth, as well as depth among specific interest groups (African American, Latino, Asian, youth and immigrants), and in high need geographic areas, specifically in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. Constituency-based groups’ involvement in the Campaign, particularly in the formation of the platform, served to deepen their members’ knowledge about school governance issues, and to increase their sophistication working at a policy level as they dealt with balancing principles and pragmatism.

The platform was carefully negotiated, and ultimately solidified the member groups around a shared set of policy positions for improving mayoral control, although the process of refining the platform was not easy. The tensions between being pragmatic about what could be achieved and putting forth principles for what might be the ideal goal were traversed without groups breaking away. The number of groups in the coalition grew to 26. Some of the groups on the Steering Committee had not previously engaged in education policy issues or coalition building, or in working on issues

generally beyond those central to their own core work. Through their exposure to groups with experience in education policy change, these groups increased their capacity to navigate the inevitable tensions of complex, high stakes policy environments. The inclusion of these groups in the Campaign strengthened the coalition by expanding its base of collaborating groups. By May 2009, the coalition had been established and agreed upon a platform with recommendations for changes to the existing legislation in the areas of checks and balances, transparency and public participation. Figure 2 provides a summary of the Campaign platform, and Appendix D presents the full document.

## Figure 2 Summary of Campaign Platform

“The Campaign for Better Schools supports the concept of Mayoral Control but disagrees with the way it has been implemented.... The reforms outlined in this proposal will make mayoral control of schools workable by strengthening the decision making process by which education policies and reforms are developed, and by restoring the trust that families and communities put in the school system.”

### Checks & Balances

- **The PEP** should have a minority of members appointed by the mayor, each with set terms and full voting rights, should include representatives from all the boroughs and multiple community representatives, and should select a Chair who sets meeting agendas.
- **The Chancellor** should not be a voting member of the PEP.
- **The PEP** should have approval power over large procurement contracts, the DoE operating budget and capital plan, and changes in educational policies proposed by the Chancellor.
- **PEP** meetings and votes should be held publicly, with two-week public notice, interpretation services, and time for public comment.

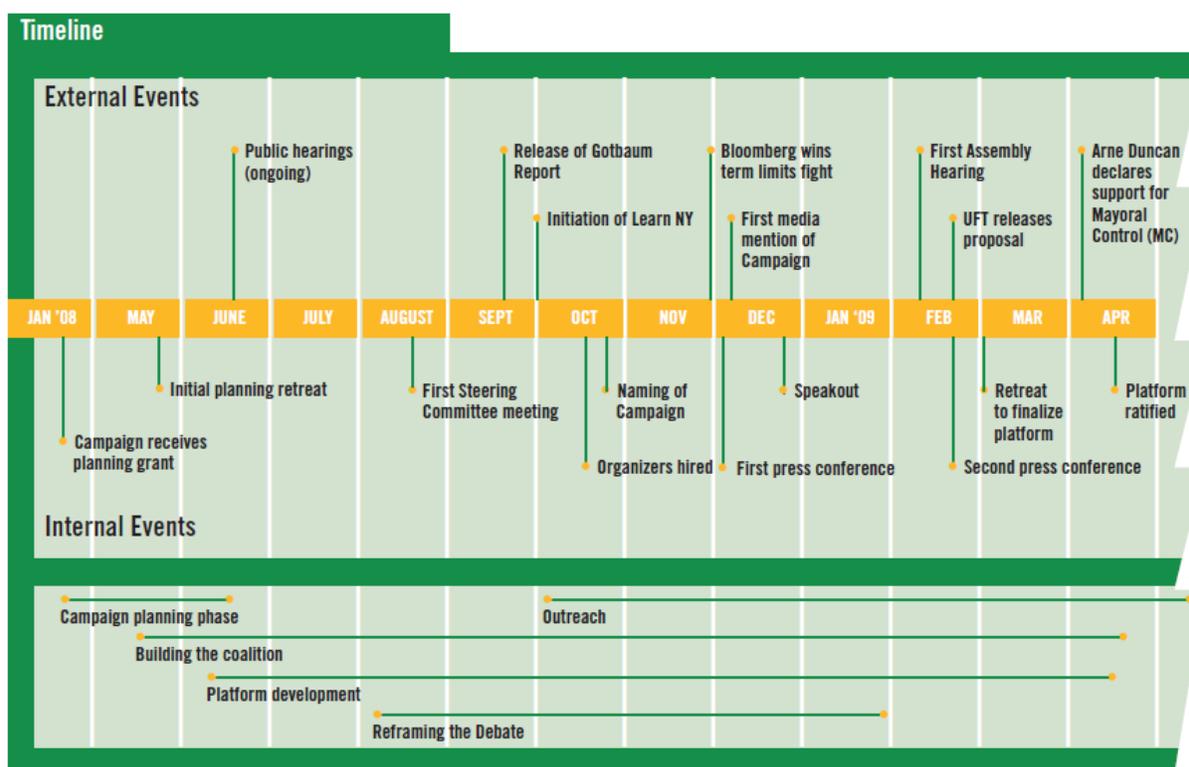
### Transparency

- **The IBO** should be given full and timely access to DoE data in order to report annually on the DoE’s finances, school performance, student achievement, student safety, and shared decision-making at the school level.
- **The IBO** should be sufficiently funded for these responsibilities.
- **The City Comptroller** should have complete access to DoE’s finances for oversight and auditing purposes.

### Public Participation

- An independent, publicly funded, **Center for Parent and Student Service and Empowerment** should be created to outreach, train and support parents and students in New York City Schools.
- **School leadership teams (SLTs)** should provide a strong role for parents and high school students.
- **Principals** should be required to hold public meetings on school finances and student performance, develop school-based budgets in consultation with the SLTs, and ensure that budgets are aligned with schools’ Comprehensive Education Plans.
- **District superintendents** should be appointed by the Chancellor in consultation with the Community District Education Council (CDEC), Presidents’ Council, and District Leadership Team, and have sufficient staff support. They should supervise principals and oversee schools in their district, and should hold public meetings on district performance and plans for district school improvement.
- **Citywide Council on High Schools** should be codified in state law.
- **The opening, closing, re-locating, or re-configuring any school** should require reasonable notice, an impact statement and needs assessment, a public hearing, a vote of approval by the CDEC, and a final decision of approval or disapproval by the PEP in public session.

In the next section we continue the story of the Campaign and examine the impacts as well as the lessons to be learned from Campaign activities and the long-term investment DEC has made in promoting collaboration among advocacy and grassroots groups. Below is a timeline of the two years in which we covered the Campaign and its effects, providing an overview of the chronology of events.

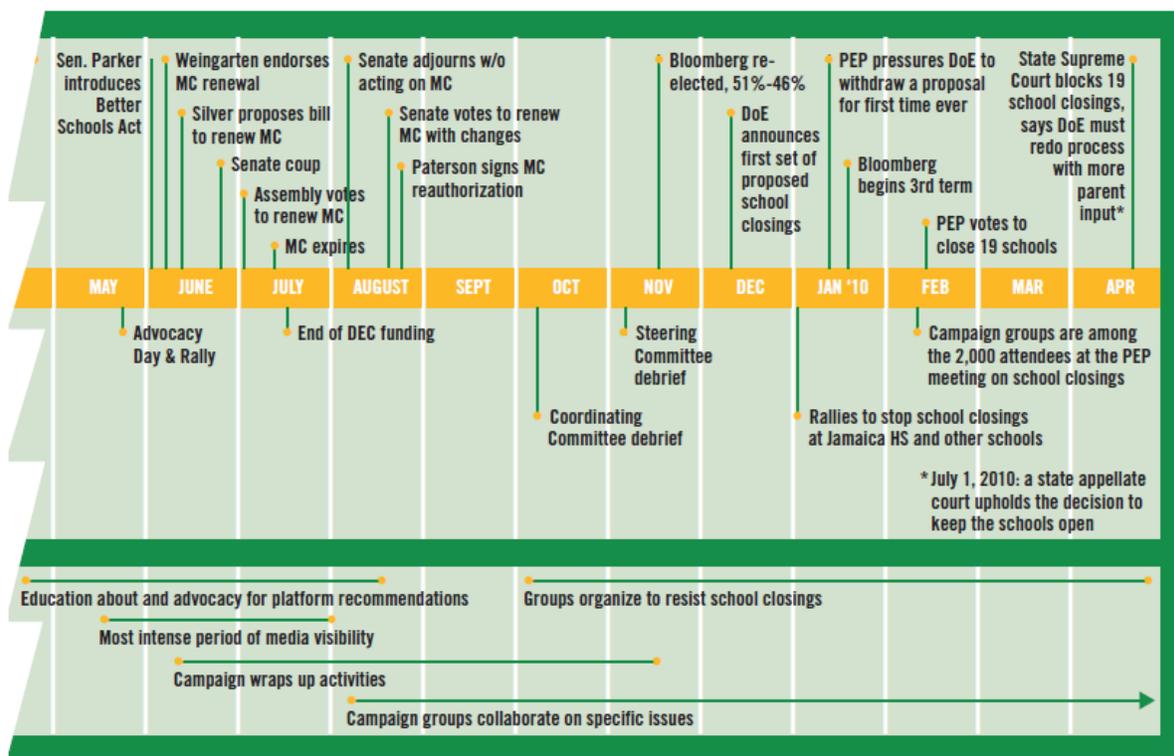


## Year Two of the Campaign: Accomplishments in the Face of Challenge

We now turn to the main period of focus of this report, from May 2009 to May 2010. Mayor Bloomberg’s successful extension of term limits had altered the debate about NYC school governance from a more abstract discussion about the relative merits and drawbacks of mayoral control of the schools to a specific focus on the Bloomberg-Klein administration and its interpretation of the powers of mayoral control. The crux of the mayor’s argument was that mayoral control was defined by his power over the PEP—through his ability to make the majority of appointments and dismiss his appointees at will. Using his substantial public relations and communications resources, he argued that any change to the balance of power on the PEP would destroy mayoral control, and that anyone proposing a change was threatening a return to the previous order. He was backed in this claim by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who proclaimed mayoral control as the new order, and held up NYC as the model.<sup>27</sup> The Campaign’s strategy was to counter the mayor’s claim by recommending checks and balances to the mayor’s

<sup>27</sup> Scott, Brendan. (2009, March 31). Bloomberg beams over school praise. New York Post. [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/regional/item\\_4T5NhQrNwDcJTtxgQN5icI;jsessionid=CAF73CACD181AACC5219784C053D2DBB](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/regional/item_4T5NhQrNwDcJTtxgQN5icI;jsessionid=CAF73CACD181AACC5219784C053D2DBB).

authority over the PEP. By challenging the makeup of the PEP, the Campaign opened a space in which a broader debate could occur about the extent of the mayor's authority, ultimately paving the way for other changes to the law that the Campaign platform recommended to check the power of the mayor.



In the remainder of this section, we discuss in detail the challenges, both external and internal, that the Campaign faced in its second year. First, the Campaign competed for authority and attention with other groups seeking to claim the mantle of speaking authentically for New York's parents and community members. Second, the Campaign's platform recommendation for expanding public engagement directly challenged the administration's paradigm for parent participation. Third, the Campaign had to adapt to a climate in which it was largely assumed that the concentration of authority in the mayor would continue beyond June 30, 2009. Fourth, the Campaign had to adjust to the upset in business as usual in Albany, and maintain solidarity, focus and excitement in a volatile political atmosphere while participating in a high stakes, complex policy issue. The challenges of this situation only intensified further when the legislature was unable to act before the June 30 date for sunset of the existing mayoral control legislation.

### *Competing Claims about Who Represents Parents*

By fall 2008, three groups emerged claiming to represent parents, each with distinct positions regarding mayoral control. Although each was successful in attracting the attention of the media, the Campaign emerged as the group that was recognized as authentically speaking on behalf of parents

and that received the broadest and the most media coverage—especially during the crucial months of May, June and July 2008. (The Mayoral Control and the Media Addendum to this report provides detailed information). Figure 3 provides an overview of the three parent groups.

**Figure 3 Parent Groups’ Position on Mayoral Control**

Who	When	How	Position on Mayoral Control	
<b>Learn NY</b> Proposed that mayoral control be extended				Keep It
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coalition of 60-70 community groups, parents, and religious leaders</li> <li>Some had received funding from the city, the DOE, and possibly Bloomberg</li> <li>Constituency included many low-income charter school parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emerged in fall 2008</li> <li>Dissolved after mayoral control was renewed in August 2009</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocated for no change to PEP but greater transparency and participation, and argued this could be done without changing statutes</li> <li>Gave testimony at Assembly and Senate hearings, city-wide forums, CEC meetings, and media interviews</li> <li>Coalition funded with an estimated \$4 million from philanthropists Bill Gates and Eli Broad</li> </ul>		
<b>Campaign for Better Schools</b> Proposed that mayoral control be continued with significant changes to the law				Change It
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coalition of 26 advocacy, organizing, research, and policy organizations</li> <li>Constituency included a spectrum of low-income parents and youth from diverse racial and ethnic groups, including immigrants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formed in summer 2008</li> <li>Funding ended June 30, 2009, but continued activity through August 2009, and groups continue to collaborate informally around issues of mutual interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed a platform recommending that mayoral control legislation be amended to provide checks and balances at the level of the PEP, as well as greater transparency, and public participation</li> <li>Organized press events, speak outs, rallies; attended Assembly and Senate hearings, CEC meetings, and Parent Association meetings</li> <li>Supported by an estimated \$445,000, largely from the Donors’ Education Collaborative (DEC)</li> </ul>		
<b>Parents Commission</b> Proposed that mayoral control be allowed to end, with recommendations for reforming NYC school governance				End It
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group of individuals, including members and leaders of the CECs and Presidents’ Councils, and any other parent who wanted to join.</li> <li>Many constituents, but not all, were middle class parents from Manhattan’s upper-West and upper- and lower-East sides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formed in summer 2008</li> <li>Some members wanted to disband after their recommendations were released in spring 2009, but activity continued through August 2009</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed a “Recommendations” document, which proposed legislative changes creating a Board of Education, restoration of the Community School Districts and CDECs as the basic units of governance.</li> <li>Conducted press interviews, met with legislators, and planned rallies</li> <li>Did not receive outside funding; staffed solely by volunteers</li> </ul>		

The Bloomberg-Klein administration believed that they had the support of a vast majority of NYC parents, even if these parents were not vocal or visible. As one administration leader put it, "... poor parents, parents without means are strong, strong allies. We [the Bloomberg-Klein administration] have been the voice of the voiceless, in a way that has never occurred in the system before." In summer and fall 2008, close allies of the administration began to take steps through a new organization, Mayoral Accountability for School Success (MASS), to make their case for public support of mayoral control more visible. In November 2008, MASS re-launched as Learn NY, maintaining the same board members. Learn NY claimed to be independent of mayoral influence and funding, although it had strong ties to the administration and its backers.<sup>28</sup> Its mission was to show grassroots support for the continuation of mayoral control, with no significant changes to the authority of the mayor, although Learn NY's most visible spokesperson, Geoffrey Canada, wrote an op-ed noting that mayoral control was not perfect and calling for increased transparency and public participation, which he said were lacking in the current system.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Learn NY claimed the endorsement of 60 to 70 community-based and religious groups, as well as pastors and other religious leaders,<sup>30</sup> and its spokespeople joined with mobilized charter school parents, and the administration, linking the positive environment for charter schools to the current regime.<sup>31</sup> Representatives from Learn NY participated in Assembly and Senate hearings, were visible at city forums on mayoral control, conducted active outreach to Community Education Councils (CECs) and Presidents' Councils of Parent Associations, and organized rallies.

Also over the course of 2008, an organization calling itself the Parent Commission on School Governance and Mayoral Control emerged, drawing its members mainly from among parents serving on CECs, School Leadership Teams (SLTs) and Presidents Councils (organizations of presidents or designates of Parent Associations from within specific jurisdictions) from the upper east and west sides and downtown NYC. This organization, which stated that it welcomed any parent who wanted to join, believed that mayoral control should end with the sunset of the law. They also advocated for an Independent Parent Organization with elected representatives from each district who would lobby and train other parents. In contrast to Learn NY and the Campaign, the Parent Commission had no external funding to support its work of organizing public forums about mayoral control, attending hearings, visiting legislators, and drafting its own set of recommendations for NYC public school governance, *Recommendations on School Governance*.<sup>32</sup>

The Campaign for Better Schools made its official public debut at a November 2009 press conference. By the time it emerged publicly, the Campaign already had the broad outlines of its platform for reform of mayoral control calling for checks and balances on the mayor's authority, greater transparency of data, and increased public participation in policy formation. The Campaign's member groups mobilized their own members for participation in the Assembly and Senate

<sup>28</sup> Green, E. (2008, November 24). Pro-mayoral control group has new name and will get a blog too. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2008/11/24/pro-mayoral-control-group-has-new-name-and-will-get-a-blog-too/>.

<sup>29</sup> Canada, G. (2008, November 23). Accountability = Achievement, says top children's advocate. *New York Daily News*. [http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2008/11/23/2008-11-23\\_accountability\\_\\_achievement\\_says\\_top\\_chi.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/opinions/2008/11/23/2008-11-23_accountability__achievement_says_top_chi.html).

<sup>30</sup> Milosheff, P. (2009, June 9). 5,000 Rally for Mayoral Control. *The Bronx Times*. <http://www.bronx.com/news/education/273.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Cramer, P. (2009, March 19). Mayoral Control, Obama – Unseen stars at Harlem Charter Night. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2009/03/19/mayoral-control-obama-unseen-stars-at-harlem-charter-night/>.

<sup>32</sup> The Parent Commission issued a set of recommendations that called for a "mayoral partnership" that included a Board of Education in which the Mayor appointed three of 15 members, all with fixed terms. Parent Commission on School Governance and Mayoral Control. (2009, March). *Recommendations on School Governance*. [http://parentcommission.org/parent\\_commission\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://parentcommission.org/parent_commission_Final_Report.pdf).

hearings, citywide forums, and outreach to CECs and Presidents Councils; and held press conferences, rallies and public events in which the main message was dissatisfaction with what they referred to as Bloomberg’s “one man rule” approach to mayoral control.<sup>33</sup> They also challenged the DoE’s claims to dramatic achievement gains and pointed out the failure to close the gap between white and Asian students and African American, Latino, English Language Learners (ELL), and other vulnerable populations when it came to earning a Regents diploma, and to graduation rates.<sup>34</sup>

The Campaign members elaborated their framework for reforming mayoral control with a pointed set of policy recommendations for NYC school governance. Their recommendations for improving mayoral control moved beyond what Bloomberg and Klein considered their main mechanism for public accountability—that is, elections that occurred only every four years and were clearly not just about education. The recommendations squarely addressed the concentration of power in the mayor through changes to the PEP, but also encompassed greater transparency and increased public participation. On these two issues the Campaign sought to require greater parent input into decision-making in areas such as plans for school closings and school site relocations, and to create stronger public accountability through funding for the Independent Budget Office (IBO) to provide an independent analysis of student achievement and financial data.

All three groups—Learn NY, Parent Commission, and the Campaign—received media attention, and all three were recognized as representing parents, albeit different groups of parents. The challenge for the Campaign was to achieve prominence as a legitimate and significant voice of parents, community members and youth. There were obstacles to overcome in this regard. Learn NY had received several million dollars in funding from billionaires Bill Gates and Eli Broad,<sup>35</sup> and was able to outspend the Campaign and the Parent Commission in its public relations efforts. Even though the Parent Commission was a volunteer organization without external sources of funding, its primary architect and spokesperson, Leonie Haimson, had name recognition as an education activist. To gain media attention, the Campaign had to tightly focus its messages, time its actions strategically, and establish its own recognized parent spokespeople to convey the Campaign’s legitimacy as a voice of parents, community, and youth.

The Campaign was able to meet these challenges. First, Zakeyah Ansari emerged as one of the Campaign’s primary spokespersons. A mother of eight, with four children still in K-12 grades, Ms. Ansari was a long-time parent leader in two of the Campaign’s member groups, the CEJ and AQE, and was hired as one of the two organizers for the Campaign. Among the most visible spokespersons in the three groups, Ms. Ansari was most consistently identified by the media as a parent of NYC public school children. Along with other parents who spoke out at Campaign press conferences, rallies and in Assembly and Senate hearings, she reinforced the image of the Campaign as representing a group of concerned, mobilized parents. One close media observer of the debate noted about the Campaign and its spokespersons:

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<sup>33</sup> Kolodner, M. (2008, November 17). Foes vow to loosen mayor Michael Bloomberg grip on schools. *New York Daily News*. [http://www.nydailynews.com/ny\\_local/education/2008/11/16/2008-11-16\\_foes\\_vow\\_to\\_loosen\\_mayor\\_michael\\_bloombe.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/education/2008/11/16/2008-11-16_foes_vow_to_loosen_mayor_michael_bloombe.html).

<sup>34</sup> Fruchter, N. (n.d.). The Results of Mayoral Control in New York City. Annenberg Institute for School Reform, NYC.; Why Mayoral Control Needs Improvement. Handout at the November 2008 Campaign for Better Schools Steering Committee Meeting; see also Fruchter, N. (2008). “*Plus Ca Change . . .*” Mayoral Control in New York City. In *The Transformation of Great American School Districts: How Big Cities Are Reshaping Public Education*. Eds. Charles Kerchner, William Boyd, & Mark Blyth. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>35</sup> Campanile, C. (2009, August 17). Gates’ \$4 Mil Lesson. *New York Post*. [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/regional/item\\_ekjA6OeXIrZjDATHPbkuJ](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/regional/item_ekjA6OeXIrZjDATHPbkuJ).

As opposed to Learn [NY] that had money, I think probably they [the Campaign] had the people. .... They had more turn-out and people *ready to talk* (emphasis added).

The issues around parent participation raised by the Campaign’s constituents and platform aligned with the concerns of a number of legislators, who reported in public hearings and interviews that they had been receiving complaints from their own constituents about the lack of responsiveness of the DoE and that they had themselves had experienced difficulty dealing with the DoE. One Campaign member observed that statements by Campaign constituents about the unresponsiveness of the DoE and how mayoral control was not working for the Black, Latino, and immigrant communities resonated with many black Senators, who had similar complaints. This Campaign member reflected, “That [the complaint about the DoE—and by extension mayor control] is what defined the debate. That’s why we had credence, [why] everything [we recommended] had credence,” due to agreement that the system was unresponsive.

The Campaign’s voice was amplified with DEC funding, not only by the ability to hire paid staff, but through support of the media consultant who helped the Campaign hone its messages, time its events, and expand member groups’ already substantial media and legislative contacts. By May 2009, as the debate was heating up in Albany, the Campaign was greatly outpacing the other two organizations in news media coverage. Coverage of Learn NY peaked in January 2009, as groups were signing on, but by summer 2009, media coverage of Learn NY had lessened to fewer than three references a month, with the majority appearing in *Gotham Schools*, an online publication mainly followed by readers with a keen interest in education. The Campaign, on the other hand, was receiving its strongest coverage in May, June and July, with 20 articles in May, and then dropping to 15 and nine in the subsequent months.<sup>36</sup> Again, *Gotham Schools* was an important source of coverage, but in contrast to Learn NY, the Campaign had substantial visibility in a range of media sources. The coverage of the Parent Commission also peaked in May, June and July, with six, nine, and six articles respectively. Their coverage, however, was even less diverse than Learn NY’s, with 76% of its coverage appearing in *Gotham Schools*. (See the Media Addendum for more details on coverage of the Parent Commission and other groups.)

In sum, the Campaign contended with other groups that claimed to represent the interests of parents. The groups—Learn NY, the Campaign, and the Parent Commission—represented a continuum along the key dimension that Bloomberg had defined as the bottom line of mayoral control—his authority over the PEP. While all three claimed to represent the voice of parents, the Campaign gained media recognition as the group whose spokespeople were most frequently parents of public school students. Furthermore, our media analysis showed that as the debate heated up, the coverage of the Campaign’s activity and platform was both greater, and ran across more print media sources, than that of either of the other groups.

### *The District Context: The DoE and Its Paradigm of Parent Engagement*

In its recommendations for increasing parent participation, the Campaign was questioning the DoE’s assumptions about what constituted genuine parent involvement. Four of the authors of this report have been studying the DoE’s approach to parent engagement and can contrast it with the Campaign’s demands.<sup>37</sup> The authors have found that the DoE defined parent engagement largely as

<sup>36</sup> These numbers represent only the news sources that were tracked in our media scan – see the accompanying media report for details on the specific sources tracked as well as the specific media analysis procedures.

<sup>37</sup> Henig, J.R., Gold, E., Orr, M., Silander, M. & Simon E. (in process). NY Retrospective Project (ed. Jennifer O’Day).

involvement with one's individual child's education, and parental assistance in implementing district policies. The DoE's portfolio of parent engagement opportunities does include structures where parents theoretically can act collectively to influence decision-making, such as the CECs and the SLTs, both structures that predated mayoral control and whose continuance were required in the 2002 mayoral control law. These structures for engagement, however, largely have been stripped of their decision-making responsibilities.<sup>38</sup>

The Campaign (as well as the Parent Commission) defined parent participation as a more collective effort that went beyond the DoE's definition. In contrast to Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein, the Campaign's conception of engagement also included a greater parental role in policy decision-making. The mayor and chancellor, however, tried to discredit any alternative paradigm to their own through their "my way or the highway" stance, which insinuated that any alternative to their program meant a return to the failed strategies of the past. This posed a challenge to the Campaign, as it worked to reframe public participation in the mayoral control debate.

### *The Need to Adapt to Changing and Complex National and State Political Environments*

The Campaign had to navigate through challenging political and ideological seas during its second year as a result of both unfolding national policies and unpredictable state political events. National education policy was taking shape in parallel to the debate around mayoral control of NYC schools. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, representing the orientation of the Obama Administration, unabashedly supported mayoral control in NYC as early as March 2009.<sup>39</sup> By pointing to NYC as a model, he was implicitly endorsing Bloomberg's definition of mayoral control and his authority over the PEP. Duncan was also a strong supporter of the expansion of charter schools, an important item on the agendas of both Bloomberg and Klein. Although few of the observers we talked to thought that national politics directly influenced the outcome of the legislation, some noted that the considerable national support, coming from a Democratic administration for a Republican mayor set a strong positive tone for mayoral control—and the way in which Bloomberg and Klein had implemented mayoral control—that was challenging to counter. One observer who believed that mayoral control was not the answer for NYC schools commented this way on the effect of the national influence:

But I would say that the entire [mayoral control] conversation was controlled and influenced by what drives Arne Duncan. ... I feel like the mayoral control conversation, whether it's the academics, the media, editorial boards, the politicians who are in place – have bought into [the direction Duncan has set]. And...that was the real influence is how I see it.

New York State politics in Albany was characterized by the collapse of business as usual. During the first half of 2009, the ground in Albany shifted substantially, so that it was less clear who would be involved in the deal-making on mayoral control than it had appeared when our first round of interviewees were making their predictions. With Governor David Paterson looking weaker than Elliot Spitzer had been and with the Democrats' narrow majority and the chaos that erupted in the State Senate, it appeared that of the "three men in the room," only Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver

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<sup>38</sup> Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander & Simon (in process).

<sup>39</sup> Campanile, C. (2009, March 30). Bam Backs Mike School Rule. *New York Post*. [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/politics/item\\_oL38ZA3NwxxoWnBELBhPXP](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/politics/item_oL38ZA3NwxxoWnBELBhPXP); Medina, J. (2009, April 2). Education's Odd Couple Do Their Act, and Provoke Controversy. *New York Times*.

was clearly left. One leader of an advocacy group generally aligned with the mayor described the scene this way in an interview in late spring 2009:

I couldn't have imagined how weak [Paterson] would turn out to be. Like the calculus that I was making, if the governor was going to be strong and the senate leader Malcolm Smith was going to be strong, it was really just a matter of what is it going to take to move Sheldon Silver. ... The dynamic seems to have shifted. Rather than having Sheldon Silver be the last piece to fall into place, I get the sense that the Bloomberg people are talking to him about trying to make him the first piece, and assuming that the governor and the Senate leader come through.

Furthermore, some key Albany players—Randi Weingarten of the UFT as well as Silver—were unpredictable, taking an unanticipated stance of support for the mayor's insistence on having a majority of appointees on the PEP. The breakdown of the legislative process in the Senate created a hiatus, as the sunset for the mayoral control went by without a new bill. (Chapter 3 will discuss the dynamics in Albany in more detail, examining predictions and legislative outcomes, and how these outcomes compared with the Campaign's platform.) When decision-making and wrangling over the mayoral control legislation began in earnest in late May and into June 2009, and then extended beyond the sunset date, the speed and complexity that characterized unfolding events increased significantly. These developments extended the work of the Campaign beyond the period of DEC funding, creating further challenges, as well as opportunities. Figure 4 gives a thumbnail sketch of the challenges created by the political environment in which the mayoral control debate unfolded.

Figure 4 The Political Environment: Challenges the Campaign Faced and Fought	
Local	The DoE's approach to parent participation was markedly different from that of the Campaign.
State	Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver sided with extending mayoral control legislation, with no changes to the PEP, and the State Senate fell into disarray.
National	Obama and Duncan came out in support of mayoral control and held up NYC as a model.

The Campaign responded to national pressures and state legislative chaos, striving to maintain the validity of its suggestions for making improvements to mayoral control, and to keep up with the changing terrain in Albany. Developing its platform had strengthened the Campaign through the deliberative way in which the organizations worked together. Platform consensus represented strong investment by Campaign groups and their individual members. The link to members of coalition groups through the Steering Committee and the requirement for Steering Committee ratification of decisions ensured that the people were supportive and willing to be active. There was wide agreement among Campaign members we interviewed that even though it took a long time for the Campaign to finalize its platform, the benefits of this process outweighed the drawbacks. Campaign members who turned out for events were generally enthusiastic and “on message” about the

elements of the platform. The process of creating the platform had built solidarity among the groups that was sustained through the challenges of year two.

This solidarity had been reinforced once the platform was completed, as the Campaign turned to educating the public and legislators about its positions on changing the mayoral control legislation. Campaign outreach activities drew on the social capital that had been built during the platform phase, with the Coordinating Committee and Campaign staff calling on Steering Committee groups to come out to rallies and events and to mobilize constituents to make a strong showing of support.

### *Tensions within the Campaign*

Inevitably, the complexity and speed of change in the policy and legislative environment created some internal tensions in the Campaign during year two. Publicly, the member groups were careful not to call attention to these issues, and they took care to work through them as a coalition. An examination of the tensions and how they played out illuminates important considerations for future collaboration in campaigns that involve both mobilization and strategic decision-making in an initiative focused on state level policy change. There were three main sources of tension: 1) communication between the Coordinating Committee and the larger Steering Committee; 2) differing perspectives between strategy-oriented and process-oriented groups;<sup>40</sup> and 3) pressures on multi-issue groups.

At the point when the legislature actually began to issue versions of bills on school governance, events were moving quickly and the Coordinating Committee members were closer to the action than most of the Steering Committee members and their constituents. This period was one in which nimbleness and strategy were vital in order to make use of available leverage to push for an impact on the legislation. During this period, the strategy-oriented groups—those policy groups with knowledge of Albany and acumen regarding legislative wrangling—took the lead. As a Campaign staff person pointed out, during this volatile period, much of what the Campaign had to communicate was sensitive and extremely time-limited. As a result, although email had been a mainstay of communication among coalition members throughout the formative phases of their efforts together, electronic communication was too vulnerable to leaks and misinterpretation to be a good medium for communicating about the rapidly unfolding behind-the-scenes political dynamics of legislative negotiations. During this period, the Campaign used email only to make requests to come to rallies, public forums and press conferences.

The highly consultative decision-making process that had characterized platform development was not adaptable to the politicized environment in which the Campaign was now working. Thus, when it came to decisions about how to focus Campaign efforts relative to the legislature, the process-oriented groups—those constituency based groups in which consultation and consensus decision-making were the norm—were not able to confer with their members as they had earlier. There was a growing sense among the Steering Committee members that they were not being consulted or brought up to speed, even though they were being asked to attend rallies and help educate people on the Campaign's position. A Steering Committee member explained her frustration with the communication:

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<sup>40</sup> For clarity, we write about process-oriented and strategy-oriented groups as if they were always distinct groups. In reality, a group might embody both process and strategy orientations, foregrounding one or the other orientation depending on context or phase of a campaign. Nonetheless, within individual groups, one tendency generally predominated over the other.

Toward the end, those of us not on the Coordinating Committee had very little idea what was going on. You'd get these things [emails] to get on a bus ... There was less and less communication. *This represents the difficulty of creating an inclusive structure in a fast-paced legislative campaign* (emphasis added). That was a big challenge.

Coordinating Committee members and Campaign staff recognized the problem as well. One Coordinating Committee member said, "I do think there is a sense of frustration and questions. After the May 2009 Steering Committee meeting, there hasn't been a lot of communications. So these decisions and this strategy all happened within the Coordinating Committee..."

The tensions that emerged in the legislative phase of the Campaign reflected the difficulty of balancing the styles of the process-oriented groups, which brought mobilizing strength to the Campaign, and the strategy-oriented groups, which brought skills in navigating the political terrain. A Coordinating Committee member, noting the mix of groups among the Campaign's members advocacy, mobilizing and strategy – added, "It is important how you balance them." The legislative phase required both policy skills and mobilization of members for public events, but the rapid pace of developments made balancing these needs more difficult. Ultimately, although the tensions could not be completely resolved, coalition members acknowledged that they had complementary strengths and each brought a necessary perspective and set of skills. As reflected in Campaign debriefing sessions attended by the researchers, most Campaign participants believed that recognition of their combined strength kept the coalition together despite the frustrations.

The third major factor that raised tensions during this last phase in the Campaign was pressure on multi-issue groups in the coalition to maintain solidarity with the Campaign's stance on mayoral control. These groups had to balance their association with a coalition to change mayoral control with advocacy for their core agendas, which relied on relationships with the DoE and sometimes other city agencies. For a number of coalition groups, their first priority had to be protecting the interests of their constituents and programs to serve those constituents. In the intense last phase of the Campaign, some of these groups were concerned that the administration or DoE would create a hardship for them by cutting back on funding their programs as a result of their position on mayoral control. For example, one group had been negotiating with the administration around funding and policy changes for specific programs. The administration's attempts to add those issues into the mayoral control negotiations raised the stakes for the group, which saw its other needs held hostage to support of mayoral control. As one of the members in this situation noted, it was challenging in the last month to both maintain commitment to the Campaign's positions, and not be targeted by the administration for funding cuts that undermined the needs of the organization and its constituency. Even through this kind of external pressure the groups felt that it was important to "minimize drama" to sustain the coalition, keep tensions out of the public eye, and support the position of the Campaign even as it evolved to respond to external circumstances. The internal communications issues discussed above presented an additional complication, as Campaign members needed to know quickly how the Campaign's position was evolving and why, both to maintain a consistent message and for multi-issue groups to be able to maneuver to protect their own interests.

In an effort to address the internal tensions and reinforce coalition solidarity, the Campaign had two debriefing sessions—one among the Coordinating Committee members and another for the whole Steering Committee—in early fall 2009. During these sessions, members openly exchanged views and reviewed both their accomplishments and frustrations. The trust and good will that member

groups had built during the platform development phase contributed to their ability to process the issues in these forums.

In this chapter we reviewed the Campaign's accomplishments during its first year—building a strong infrastructure, using a strategic approach, establishing visibility and credibility for its position, and achieving recognition as a legitimate voice for a diverse base of constituents. We have also described the Campaign's activities and the political and internal hurdles it faced during its second year. The Campaign took on the mayor's definition of mayoral control, which their research had shown to be the extreme in its concentration of power. In challenging the mayor they were up against one of the richest men in the world, with a substantial public relations team. Nonetheless, the Campaign was able to bring to the forefront of public debate the extensive power of the mayor, and, as the next chapter will show, this led the way for changes in the law that now challenge the mayor's ability to make at least some decisions without public consultation. We also found that the social capital built in the earlier period and the capacity this created for groups with different expertise and skills to work together proved very important in keeping the coalition unified and moving its agenda forward in the face of a shifting and very demanding environment.

## Chapter 3: The Legislative Outcomes

When the Albany legislature passed the original mayoral control law in 2002, they established a seven-year sunset because, as one legislator put it, “unlike what happened with the decentralization law [in the 1960s], we . . . recognized that things might not work well—so we would require the legislature to revisit the issue . . . and make necessary changes.” On August 11, 2009, more than two months past its expiration date, the mayoral control law of 2002 was extended with changes, and signed into law by Governor Paterson. The extension legislation largely preserves mayoral control of the nation’s largest school district but with a number of adjustments. Despite Campaign efforts, in the final legislation, the mayor retained his authority to appoint eight of 13 PEP members and the right to dismiss any of his appointees at will. However, other changes that had been a part of the Campaign’s platform, such as requirements around school closures, including an impact statement, a public hearing, and public notice six months in advance. Although these changes received less public attention when the law first passed, they have proven significant, providing parent, community and advocacy groups with levers for action.

A straightforward way to assess the outcome of the Campaign’s effort to influence the debate on mayoral control is to compare the legislation that was enacted with the Campaign’s platform. In addition to describing how the legislation did or did not conform to the platform, our analysis aims to capture the challenge and complexity of the process involved in influencing the legislation, and the dynamics of strategy development that would ultimately affect the Campaign’s impact on the debate and the new law, as well as the significance of the outcome. Some platform provisions, particularly those related to checks and balances on the PEP, were much more challenging to achieve than others. Although changing the power structure on the PEP was a principle of many of the Campaign groups, the pragmatic, strategic concerns of positioning and providing a basis for negotiation over the different elements of the platform had to take precedence in the last phase of the Campaign’s work. Attention turned almost completely to strategy in Albany—determining potential allies, their interests, and what realistically they could be expected to promote among their colleagues in the legislature.

The Campaign considered the first two recommendations listed in their platform to be key in establishing a check on the mayor’s authority over the schools. The recommendations were stated in the platform as follows:

The PEP should have a narrow majority of members appointed by the City Council or other elected officials, and a minority of members appointed by the mayor.

PEP members should serve for set terms of a relatively short duration (three years or less) and have full voting rights.

The Campaign’s position not to oppose mayoral control completely yet calling for these PEP changes was central to its strategy to ultimately constrain the mayor’s authority. However, the platform included other recommendations concerning transparency and public participation that were also intended to shift the power balance. Primary among these were the platform provisions to give the IBO oversight responsibility and to allocate adequate funding for it to carry out its increased responsibilities, as well as requirements for advance public notice of PEP meetings and the

mandates about school closures noted above. In addition, the platform called for a parent training center to build parents' knowledge about the system and skills to influence decision making.

Even though the Campaign saw itself as pragmatic in positioning itself for mayoral control with changes, its leaders told us that they knew their recommendations to change the balance of power on the PEP would be the most difficult objective to achieve—given the mayor's unyielding position on the PEP's composition and his abundant resources. Some said they never expected to win on that issue. One explained the decision to push for the changes to the PEP, knowing they were unlikely, as part of a larger strategy to win on other issues:

I think we were more effective than I thought we would be in framing the debate, actually. And there were a couple things that broke our way to make that happen, but I think that by and large we said the issue was who controls the PEP, that was the issue. We didn't win that. We said the issue was term limits, that was the issue. We didn't win that either. But we knew that those were the two leading edge issues. We had a strategy which was: that's the leading edge by which you win other things.

With the mayor's unchecked authority as their "leading edge issue," the Campaign framed the debate around the argument that Bloomberg had too much power, often using the phrase, "One man rule has got to go," or referring to the PEP as a "rubber stamp." Their messages directly challenged the mayor's definition of mayoral control with a call for the PEP to be more independent, responsive and accountable to parents and community members directly rather than just through the electoral process. These sentiments struck a chord with many legislators who were frustrated with what they perceived as the mayor's arrogance.

In an effort to assess the Campaign accomplishments with regard to legislative outcomes, we tracked over time public perceptions of the players and issues that were the most consequential in the debate. We conducted interviews with Campaign members, education stakeholders, and city and state officials before (fall 2008) and after (fall 2009) the passage of the August 2009 legislation (see Appendix A for more detail on data collection). Few predicted that grass-roots groups would have influence in the debate or in the final legislation in the early interviews, and, even after the new legislation had passed with several changes, the public perception as portrayed in the media was that the mayor largely had won the battle. There was little acknowledgement in the immediate aftermath of the potential import of the legislation's inclusion of new education responsibilities for the IBO, or of the new requirements for public review when school closings were being planned. This chapter discusses the predictions made in first-round interviews about what the key issues would be in the debate and who would be most influential. We then describe the new legislation and stakeholders' perspectives on how it came to be. At the end of the chapter, we return to a discussion of the Campaign in relation to the legislation. While recognizing that the media coverage both reflected and shaped public perceptions of mayoral victory, we describe the "wins" for the Campaign, including which of the new provisions in the law are turning out to be "wild cards," that is, those provisions that were not recognized widely but which have proven to have potential for strengthening parents' and the public's role in school policy decisions.

### The Landscape: What were the issues?

In the fall of 2008, the question of mayoral control sat mostly on the back burner as the legislature in Albany engaged in drawn-out state budget negotiations. Several city and state officials we

interviewed predicted that the legislature would vote to extend the 2002 mayoral control legislation for one year before debating its merits, allowing budget negotiations to finalize and a new mayor to take office. Once Bloomberg was cleared to run for a third term, however, the one-year extension was off the table. As 2009 approached and the June sunset loomed on the horizon, the debate over mayoral control picked up steam. The public relations arm of the DoE encouraged the belief that a renewal of mayoral control in some form was virtually inevitable. Indeed, our interviews underscored that reverting back to the status quo ante was widely perceived to be neither realistic nor desirable. The public relations arm of the Bloomberg administration also capitalized on public perceptions of the previous governance arrangement as flawed and corrupt, and painted anyone who might oppose mayoral control as wanting to return to that system. While most of those we interviewed anticipated that the mayoral control legislation would be renewed, they acknowledged that it was likely to have some “amendments,” “tweaks,” or “midcourse corrections.”

A variety of concerns about mayoral control were emerging in the educational community, but few of those we interviewed in the fall of 2008 were ready to predict what would ultimately be solidified in legislative amendments to the 2002 law. In interviews, the need for greater parent and community input was raised again and again, by community members as well as legislators who had heard the complaint from constituents and had experienced their own frustrations trying to communicate with district officials on behalf of constituents. For the most part, interviewees spoke broadly about parents feeling shut out of the system, having nowhere to go locally with their complaints, and having no role in decision-making, even in such official bodies as the CECs. One City Council official described the concerns of local groups:

They will probably have consensus on certain things. For example, every group will say that under mayoral control, parents have been shut out of the system. The administration will argue that it's not true. I'm not talking about the average parents, I'm talking about active parents, member leaders of the Parent Associations or on the SLTs or CECs or the CPAC [Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council], or the Presidents Councils. Those are the hundreds and hundreds of parent leaders that we're talking about. And those leaders have been shut out of the decision-making process or even true consultation.

Also high on the list of concerns about the existing system was the objection that the mayor's authority was too unchecked. Some observers predicted that the new legislation would strengthen the oversight powers of the PEP, including the approval of large contracts. Finally, a range of respondents raised the need for greater transparency, specifically a more independent control and analysis of data relevant to DoE finances and student achievement. Even groups more generally allied with the mayor expected that steps would be taken to address this concern, although some believed that the administration might preempt legislative interventions regarding transparency by taking ameliorative action on its own initiative.

As the mayoral control debate entered 2009, it began to attract greater attention, media coverage increased, and different interest and community groups began to clarify their positions with focused policy recommendations. Most advocacy and community groups advocated for changes that would, to some extent, improve transparency and parent participation in the school system. Where groups fundamentally differed, however, was in their recommendations regarding changes to the PEP that would rein in the mayor's authority. In February 2009, the UFT released a proposal that called for a change in the number of mayoral appointees (and consequently the balance of power) on the PEP, although by late May 2009, UFT president Randi Weingarten reversed this position by announcing

her support for maintaining the mayor's majority.<sup>41</sup> Also in the spring, the Parent Commission and the Campaign released their recommendations. The Parent Commission was the most radical in proposing an end to the PEP and the creation of a governance structure with a Board of Education. The Campaign took the middle ground with its recommendations for changes to the PEP, and Learn NY positioned itself strongly in favor of mayoral control with no change to the PEP.

## The Landscape: Who would be the important players?

Across New York City and Albany, education stakeholders we interviewed in the fall of 2008 told us nearly universally that Bloomberg would be hugely influential in the mayoral control debate. Because of “his extraordinary personal wealth” and the number of people indebted to him, “he clearly will be able to put on a full-court press,” said one union leader. Many of the education observers we interviewed believed that Bloomberg and his closest allies—including the business community and the editorial boards—would stand firm in calling for no change at all. The Albany legislature, however, was not expected to push over easily. Some believed that Democratic Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, as well as New York City Democrats in both the Assembly and the Senate, did not appreciate the mayor's “my way or the highway” approach and would create trouble for him.

Albany's historic reputation for decisions made behind closed doors by “three men in a room”—the governor, the Senate Majority Leader, and the Assembly Speaker—was expected by many we interviewed to prevail again with the mayoral control legislation. “At the eleventh hour, the three would go into a room and come out with a budget,” one long-time NYC education advocate said of the historical pattern. Among these three players, observers were most likely to point to the Assembly Speaker, Sheldon Silver, as critical, given that Senate leadership might change with the fall election, and Governor David Paterson was relatively new and, according to some, unpredictable. In addition, the various stakeholders we interviewed expected that the “three men in the room,” and Silver in particular, would likely be influenced by dealings with Bloomberg and Randi Weingarten's UFT. There was also widespread agreement among these stakeholders that the NYC business elites led by Katherine Wylde and the Partnership for NYC, who had played a key role in 2002, had significant influence in Albany and again would play a key role.

There was less agreement about the level of influence community groups would achieve in Albany. Of those we interviewed, Albany observers and legislative aides were most likely to name parents and community groups as potentially influential players. They were familiar with these groups, some of which were members of the Campaign, because they had been important in advocating for restoring education funding in recent city and state budget negotiations. Others, however, perceived parent and community groups to be weak and disorganized. In fact, a few civic leaders we interviewed in the fall of 2008 were skeptical that community groups could be influential unless they allied with the UFT.

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<sup>41</sup> Weingarten, R. (2009, May 21). Mayoral Control 2.0: Keep, But Improve, the System. *New York Post*. [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item\\_Q9KWh0ZHFuBXaknuhzXKGGK;jsessionid=0CF9FCE3BF818DC7F59A9486F5B53802](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_Q9KWh0ZHFuBXaknuhzXKGGK;jsessionid=0CF9FCE3BF818DC7F59A9486F5B53802); see also (2010, June 3). Randi Weingarten Under Fire for Mayoral Control Position. *On Line Education in America*. <http://www.onlineeducationinamerica.com/randi-weingarten-under-fire-for-mayoral-control-position/>.

## The Outcome: What was in the legislation?

Despite the early predictions that Bloomberg would face resistance in Albany, the mayor prevailed in maintaining his authority with the PEP, which he considered the essence of mayoral control. This outcome was likely the result of a culmination of expected and unexpected factors, as the debate played out in the late spring and summer of 2009. As we will describe shortly in more detail, in mid-June the Assembly passed a bill that retained the PEP structure, but included a number of other changes that reflect Campaign platform recommendations related to transparency and public participation. With the Senate in chaos at the end of June, there was no debate on the bill until after the Senate leadership reconstituted itself. While the Assembly's bill awaited the Senate's attention and vote, the June 30 sunset date passed. Officially, at that point the NYC school system reverted back to pre-mayoral control governance structures, though effectively mayoral control continued *de facto*. A four-member Board of Education was reestablished and met for fewer than ten minutes, electing Dennis Walcott as Board president, and reappointing Klein as chancellor indefinitely. The Board adjourned until September, and mayoral control thus continued.

Once the Senate sorted itself out in early July, it began to debate the Assembly bill and possible amendments to it. The Senate passed the Assembly's bill on August 6, only after the DoE agreed to enact four amendments, regardless of whether the amendments later passed through the Assembly and became law. Of the amendments, the Campaign had worked most actively for establishing a parent training center and Student Success Centers. As of this writing, the Senate amendments still sit in legislative limbo, largely because a budget crisis has forestalled the allocation of funds for their implementation. Figure 5 summarizes key components of the new legislation and Senate amendments, and how they compare with the recommendations in the Campaign's platform. In the next section, we will provide an interpretation of the legislative outcome.

**Figure 5 The New Mayoral Control Legislation**

- Key:**
- ✓ Changes comparable to recommendations made by the Campaign
  - ▲ Other changes to 2002-2009 system seen positively by the Campaign
  - ▼ Losses for the Campaign

**Sunset**

- ✓ The new legislation will sunset on June 30, 2015.

**Checks & Balances**

- ▼ Mayor will continue to appoint the majority—8 of 13 members— of the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP).
- ▼ PEP members will continue to have no set terms, allowing the mayor to dismiss his appointees at will.
- ✓ The chancellor no longer votes but serves as an ex-officio member of the PEP.
- ✓ The PEP elects a chair from among its voting members.
- ✓ Two of the mayor's appointments to the PEP must be NYC public school parents.
- ▼ There is no requirement that the PEP include students or representatives from community-based organizations.
- ✓ The PEP's authority is expanded to include, among other things, the approval of school closures, of all regulations proposed by the chancellor, and of no-bid contracts.

**Public Participation**

- ✓ PEP's monthly meetings must be public, with ten days public notice, sufficient time for public comment after each agenda item, and minutes made available to the public.
- ✓ Proposed school closings and significant changes in school utilization require a public hearing and vote with 45 days notice.
- ✓ Proposed school closing and significant changes in school utilization require that the chancellor file an educational impact statement.
- ▼ The impact statement does not specifically require description of impact on ELL students.
- ▼ The Community Education Councils (CECs) do not need to approve school closures.
- ✓ Public hearings on school closings or significant changes in school utilization must be held at least six months in advance of the next school year.
- ▲ Several other types of public meetings are required; for example, biennial meetings must be held by the chancellor and each CEC to report on data, goals and priorities, with time for public comment.
- ✓ Superintendents will no longer be assigned duties outside their districts that will impede their ability to be available to and perform duties within their districts. These duties include supervising and evaluating principals, and establishing avenues by which parents can access information and provide input.
- ✓ Citywide Councils on High Schools and on ELLs will be established and will make recommendations in annual reports to the PEP.

**Transparency**

- ✓ The City Comptroller now has the authority to conduct audits of the Department of Education (DoE).
- ✓ The Independent Budget Office (IBO) must analyze NYC DoE data and prepare reports on education achievement and financial data.
- ✓ The City will dedicate appropriations to fund the IBO's expanded duties.

**Senate Amendments**

- ✓ A Parent and Student Training Center will be established, with Student Success Centers, to train students and parents for leadership and participation in school structures. The Center will be independent of the DoE, and will have dedicated funding.
- ▲ A citywide advisory committee on the arts in education will be established.
- ▲ Superintendents will include "quality of curriculum instructions" as part of principal evaluations.
- ▲ Every school must hold a public meeting on school safety.

## The Process: How did the legislation come to be?

The bill that passed would hardly seem a surprise to any of the people that we interviewed in early fall of 2008. As we described earlier, the overwhelming expectation among a range of education observers in the city and in Albany was that mayoral control would be continued with the new legislation. The media, focusing primarily on the decision to maintain the balance of power in the PEP, treated the new bill as a victory for the mayor. As the tally in Figure 5 shows, however, the outcome was more mixed. The legislation reflected both the ability of the mayor to convince legislators to continue what he deemed the essence of mayoral control, and the Campaign’s agility in appealing to the frustrations of some of the legislators in both the Assembly and the Senate. The result was legislation that included a number of the Campaign’s recommendations regarding transparency and public participation and a stage set for the DoE’s eventual agreement to the amendments that would fund a parent training center with student success centers.

The story of the legislation requires an understanding of the political context in Albany and the Campaign’s strategy in the face of that context as well as the other significant challenges noted in the previous chapter. Although changing the PEP was an important priority, the Campaign ultimately had to make a strategic decision whether to continue to oppose the Assembly bill on the basis of its provisions regarding the PEP, or to use its leverage to gain other concessions. Although the PEP was a key site for adding checks and balances to mayoral control, it was also a potent symbol of the “new order” and key Albany players, most importantly Silver, decided not to take it on. In interviews, several different observers of the debate outside the Campaign echoed the mayor’s own opinion that the proposed changes to the PEP would so thoroughly undermine his authority that the new system would no longer be one of mayoral control.

Though the Campaign did not win the desired change to the PEP, it was successful in bringing attention in the debate to the issue of the mayor’s overly strong authority, providing sympathetic legislators with justification for including provisions on transparency and public participation in the legislation.

Those who were pulling for the ear of the Albany legislature—Bloomberg included—had a clear target in Sheldon Silver, who was effectively the only one left of the “three men in a room” decision-making scenario because of the weak status of the governor, and the turnover of Senate leadership. In essence, there was more space at the negotiating table, and observers we interviewed speculated that some players, most notably Bloomberg and Randi Weingarten, were involved in deal-making with Silver and with each other that ultimately influenced the bill Silver introduced to the Assembly maintaining the balance of power on the PEP. Silver and Weingarten’s announcements in May 2009 in support of the PEP status quo put the most powerful player in Albany, Assembly Speaker Silver, and the UFT President behind the mayor’s definition of mayoral control. The Campaign and others advocating for changes had to determine what they could realistically accomplish in that context.

Randi Weingarten’s decision to come out in support of the mayor’s control of the PEP was a significant shift in the playing field. The UFT was unpredictable from the outset, but in the fall most observers had expected the union would want to see mayoral control significantly reformed. In February 2009, a UFT taskforce released a proposal for reforming mayoral control, including changes to the PEP that aligned with those in the Campaign’s platform. In May 2009, however, Randi Weingarten surprised many when she re-positioned the UFT in an op-ed in the *New York Post* with the title “Mayoral Control 2.0,” in which she strongly supported keeping the mayor’s ability to

appoint the majority on the PEP.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, she suggested other mechanisms for greater checks and balances and transparency, including set term limits for PEP members. The additional improvements she recommended were in line with the Campaign's and others' calls to strengthen public participation and information sharing. After Weingarten came out in support of maintaining the composition of the PEP, Campaign members told us that it would be more difficult to fight for changes to it. The mayor had won over a potential opponent, and there was speculation in the media, as well as in our interviews, that Weingarten, who was looking ahead to teacher contract negotiations and observing the way winds were blowing in Washington, where she hoped to be a player, had struck a deal with Bloomberg.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Assembly Speaker Silver's position in favor of mayoral control with few changes was a surprise to many. Bloomberg had earned the enmity of many Albany legislators who believed he was "arrogant, heavy handed, and elitist."<sup>44</sup> He had already experienced setbacks in Albany to a number of his pet projects, such as Congestion Pricing and the West Side Stadium. The Campaign and others had reason to hope that continuation of mayoral control with no changes might meet similar resistance in the legislature. One news reporter described Albany's disdain for the mayor, saying, "They feel he ignores their concerns. They feel that they haven't done enough in the communities to improve the quality of the schools. ... A lot of people, because of their dislike of Mayor Bloomberg, wanted to hurt him in an election year." Despite these expectations, in mid-June, Silver introduced the Assembly bill, which appeared to be recommending only relatively minor changes to the mayor's authority. Even though some Assembly Democrats had supported greater change in the PEP, in the end a majority followed Silver's lead, and the bill passed the Assembly with relative ease on June 17, 2009. As with Weingarten, Silver's promotion of the Mayor's demand for no significant changes to the PEP was somewhat baffling to advocacy and civic leaders, and led them and members of the Campaign to speculate that Silver had made a trade with Bloomberg, offering his support in exchange for Bloomberg's support on non-education issues of concern to him and his constituents. However, no one claimed specific knowledge of what trading had transpired. Others thought Silver was looking ahead and calculating that he would likely need to live with Bloomberg for another four years.

Having both Silver and Weingarten come out in favor of the mayor's position had serious implications for the Campaign's strategy going forward. Initially, the Campaign came out in opposition to the Assembly bill, issuing a memo that noted the improvements to the previous legislation, but taking a stand that the new bill did not go far enough in creating checks and balances through changes to the PEP. Campaign members we interviewed felt that as long as the mayor appointed the majority of PEP members, and without set term limits, the body would continue to serve largely as a rubber stamp for the mayor's decisions.

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<sup>42</sup> Weingarten, R. (2009, May 21). Mayoral Control 2.0: Keep, but improve, the system. *New York Post*. [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item\\_Q9KWh0ZHFuBXaknuhzXKGGK;jsessionid=537AFE2D6AA5C8DF2D3EDBEAE6455D5E](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/item_Q9KWh0ZHFuBXaknuhzXKGGK;jsessionid=537AFE2D6AA5C8DF2D3EDBEAE6455D5E); Also see, Lombardi, F., R & Kolodner, M. (2009, June 2). Mayoral control of schools fight becomes lovefest between Mayor Bloomberg, Randi Weingarten. *New York Daily News*. [http://www.nydailynews.com/ny\\_local/education/2009/06/02/2009-06-02\\_mike\\_randi\\_gains\\_lovefest\\_for\\_now.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/education/2009/06/02/2009-06-02_mike_randi_gains_lovefest_for_now.html).

<sup>43</sup> Cramer, P. (2009, June 5). Weingarten's critics speculate about her mayoral control motives. *Gotham Schools*. Retrieved from <http://gothamschools.org/2009/06/05/weingartens-critics-speculate-about-her-mayoral-control-motives/>; Medina, J. (2009, October 29). With Teachers' Contract Set to End, Talks Are Quiet. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/30/education/30contract.html>.

<sup>44</sup> King, D. (2009, March 2). Rural Legislator, City Issue – How Upstaters Decide. *Gotham Gazette*. <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article//20090302/200/2844>.

However, recognizing that in the existing climate and with Bloomberg as an opponent, changing the PEP would be a reach, Campaign members knew that they would have needed some additional muscle behind them if they hoped to win this key demand. Several Campaign members we interviewed acknowledged that, given the political climate and their powerful opponent, changing the composition and term limits of the PEP was a long-shot from the outset. Still, until Silver and Weingarten came out in support of the current configuration of the PEP, the Campaign calculated that their position on the PEP was plausible, if unlikely, and would not marginalize them in the debate. As one community advocate put it: “Given his money and power, the only [players] who could have stood up against him [were] Silver and the UFT, and they didn’t.” Another knowledgeable observer noted the significant impact the Silver and Weingarten position was likely to have on the debate:

In reality, once Shelley Silver and Randi Weingarten said that we are going to have mayoral control—the rest became moot. If Shelley Silver and Randi Weingarten were not willing to challenge mayoral control, then others were going to follow... I was surprised that Silver and Weingarten took this position as early as they did.

In retrospect, some Campaign members saw their initial PEP platform provisions as integral to a larger strategy to position the Campaign for victories in other areas important to them. One coalition member described her analysis of the Campaign, saying, “I don’t think we ever had a fighting chance to change mayoral control of the panel, so I think we were sort of fighting around the margins to begin with. The mayor really had the panel sewn up. On the other hand, we definitely emerged as a player – although a player around the margins.” In other words, the Campaign reached for its “leading edge issues,” believing that pressing on this issue would open the possibility that the mayor would be more likely to negotiate and compromise on their other proposals, and which they believed if they won, could affect his authority over time.

Once the Assembly had rather quickly passed Silver’s bill, it went to the Senate where it sat mired until July. It might have been anticipated that the bill would easily pass the Senate because Malcolm Smith, the Democratic majority leader, supported Bloomberg and Klein, in part because of his sympathy for charter schools. With Democrats finally in control in the Senate, however, it was possible that discontented Assembly Democrats would be eager to work in conference with Senate Democrats to revise the bill. These scenarios were precluded, however, by a remarkable breakdown in the Senate even before the Assembly passed Silver’s bill. On June 8, 2009, Senators Pedro Espada and Hiram Monserrate crossed the aisle to work in coalition with the Republicans, shifting the balance of power five and a half months after the Democrats had taken the Senate by a slim margin – and chaos ensued. The Democrats challenged this “coup” as illegitimate in a case that went to the state Supreme Court. In the “three men in the room” scenario, the Senate Majority Leader would have been heavily involved in negotiating the mayoral control bill along with Silver and Paterson, but with the majority in dispute, there was no clear leader to do the negotiating. Moreover, the lag time between Assembly and Senate action on mayoral control likely hampered any efforts for the two chambers and their leaders to negotiate. Thanks to the coup, the Senate had become utterly ineffective as a legislative body and was not voting on any bills. The deadline for sunset passed, and still there was no movement. The governor, who the media and several of our interviewees agreed by this time was generally ineffective, was not able to expedite a solution to the Senate collapse.

The slow-down in the Senate created an unexpected opening for further debate among legislators, and further attempts by Bloomberg, lobbyists, and community and advocacy groups to frame the

debate and influence the outcome. Although DEC funding ended formally on June 30, the Campaign groups continued to work together throughout the summer. Beginning in late June, the Campaign focused its attention on informing members of the Senate, through meetings, rallies and press conferences, of the need for additional measures in the law that would strengthen public participation, including the idea for an independent parent training center that would include student success centers.

In the opinion of some Coordinating Committee and Steering Committee members, the chaos in Albany—although it extended their work beyond what had been anticipated—also allowed them to regroup and press harder for measures that would enhance the potential role of parents, youth and community. Public participation was an issue that resonated with many of the legislators and offered a means for them to express their independence from the mayor while still being seen as supportive of mayoral control. These legislators relayed stories in media accounts and in hearings of regular complaints from their constituents that the school district was unresponsive to their needs. According to one advocacy group leader, “A lot of the talking points and concerns being raised in the community, in the Campaign for Better Schools, ended up working their way into the debate [and] being issued by prominent senators.”

Realizing that negotiation between the Senate and the Assembly on the bill under consideration was unlikely, the Campaign made the strategic decision to pivot from opposing the bill to fighting for the recommendations from their platform regarding parent participation.<sup>45</sup> During the coup, Senator John Sampson was elected into leadership among Senate Democrats, first as party leader, and then as Democratic Conference Chairman in July, after Espada rejoined the Democrats. Several advocacy leaders told us in interviews that having Sampson in leadership proved consequential in gaining leverage for more changes to the mayoral control legislation because, unlike Senator Malcolm Smith, who had preceded him, Sampson was not a supporter of mayoral control. He and several other members of the Conference of Black Senators were unwilling to simply pass the Assembly bill without changes. At the end of July, an agreement was reached between the mayor and the Senate that allowed for the passage of the Assembly bill with amendments that included the parent training center with student success centers. In press releases and events, and other public statements, the Campaign and Senators who were involved in the negotiations all could claim success. Following the passage of the legislation, Campaign members thanked Senate Democrats for pushing for amendments, including the parent training center. In a statement issued by the Campaign on July 24, 2009, the Campaign quoted Zakiyah Ansari as saying,

After seven months of heated public debate, finally the demand that parents and students have a voice in the schools is being met through the creation of an independent, publicly-funded parent and student outreach and training center. Parent and student outreach and training have been a centerpiece of the Campaign for Better School’s platform from day one. It was overshadowed in a debate dominated by other issues, but the Senate Majority never stopped insisting that parents’ and students’ voices must be heard.

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<sup>45</sup> The Campaign had funding from sources other than DEC to support lobbying and direct negotiations. In a press release issued July 24, 2009, the Campaign acknowledged the individuals who had contributed to the final negotiation that resulted in agreement to pass the Assembly bill with amendments, including key representatives of the Campaign.

## The Campaign: Wins and Wild Cards

The passage of legislation results from a confluence of factors, making it difficult to measure the exact degree to which the Campaign was responsible for the changes contained in the new legislation. It is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from our interviews about how much the Campaign swayed the minds of legislators, although the interviews provide some evidence that the Campaign’s messaging, especially concerning student achievement data, was successful in gaining visibility in Albany. Of those we interviewed in Albany (a media representative, a lobbyist, and eight state officials), all but one named the Campaign, or groups and individuals from the Campaign, as influential in the legislative outcomes. One state official spoke about the influence of both the Campaign and the Parent Commission:

I think the [Campaign and the Parent Commission] had a big role in framing the debate. . . . I think they were the leaders in bringing up the opposition of mayoral control. They were on the critical end of things that had been happening, highlighting the need for greater parent involvement and flaws in the system.

This same official went on to make a distinction between the strategies of the two groups, saying:

[The Campaign] was a little more realistic in what they wanted, and when push came to shove at the end, they recognized what was happening and were pragmatic enough to alter their approach to get what they could.

The civic and advocacy leaders we interviewed in NYC were less likely to identify the Campaign as among the influential players, which suggests that Albany was the key arena for the Campaign’s efforts.

The Campaign platform provided specific recommendations for greater transparency and public input that the legislators who wanted to strengthen the accountability of the Mayor could draw on. As noted in our comparison of the law with the new legislation, there were a number of measures, even in the Assembly bill, that echo the wording in the Campaign’s platform. Requiring an “educational impact statement” in the case of school closings is a key example. Certainly the Campaign was the only group that called for a parent training center. In interviews, as well as in a press conference following the Senate’s vote, Campaign members stressed their common ground with the legislators in seeking more parent involvement and public input to critical decisions such as school closings. At the press conference where the Campaign celebrated the Senate’s addition of the parent training center via their agreement with the DoE, Campaign member Billy Easton told the gathered supporters that “there are a number of other changes that have occurred in mayoral control this year that *would not have occurred without our efforts?*” (emphasis added).

This next section delves more deeply into the question of whether the Campaign’s pragmatic strategy paid off. We have already described the lack of change in the PEP, which was generally perceived as a significant mayoral victory, and was a “loss” for the Campaign in light of the aspirations expressed in their platform. As one Campaign member said, these changes, if included, would have put “a more fundamental block on mayor dictatorship.” Here, we look at “wins,” that is, the provisions in the legislation that were most similar to the Campaign’s platform (see Figure 5). In addition, the nine months since the passage of the legislation have shown several of the provisions for improving public participation to be “wild cards” because the nature of their impact is still

unfolding. Some of the most initially promising pieces, including the parent training center, are still to bear fruit. Other pieces that received less attention are creating new handles for public participation, which will be explored further in the next chapter.

### *Wins: Transparency*

Among the Campaign members we interviewed in the fall of 2009, the provisions intended to increase transparency were seen as the clearest victory because they closely matched recommendations made by the Campaign and because they were expected to make a difference. The proposal for greater accountability around the DoE's reporting of its finances and educational data grew out of accusations that the mayor was supporting his reforms with data that obscured inequalities in student performance. While Bloomberg touted improved student achievement data under mayoral control, the Campaign's platform claimed that "the achievement gap between African American and Latino students and white students in obtaining Regents diplomas has not budged, and graduation rates for immigrant students learning English has actually dipped under mayoral control."<sup>46</sup> The August 2009 legislation matched the recommendations of the Campaign's platform in expanding the responsibilities of the IBO to include analysis and reporting of the DoE's data and finances. One Campaign member described the frustration among community groups and parents prior to the legislation, and the significance of the change:

I think the accuracy of [DOE] reporting always [made it] really hard for us as advocates to get a clear understanding. What are they saying? How are they calculating rates? We really hope that the IBO can get student level data and be able to give us a better understanding of what is really going on. I think that's a very important piece for us.

The Campaign was pleased with this legislative change and had supported it all along. Other groups had also called for greater transparency, even Learn NY's leading spokesperson, but the Campaign had insisted on a legislative change to increase transparency and had offered in its platform specific recommendations for improving transparency.

### *Wild Card: Public Participation*

A number of provisions in the new legislation which related to public participation could be considered wins for the Campaign. We use the term "wild card" to characterize many of these provisions because, in the first several months after the legislation was passed, it was difficult for Campaign members and others we interviewed to gauge their significance. The creation of a Citywide Council on ELLs, for example, was important to a number of Campaign groups. Allocation of funds for Student Success Centers, part of the amendments the Senate added, also matched Campaign recommendations. Another Senate amendment, the parent training center, also held the potential to increase public participation, but those we interviewed in the aftermath gave mixed reviews regarding the likelihood of its implementation and impact. With the outlined changes to the PEP looking unlikely, the Campaign had made a decision to prioritize the parent training center, and to make a final push for it when the legislation was mired in the Senate's summer chaos. During this period, the parent training center received a swell of media attention, sometimes mentioned in conjunction with the Campaign but most often not. Following the passage of the

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<sup>46</sup>Campaign for Better Schools. (2009, February 6). *Recommendations to the New York State legislature on governance of the New York City School District*. New York: Author, p.1. <http://gothamschools.org/2009/02/06/communities-must-be-involved-in-school-governance-group-says/>.

legislation, the Campaign celebrated the center as a victory and credited its own work as well as the Democrats in the Senate for adding it to the Assembly's bill. Francisca Mujica of Make the Road New York spoke at an August 6 press conference organized by the Campaign:

Because of the reforms we've won, families and their children will have a stronger voice in improving our local schools. When parents are involved, the entire school system benefits. Thanks to the Senate majority, we will have more resources and opportunities to demand leadership, accountability, and results. These reforms will make a difference for my family and my community in making our schools better and giving our kids a better chance in life.

This hopefulness was echoed in some of our interviews. Despite the promise of the parent training center, however, a number of Campaign members worried about the level of funding committed and, given the current budget crisis, whether it would be implemented at all. As of this writing, plans for initiating the parent training center remain stalled.

Meanwhile, other parts of the new legislation have had a greater impact than portended by the small amount of attention they received during the mayoral control debate and in the crucial period during the push to the final legislation. In March 2010, seven months after the extension law was passed, a judge in the State Supreme Court of Manhattan blocked the mayor from closing 19 schools, "finding the city engaged in 'significant violations' of the new state law governing mayoral control of city schools."<sup>47</sup> The basis of the judge's decision was that meaningful educational impact statements had not been issued. The judge's decision was upheld by an appellate court ruling in July 2010. Chapter Four will explore further the ways that new regulations on school closing procedures provided community groups and parents with new openings for public participation. Other public participation elements of the legislation, such as the role of the district superintendents or the requirement for the principals to consult with the SLT's concerning the school budgets, also may prove significant for increasing public participation and having an impact on educational decision-making—but it may take longer to be able to tell how much of an impact these provisions will have.

This chapter has told the story of the debate and subsequent passage of the legislation that extended mayoral control of New York City schools for six additional years. During the debate, multiple community and legislative voices called for changes to mayoral control in order to provide greater transparency and improve opportunities for public participation. The question of whether the new law would change the PEP's composition and term limits came to define the key differences among the players. Particularly after Silver and Weingarten came out in support of the mayor's position on the PEP, the changes in the mayor's authority proposed by the Campaign appeared unlikely. The Campaign's platform and outreach had fortified legislators who wanted legislation that would provide a check on the mayor's power by advocating specific measures to increase public participation and transparency. The mayor, on the other hand, had succeeded in framing mayoral control as requiring his absolute authority on the PEP. Even though the legislation that finally passed in August 2009 reflected a number of the Campaign's recommendations (but not changes to the PEP), many in the press, as well as Campaign members and supporters, considered Bloomberg victorious. As we will explore in the following chapter, however, Campaign recommendations that did make it into the bill but which received much less attention in the immediate aftermath may prove to have longer term effects. The impact of those recommendations may serve as checks on

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<sup>47</sup> Otterman, S. (2010, March 26). Judge Blocks Closing of 19 New York City Schools. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/nyregion/27close.html>.

the mayor's power, and potentially could recalibrate the starting point for the debate during the next mayoral campaign or the next time the legislation approaches its sunset.

## Chapter 4: The Long Term Effects of the Campaign's Efforts and the Mayoral Control Debate

Fully evaluating the long-term consequences of the process and outcomes of the mayoral control debate is not possible at least until after the next election cycle has run its course and a new administration demonstrates whether it will build upon or sharply reconfigure the education changes initiated under Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein. In the short term, however, it is clear that because of efforts by the Campaign and others, the mayor and his team had to work harder than they might have hoped to defend their interests in Albany. Moreover, they had to endure more uncertainty than anticipated during the legislative confusion in the Senate, and they had to accept some changes despite the fact that, back when the debate first began, their stance had been that *any* changes risked weakening the institutional structures upon which their reforms were built.

On the key battles around checks and balances—which focused on the composition of the PEP and term limits of PEP members—the mayor and chancellor held their ground and prevailed. The Campaign's strategy to hammer away at the issue of the concentration of power in the mayor, however, provided room for other legislative changes, which now appear to be curbing the mayor's authority. Although the administration had drawn a line in the sand around the PEP, the terms of the debate forced their hand on the issues of transparency and public participation, both of which were salient areas of concern among many of the legislators, and resonated even with some constituencies sympathetic to the mayor's desire to maintain his advantage on the PEP.

On issues related to more transparent and independent handling of financial and achievement data, the administration essentially conceded. On greater public participation, the concessions initially did not attract media attention as significant. That was an oversight: in the winter and spring of 2009, the issue of school closings was a mounting concern among parents. For this reason, the Campaign platform had included the requirement that there be impact statements and public reviews in their platform whenever the administration was proposing a closing. The inclusion of these requirements in the legislation appears to be having consequences that are meaningful in the short term and are likely to continue to have an impact into the future. They have provided a mechanism for public mobilization, and a recent judicial decision indicated that they are a flashpoint in the battle around the balance between mayoral authority and the rights of the public to information and potentially, in decision-making.<sup>48</sup> We will discuss in this chapter a combination of factors that have produced perhaps subtle, but important changes in the political landscape, creating more room for public challenge of the administration's policies and seeding elements of what might develop into a vision and organizational foundation for an alternative idea of public education reform, with a more robust role for parent participation. Figure 6 provides a summary of these longer term effects.

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<sup>48</sup> Medina, J. (2010, July 1). In Blow to Bloomberg, City Must Keep 19 Failing Schools Open, *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/02/education/02schools.html?scp=1&sq=19%20school%20closings&st=cse>.

<b>Figure 6 Longer Term Effects of the Mayoral Control Debate</b>		
	<b>Possible Cause</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>External Impacts</b>	The Campaign turned out large and diverse groups of parents and youth at legislative hearings and public forums.	Campaign groups gained legitimacy as representatives of community voice.
	Campaign members developed and strengthened relationships with one another through their joint work.	Campaign groups are likely to collaborate in future efforts.
	Campaign members learned lessons about: (1) navigating local and state policy arenas, and (2) organizing and sustaining an effective coalition.	Campaign groups are likely to be more effective in future efforts—individually or as a collaborative.
<b>Internal Impacts</b>	Bloomberg's popularity may have been weakened in the 2009 election year by critiques of his heavy-handed approach to education policy.	Bloomberg won the mayoral election by a small margin.
	The Campaign, Diane Ravitch, and others pointed to disparities and oversights in the achievement data provided by the DoE.	DoE's claims of improved test scores suffered a loss of credibility.
	Legislation opened the door for organized resistance to proposed school closings and a lawsuit claiming the DoE had not provided the necessary impact statements.	The planned closure of 19 schools was blocked.

### Building on the Mayoral Control Battle: A Changing Political Environment

In November 2009, Michael Bloomberg won reelection to his third term, but by a considerably smaller margin (51%-46%) than most observers had expected – despite the normal advantages of incumbency and the fact that he had outspent William Thompson, his Democratic opponent, by about 15 to one. Bloomberg “won with the smallest number of votes received by any mayoral candidate since 1917, when three million fewer New Yorkers lived in the city and women were not allowed to vote.”<sup>49</sup> In an email to DoE staff on the morning after the election, Chancellor Klein asserted that their school reform efforts had played a role in the victory: “In an election where education was a major focus, the outcome is truly a testament to your hard work and accomplishments and what they have meant for our students.” He saw an opportunity to institutionalize “a permanent culture shift—creating a school system that puts the interests of

<sup>49</sup> Roberts, S. (Updated March 19, 2010). Michael Bloomberg: Overview. *New York Times*. [http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/michael\\_r\\_bloomberg/index.html?inline=nyt-per](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/michael_r_bloomberg/index.html?inline=nyt-per).

students above all else.”<sup>50</sup> But there were already some signs that the opposition that had coalesced around the mayoral control issue was alive and kicking.

Thompson had made criticism of the Bloomberg/Klein style of education reform one of the key elements in his campaign, although it is unclear how much this strategy helped him. The mayor’s team counter-punched with advertisements playing up the fact that Thompson had led the old school board from 1996 to 2001 and asking voters to hold him responsible for what many considered to be the failures of that earlier regime. Ultimately more important to Bloomberg’s election returns might be the fact that candidates for other offices also chose to feature criticism of the mayor and chancellor in their successful campaigns and to offer indications that they would use their new positions to stand up for a different vision of school reform. In campaigning for the position of Public Advocate, generally considered the second highest ranking citywide elected office, Bill de Blasio had supported the general notion of mayoral control but sharply criticized the mayor’s governing style. During his campaign de Blasio issued what he referred to as a “Public School Parents’ Bill of Rights,” which expanded on the DoE’s policy and included calling for parents to have “meaningful input into school policies and programs before decisions are made, particularly decisions affecting their children, local schools and school siting.”<sup>51</sup> Once in office he continued on this theme: on his first day he announced the launch of a Community Organizing and Constituent Services Department, to help organize communities to play a more meaningful role across a broad range of city policies, and in March 2010 he announced that he would be helping to form a “Parent Advocate Coordinating Team” (PACT). As reported by the *Gotham Schools* web site, “The group will join a growing field of parent activist organizations around the city. Several groups had their genesis in last year’s fight over the renewal of mayoral control, during which increasing parental involvement was a major sticking point.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, John Liu ran his campaign for city comptroller with a promise to provide greater transparency and oversight over the DoE, particularly its achievement and accountability data, and proposed to audit the administration’s decision-making process around school closures.<sup>53</sup> Liu recently announced that his office would undertake an investigation of the DoE’s progress reports.<sup>54</sup> Although it is very early to make projections, both de Blasio and Liu are considered possibly strong contenders to run for mayor in 2013.

## Building on the Mayoral Control Battle: Challenges to the Mayor’s Claims and Authority

Prior to the battle over the extension of mayoral control, the administration had been operating relatively free of major challenges to its education policies. After its mild and aborted testing of the

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<sup>50</sup> Walz, M. (2009, November 4, 2009). Klein: Bloomberg re-election will mean a “permanent culture shift” for schools. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2009/11/04/klein-bloomberg-re-election-will-mean-a-permanent-culture-shift/>. This assertion is particularly interesting, given, as the accompanying media report points out, that Bloomberg only received the votes of 43% of public school parents, compared with 55% for Thomson. See: Profile of New York City Voters. (2009, November 4). *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/11/04/nyregion/1104-ny-exit-poll.html>

<sup>51</sup> De Blasio, W. (Sept 8, 2009). Bill de Blasio, Assemblymember Peralta, and Councilmember Ferreras Call for Public School Parents’ Bill of Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.billdeblasio.com/node/663>.

<sup>52</sup> Walz, M. (2010, March 4, 2010). De Blasio creates new citywide parent advocacy group. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/04/de-blasio-creates-new-citywide-parent-advocacy-group/>.

<sup>53</sup> Benjamin, E. (2010, January 28). Liu Will Audit DOE’s ‘Musical Chairs’ School Closures. <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/2010/01/liu-will-audit-does-musical-ch.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Phillips, A. (2010, March 2). Looking back on school closure vote, officials question rationale. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/02/looking-back-on-school-closure-vote-officials-question-rationale/>.

mayor on the social promotion issue in 2004, when Bloomberg replaced PEP members before they could vote against the policy, the PEP had retreated to near invisibility and uniform acquiescence, as the mayor had made it clear he expected such behavior from the members. Parent advocates had done their best to express their view that the administration was being heedless and even unlawful in some of its practices, and in a couple of instances—notably a DoE effort to ban cell phones from schools and a botched mid-year change in bus routes—the administration’s practice of acting unilaterally and without consultation had generated a public backlash. Similarly, pressure from groups such as the New York Immigration Coalition around language access issues resulted in the DoE adapting its policies to meet parent demands for expanding the provision of interpretation and translation services. However, such responses to community pressure were hard won and the exception. Parent advocates’ concerns only rarely captured media attention, and any casual observer might have presumed that the administration had the “silent majority” of support that it proclaimed. Over the course of the mayoral control fight, however, dents were inflicted on the administration’s ability to keep discontent muffled or marginalized.

### *Contesting Student Performance Gains*

Through its “Keep it Going” campaign the administration had worked aggressively to create the public perception that test scores were rising. The Campaign, along with others, succeeded in raising substantial challenges to the administration’s claims of sharp performance gains. Some of the early challenges may have struck many New Yorkers as esoteric—for example, competing assertions about whether it was legitimate for the administration to measure growth from 2002 when virtually none of their policies had been put into effect until 2003. Over time, however, the media and some stakeholders that we interviewed—particularly legislators and their staffers—became much more attuned to some critical issues, such as the fact that the city’s gains were modest or nonexistent on the federal NAEP tests. Similarly, city gains on state tests were no more impressive than those of some other large cities.<sup>55</sup> Interviews with legislators and their staffers suggest that increasing the validity of the information on New York City student achievement was a central concern in the debate around the reauthorization of the mayoral control legislation. The Campaign had challenged the DoE’s data claims from the start, addressing both the legislature and the general public as their audience. For many of the legislators we interviewed, conversations they had with Campaign members and other advocates were central in flagging this issue. As one legislative staffer stated:

Some of the community groups, some of the parent coalitions had [test score data] on their radar. So those minority graduation rates are going to be a huge issue. And the standardized testing. Just the discrepancies and disparities in the test scores and grad rates. Those are going to be the big [education] issues [now that the legislation is finalized].

Education scholar Diane Ravitch’s voice added to the public clamor about the test score results. Indeed, William Thompson, during his mayoral campaign, cited Ravitch’s critique of Bloomberg’s and Klein’s claims of achievement gains in calling for greater transparency at the DoE. By summer 2009, DoE claims about student progress seemed more likely to be greeted skeptically, including by reporters who had become more attuned to the methodological issues involved.

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<sup>55</sup> See Ravitch, D. (2009, April 9). Mayor Bloomberg’s Crib Sheet. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/10/opinion/10ravitch.html>. See also: Henig, J.R. (2009). “Mayoral Control: What We Can and Cannot Learn from Other Cities?” In *When Mayors Take Charge School Governance in the City*, edited by Viteritti, J.P. Brookings Institution Press: 19-45.

*Dissent on the PEP*

From the time of his appointment to the PEP by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer in June 2007, Patrick Sullivan, a public school parent in District 2 and executive at an insurance corporation, was a voice of dissent. He was for the most part a lone voice, and his outcries did not upset the PEP's proceeding with the mayor's desires. Following the passage of the new mayoral control legislation, however, he attempted to use the PEP's new oversight responsibilities in the area of contracting to make the DoE more accountable. At a December 2009 PEP meeting in the Bronx, Sullivan criticized the Department's decision to renew a \$200 million contract with its current bus vendor:

Can you explain why you've chosen not to use competitive bidding? ... This is a very complicated proposal here. And my concern is, and the reason I'll be voting against it, is that very little of the information that the Panel needs to make a judicious decision was provided to us in any kind of timely fashion. ... This is a time when we need to hold the vendors accountable. Accountability can't be just for teachers and students. ... It's indefensible to approve a contract of an existing vendor when no formal assessment has been done of that vendor's performance.<sup>56</sup>

Although there is no evidence that Sullivan's attempts to have the PEP exercise its responsibility for assuring accountability in contracting has changed procedures, it was perhaps part and parcel of a new environment in which there is a more prevalent sentiment rejecting acquiescence to the mayor's authority. The December 2009 meeting evidenced a somewhat altered tenor in the panel when "for the first time in the [PEP's] history, protests from school leaders and panel members pressured education officials into withdrawing a proposal [to eliminate one school's sixth grade] from consideration," and, on the same night, when the PEP "voted to postpone another resolution, ignoring pleas from DOE officials to approve it immediately."<sup>57</sup>

*Outcry about School Closures*

Perhaps the most dramatic mark of the changing landscape was the January 2010 PEP meeting on 19 planned school closures. The meeting was attended by 2,000 people and covered by all of the major media sources in the city. Other schools had been closed in the past—more than 100 in New York City in the past decade, including 12 in 2009 and 15 in 2008—but this meeting overshadowed previous ones in terms of visibility and sympathetic coverage. For example, the DoE's decision to close 15 schools in 2008 was not well covered by the media, and reporting was largely limited to individual parent or student responses. Protests in 2009, as reported in the media, were held only in the case of the three schools that were to have been replaced by charter schools, a decision the DoE later reversed.<sup>58</sup> The groups that orchestrated the mobilization of parents to attend the 2010 PEP

<sup>56</sup> Sullivan, P. Panel for Education Policy Meeting, December 2009. From

<http://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2009/12/patrick-sullivan-commands-stage-at-pep.html>

<sup>57</sup> Phillips, A. (2009, December 18). A trace of independence appears at Panel for Educational Policy. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2009/12/18/a-trace-of-independence-appears-at-panel-for-educational-policy/>.

<sup>58</sup> Green, E. (2009, March 24). Parents, Weingarten, Sue DOE, Klein over Charter School Siting. *Gotham Schools*.

<http://gothamschools.org/2009/03/24/parents-weingarten-sue-doe-klein-over-charter-schools/>; Walz, M. (2009, December 21). Spike in anti-school closure protests begins to heat up the winter. *Gotham Schools*.

<http://gothamschools.org/2009/12/21/spike-in-anti-school-closure-protests-begins-to-heat-up-the-winter/>;

Hernandez, J. (2009, December 21). City Backs Down on a Plan to Replace Three Public Schools With Charters. *New York Times*.

meeting were able to build on momentum and employ contacts developed during the battle over mayoral control. Also significant, though, were the changes introduced in the re-authorization of the mayoral control legislation which required the Department to hold a public hearing on any proposed school closing or significant change in school utilization at least six months in advance of the first day of the next school year; to post notice of such meetings “widely and conspicuously;” and to allow all interested parties the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. This last provision resulted in public comments from more than 250 speakers at the January 2010 PEP meeting. The new legislation also required that the DoE obtain approval from the PEP for the closures. The advance and public notice requirements also appear to have facilitated community access to a public forum: in response to criticisms, the DoE moved the hearing from its originally planned location in Staten Island to a more accessible and larger auditorium in Brooklyn.

Such legislative changes were largely overlooked by the media at the time they were negotiated. But even small changes can be important when they are fixed in law. Defenders of the mayor’s vision of mayoral control had attempted, throughout the debate, to argue that many of the objections raised about inadequate parent participation could be addressed without requiring formal policy changes, simply by having the DoE adopt a somewhat more open and responsive stance. By pushing the legislature to incorporate certain new responsibilities to the public into law, however, the Campaign and its allies put themselves in a position to demand responses from the city’s education policy makers and—significantly—to have recourse to legal action if political demands were ignored.

The extent to which the new law shifted the landscape by opening the field for judicial intervention is illustrated by the March 26, 2010 decision by Justice Joan B. Lobis of the State Supreme Court in Manhattan. Judge Lobis blocked the DoE’s planned closure of 19 schools based on violations of the procedures the law had articulated requiring that detailed educational impact statements precede the approval of school closures. The UFT, NAACP and other plaintiffs, including AQE, had argued that the PEP vote to close the schools was improper because the nominal impact statements were vague and formulaic and failed to address key community concerns. According to the *New York Times*, “Justice Lobis, who voided the panel’s decision, said the new law ‘created a public process with meaningful community involvement regarding the chancellor’s proposals.’” The entire mayoral control law, she wrote, “must be enforced, not merely the portion extending mayoral control of the schools.”<sup>59</sup> The ruling of the judge was upheld in a state appellate court in July 2010, affirming again the spirit, as well as the letter, of the law. The change in the law gave opponents of the administration’s policies an additional weapon, and one that they will likely use, or at least threaten to use, again.

### *Reframing the Mayoral Control Question*

In the often-simplistic world of education politics, people and groups battle to claim the “reformer” mantle, leaving others, by implication, in the position of being defenders of a discredited status quo. Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein pursued that strategy in the struggle over mayoral control. Declaring themselves to be the true champions of reform, they attempted to saddle all critical voices with the perceived sins associated with the previous governance structure. The Mayor’s supporters could frame things concretely, for example the “Keep it Going” Campaign played this strategy out

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/03/education/03schools.html?\\_r=1&adxnlnl=1&ref=javier\\_c\\_hernandez&adxnlnl=1278961398-ZkjAMZRmBfj1aqEsUjb5yA](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/03/education/03schools.html?_r=1&adxnlnl=1&ref=javier_c_hernandez&adxnlnl=1278961398-ZkjAMZRmBfj1aqEsUjb5yA).

<sup>59</sup> Otterman, S. (2010, March 26). Judge Blocks Closing of 19 New York City Schools. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/nyregion/27close.html>.

directly, essentially asserting, “New Yorkers, here are two things you’ve experienced. Mayoral control under this administration versus decentralized school boards before. Which do you prefer?”

It was for this reason that the Campaign worked hard to establish that they were not asking for a repeal of mayoral control, but rather for reforms that would make it more accountable, open, and democratic. During the run-up to the legislative decision, the Campaign had some success in evading the charge that they were nostalgic activists – or worse, reactionaries – who wanted to recreate an earlier era, but this position came at some internal and external costs. Internally, the strategic decision to accept mayoral control as a given was disquieting to some groups’ members and arguably gave up opportunities to rally against a clearly defined target. Externally, the decision meant the group had to promote a new governance structure and vision of reform that was imagined but nowhere concretely in place. The persistence of the Campaign’s politically sophisticated and more nuanced view of the debate in the face of these challenges demonstrate the potential of a well-prepared and adequately resourced coalition to project a unified voice. As the mayoral control battle continues to play out, however, it remains to be seen whether the simplistic “either you are with us or against us” frame favored by the mayor and chancellor has been overcome.

### *Building on the Mayoral Control Debate: Increasing Civic Capacity for School Reform*

In addition to the potential impacts on the mayor’s dominance, the Campaign’s efforts in the mayoral control debate may have influenced the education playing field in NYC by growing the civic capacity of the Campaign member groups. DEC’s support of the Campaign was built on the premise that a wider scope of community participation at the policy level could change the long-term picture of school reform in New York City. DEC funding for the Campaign ended in the summer of 2009. Nonetheless, there are many indications that the experience of participating in a coalition and engaging in joint advocacy has had civic capacity-building impacts that will persist.

### Increased Legitimacy as Parent and Community Voice

First, over the course of the mayoral control debate, as described in Chapter 2, the Campaign gained recognition as an authentic parent and community voice that was able to successfully counter the administration’s charge that all community groups are “nostalgic reactionaries” often controlled by the teachers’ union. The administration took the position that any group that questioned their reforms were among the traditional claimants of community representation, and that these groups largely were self-appointed and self-interested protectors of privilege. They conveniently ignored the emergence of many new groups and reform coalitions over the past two decades. They sought to discredit any organized community group that did not uphold their definition of mayoral control by associating them with decentralization and corruption.

The equally challenging notion to overcome, perhaps, was the relatively widespread perception, not only within the DoE but among some media observers and other stakeholders involved in the mayoral control debate, that some member groups of the Campaign, and as a result, the Campaign itself, was funded and directed by the UFT. Although many of the Campaign groups had worked closely over the past several years with the UFT on the budget fight, from the very beginning, the initiating groups had decided not to invite the union to be part of the coalition because they anticipated that it was likely that the interests of the union in this debate might conflict with the interests of parents and youth, the primary constituencies of the Campaign members.

The perception that the Campaign was directed by the union may have been the result of efforts by the administration to de-legitimize the Campaign. In the media, at least, some of questions about the Campaign's independence from the union derived from their past joint work around the budget, in which Randi Weingarten openly called for a coalition of parents and the union. When the UFT decided not to use up a lot of its political capital on the mayoral control battle, the Campaign, in fact, had lost a powerful ally. Activists who wanted to take on the administration more aggressively could claim, too, that the Campaign's more pragmatic stance in support of mayoral control, but with significant changes, was a reflection of its dependence on the union. The Campaign needed to establish its independence.

The Campaign was able to counteract some of these perceptions in part because it featured among its member organizations groups that were newer to the education and policy scene and had widened the diversity of perspectives the Campaign represented. They included some new- to-education grassroots immigrant groups brought in by the NYIC and youth, who had been active in the budget fight, but for whom the Campaign was the first experience at the table of a coalition. As one member of the Campaign explained, "There is also the fact that we had multiple voices ....we had NYIC, the fact that youth were involved. For the legislators, they say, 'I don't want to just see your staff members .... I want parents and parents from my district.' .... One group may have not been able to do that."

The Campaign's ability to mobilize a broad coalition of parents to attend and speak compellingly at public forums similarly allowed it to begin to counteract the perception that the Campaign was being directed by the UFT. For example, one legislative staffer spoke about the centrality of the borough Senate hearings on mayoral control in influencing the debate and the power of listening to parent voices, many associated with the Campaign. The hearings, according to one legislative leader, "became rallying points for parents and more importantly for [state legislative] members, because members would then have an opportunity to go on record and hear from parents and become informed. ...It tied [legislators] into a solution." The Campaign worked to develop the same kind of activist, independent image within the press and at public forums. For example, as noted earlier, Zakiyah Ansari, representing the Campaign at many forums and in many press articles, was generally identified as a parent. This type of visibility is in contrast to Leonie Haimson, for example, who was generally referred to in the media in association with Class Size Matters and not as a public school parent.<sup>60</sup>

It was in part because the Campaign groups were fresh and authentic voices that the administration found that labeling them as old guard defenders of the status quo did not stick. The Campaign was an authentic grassroots voice that was challenging the mayor's authority; in response to that challenge, supporters of the mayor recruited Learn NY and charter school parents to show that the mayor too had grassroots support for his policies. One DoE official explained the role of Learn NY as:

It was important to create a counter narrative. ...Otherwise you have a very sort of monopolistic view of the truth that's out there. And the defenders of, the proponents of—whether it's the UFT, the AQE, NYIC, there were dozens of these groups—you know are

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<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Phillips, A. (2009, June 20). A state of frenzy with 10 days left before mayor's control expires. *Gotham Schools*. <http://gothamschools.org/2009/06/20/a-state-of-frenzy-with-10-days-left-before-mayors-control-expires>.

vocal, they have access to the press, they're angry, they can create an impression of sort of that there's unanimity around this, so my strategy was to create an alternative view of what the facts and the policy issues were. ...when Learn came into being, Learn NY, that really was its mission.

As of this writing, however, Learn NY has largely faded away; the organization no longer has a presence on the web or in Albany, and the funds raised that remain (approximately \$3 million) will be returned to donors.<sup>61</sup> The charter schools continue to be a competing claimant to represent the real parent and community voice, but the release of dozens of emails between Klein and Eva Moskowitz, the most politically attuned leader of the local charter community, likely will make it harder in the future for them to collaborate without skeptical observers questioning the independence of charter groups and opponents characterizing them as armies working at the bidding of the DoE. In contrast, the Campaign groups appear to have gained legitimacy among many in the legislature and media as authentic representatives of parents and community.

### **Broadened and More Diverse Networks**

An additional impact on the groups themselves of participation in a broadened coalition was that, because of the Campaign, they developed relationships and expanded their networks in new ways. Perhaps even more important were the broadened viewpoints incorporated into the coalition's agenda and platform. One Campaign member related the challenges to the coalition in melding such a broad coalition. As she described, because the different groups work on different issues, their understanding of education reform may differ. Furthermore, each of the groups is accountable to a different constituency, and they work in relationship with different political networks. All this, in her words, "plays in" to the delicate processes of coalition building and developing a shared platform and common strategy. On an individual level, some members found themselves working with specific communities for the first time. As one group member reflected, "I also know from feedback that I've gotten that it was valuable for other groups who had never had the opportunity to interact with some of the immigrant populations that we worked with, that [to interact with them] was helpful."

There are indications that the experience of the Campaign will make it more likely that ties and cooperative relationships can be reignited when an important challenge or opportunity appears. In interviews after the legislative battle was over, Campaign members widely agreed that they would continue to support each others' efforts. It is already beginning to happen. The processes of collaboration through the Campaign have enabled groups to identify mutual areas of interest outside the Campaign's mission, and spawned new partnerships. One example is the organizing around the school closing hearings and subsequent lawsuit, in which the plaintiffs include AQE, the NAACP, Zakiyah Ansari, and a number of legislators and parents, as well as the UFT. CEJ has also continued to collaborate with other groups involved in the Campaign, most recently in obtaining endorsements and support for the rolling out of their extended learning platform. Similarly, AQE is continuing to join forces with Campaign groups as part of their education budget advocacy work, and the Asian-American Children and Families Coalition is looking to the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC)—a citywide coalition of youth organizing groups – to incorporate a similar type of youth organizing strategy within its own constituency. "We developed really strong relationships," one Campaign

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<sup>61</sup> Fertig, B. (2010, March 2). Lobbying Groups for Mayoral Control of Schools Raised \$7.5M. *WNYC*. <http://www.wnyc.org/news/articles/151088>.

participant observed. “The Campaign had the effect of furthering and deepening relationships...whatever organizations choose as their priorities, we will talk about how we can work together to advance them.”

### **Deeper Policy and Legislative Expertise**

The groups’ experiences in the Campaign have developed their expertise and sophistication in the policy and legislative arenas both within and potentially beyond the confines of education policy. This effect was felt especially by the Steering Committee groups that were new to this kind of advocacy work, but even the more experienced members of the Coordinating Committee noted their own increasing savvy in navigating through the tangle of interests and individuals operating in the policy arena. Through development of their multi-level campaign, members of the coalition became increasingly knowledgeable about city and state governance and the legislative process, and about how to organize and maintain an effective coalition. “We gained knowledge of Albany politics, pushed our relationships with elected officials further. Our members who went to Albany increased their understanding of the whole legislative process and how it works or doesn’t.” Many members also indicated that the process of forming the coalition was an important learning experience. “...If we were to do it again, there are so many things that we learned about: processes that we need to have in place from the very beginning—we had some processes but I think we could have done even a better job of articulating how decisions would be made, who was ultimately accountable and responsible, for example, something as simple as supervising the staff, who is the staff ultimately accountable to?”

The lessons of the mayoral control battle are likely to make the individual coalition organizations more effective not only the next time they join together, but also in their own ongoing efforts to affect policy. Some groups noted that they had paid a price in terms of their relationship with City Hall and the DoE around their non-Campaign issues, but others felt they had learned more about how to communicate with the authorities and gained some credibility with the administration that saw them as more of a force to be reckoned with. The participating groups are certainly not treading water since the end of the Campaign. CEJ, for example, has continued advocating for changes in the implementation of school closure policies, including a recent City Hall protest and publication of a report, and further, has developed a political action committee to support political candidates. Thus, whether they are working together or individually on issues, the exposure they gained to new strategies may make them more flexible and adaptive, traits that are increasingly important in the ever more complex world of education politics.

### **Looking Toward the Future**

Early in the Mayor’s third term it is difficult to predict where momentum is heading, but it appears that the landscape has been shaken and new groups and new ideas are beginning to pop through to the surface. This could be a false spring. The Mayor and Chancellor may double down on their efforts to maintain strong control, using their substantial resources and skill to stare down critics and battle back against recent legal challenges. Various political aspirants and community-based organizations might get caught up in competing issues, fragmenting and dissipating their energies in competition for attention, access, public grants, and philanthropic support. Nonetheless, the sense is widespread among a variety of political actors that there is less risk than before in challenging the

mayor given Bloomberg's surprisingly slim margin in the mayoral race.<sup>62</sup> This change is showing up across a broad range of issues not limited to schools.<sup>63</sup> Of course, a weakened, lame duck administration in and of itself is not something one should welcome; even many critics of the mayor and chancellor appreciate their past willingness and ability to get things done and might prefer a re-oriented administration to one stymied and adrift. On the positive side, we see some prospects for the emergence of more inclusive views of what ought to guide decision-making about school governance in the future, as well as new, loosely coupled coalitions that could keep this vision on the public agenda as various candidates for the next mayoral election begin to stake out their issues and line up support.

In this chapter we have shown that the Campaign's sustained involvement in the debate has served to further develop the civic capacity of the groups within the coalition, increasing their legitimacy as a voice for parents and community, deepening existing relationships among groups and resulting in broader relationships with more diverse groups. We find early indications that individual groups are continuing to collaborate and forging new collaborations with new groups in their advocacy work in education as well as other policy areas. Our findings also suggest that participation in the governance debate served to increase the groups' policy and legislative expertise and that they are bringing this increased capacity to bear on new issues. At such a brief distance from the renewal of the governance legislation, it is difficult definitively to pinpoint long-term impacts of the Campaign on the policy landscape. We find at least some preliminary indications, however, that the debate has resulted in some subtle but important political shifts, including challenges to the mayor's dominance and to the DoE's school reform agenda, with its constrained role for parent participation in education reform.

Perhaps some of the most significant impacts were changes in the legislation that were not as well-noted at the time it was passed related to school closures and sitings. These changes appear to have created an important venue for parent and community voice around these issues, evident in the increased parent and community voice and influence on the DoE's 2010 school closure decisions, compared to prior years. Additionally, we find evidence that the Campaign's efforts were central in raising questions regarding the validity of DoE achievement data and associated claims about the DoE's impact on student outcomes, particularly among legislators. Similarly, other political officials have featured criticism of the DoE in their successful campaigns and, once in office, their preliminary actions suggest that concerns raised during the governance debate will continue to have traction, perhaps beyond the education arena. It would be a mark of real change if there now emerges a more nuanced and multi-faceted public discussion of the kind of school system New Yorkers would like to see, a discussion leading to a common vision that combines checks and balances, transparency, and broader public engagement with a rigorous commitment to achieving educational excellence and attacking educational inequities.

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<sup>62</sup> Chan, S. (2009, November 5). Election Remakes City Council, and May Give It More Bite, Too. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/nyregion/06council.html?fta=y>.

<sup>63</sup> Barbaro, M. (2009, November 3). Chief Factor in Mayor's Race – Bloomberg Influence. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/04/nyregion/04ticktock.html>.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion – The Impact of DEC Funding

In fall 2008, the June 30, 2009 sunset of the school governance legislation that created mayoral control in New York City was barely on the public’s radar screen. Nonetheless, groups with an interest in education, such as the Public Advocate and City Council, had begun to hold public hearings in expectation of a debate. We have described in this report how the Donors’ Education Collaborative also anticipated the need to prepare for the sunset of the law, leading to its funding of some longstanding grantees to plan and then create a coalition in order to bring parent and community voices to bear on any debate about mayoral control. Given the mayor’s popularity, resources, and generally good press at this early stage, however, he had little reason to think he would need to compromise with anyone on his vision of mayoral control, which he saw as his legacy to the city.

Our interviews showed that most knowledgeable observers bet the long-time political formula for getting things done in Albany would prevail and largely dismissed the possibility that community-based groups with a different agenda would have any significant influence on the legislative outcome. Our research, suggests, however, that the conventional wisdom did not completely hold. DEC’s backing of a community-based coalition was instrumental in fundamentally framing the mayoral control debate into one about checks and balances, transparency, and public engagement. The Campaign engaged significant numbers of parents and community members in the debate who would not otherwise have been involved, mobilized a counter force to Mayor Bloomberg’s massive political force, and extracted important concessions in the final legislation. Rather than funding a particular program or policy initiative, the standard operating procedure for many foundations, DEC’s approach has been to use its funding strategically to build a stronger foundation of active organizations. DEC’s support helps these organizations build their capacity and knowledge, and often is encouragement to them to join in networks and coalitions that can leverage their influence and broaden responsible public debate. Assessing the impact of DEC’s involvement is complicated precisely because some of its policy goals are self-consciously broad (to permit local actors to add definition) and its ultimate interest is in long-term and sustainable consequences. We suggest in this report that DEC’s involvement—through funding the coalition that became the Campaign for Better Schools—helped shape the debate as it unfolded in the year leading up to the legislative resolution. DEC’s funds catalyzed the formation of the Campaign and gave its leaders and core members an early start on the process of mobilization. As discussed in Chapter 2, although not the only organization offering a counter-voice to the administration, the Campaign, by early 2009, had become one of the most visible, and its framing of the battle was broadly recognized and helped influence how issues were discussed in the media and elsewhere.<sup>64</sup>

The Campaign succeeded in raising awareness and injecting into the debate concerns about mayoral control as implemented by Mayor Bloomberg; most importantly the Campaign contested the absence of public participation in education policy decision-making. It challenged whether decision-making power should be so concentrated at the top. The Campaign was also successful in raising doubts about the validity of district claims about student achievement gains, especially for ELL and

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<sup>64</sup> Whether the impact of DEC’s support of the coalition and Campaign includes substantive changes in the city’s formal school governance arrangements is more difficult to establish. That is partly because DEC as an organization did not endorse specific changes in the law and partly because the helter-skelter resolution of the legislative consideration meant that idiosyncratic factors, happenstance, luck of timing, and unpredictable events undid much of the planning and foundation-setting that had been pursued by many actors on all sides of the issue.

special education students, as well as for many African American and Latino students. It gained public attention for its positions by strategically positioning itself not *against* mayoral control, but *for* improving it; by mobilizing and working with constituents all over the city; and by achieving status in the media as a legitimate voice for the interests of parents and community members that might not otherwise be heard. These were the main accomplishments leading into the last phase of the Campaign and into the ultimate test of the Campaign's influence, the legislation that would define NYC school governance going forward from June 2009.

The Campaign faced many hurdles, mostly unexpected, in the post-May 2009 phase. The Campaign needed to negotiate these hurdles, particularly the Senate coup, to influence the legislative outcomes. During this period, the Campaign acted strategically in order to maximize its influence. The bill that the Assembly passed reflected the Campaign's recommendations to increase transparency through the scrutiny of an independently funded IBO and incorporated some of the Campaign's recommendations for increased parental input, particularly in the requirement for advance public notice in the event of school closings and/or site relocations. Campaign members were already active around school closings, and some believed this issue was likely to be a volatile one in the future. The bill did not, however, reflect the most significant change that the Campaign's platform recommended, which was an alteration in the balance of power on the PEP by lessening the number of mayoral appointments, and setting term limits. Campaign members recognized that such a change was unlikely because the mayor had defined his authority over the PEP as the essence of mayoral control and employed his considerable resources to making sure there would be no change there. There had been more consensus about the rather important changes in the legislation relating to the transparency of administration's data and decision-making, though these changes were not often noted in the immediate aftermath of the bill's passing. Similarly, the need for greater parental input in education policy decision-making also had broad consensus and was an area where there were important changes to the legislation.

The Campaign embraced the need for greater parent participation in educational policy-making as its signature issue. Although initially the Campaign groups expressed dissatisfaction with the Assembly bill because it left the PEP undisturbed, its ultimate strategy was to turn its attention full force on the Senate to gain additional wins in the area of parent participation. The Campaign's efforts contributed to the ultimate success in securing an amendment to the bill which provided for an independent parent training center and student success centers. The parent training center has potential to build the capacity of NYC parents and students to participate meaningfully in school matters. Members of the Campaign are already working toward that end: for example, the NYIC and more than a dozen of its immigrant Education Taskforce members have launched the Campaign for Family Engagement which builds on the work begun as part of the parent center organizing during the mayoral control battle. In addition, changes in the law that received little attention in the short term—the stipulation that school closures be preceded by an impact statement, a public hearing, and public notice six months in advance—have exerted unexpected influence in the system. Already, through legislative changes the Campaign championed, the law has provided levers for public action and engagement with a potential long term impact of increased parent participation in decision-making. The legislation contains other provisions that reflect priorities of Campaign member groups with potential future benefits, such as a Citywide Council on English Language Learners to make recommendations to the PEP on issues related to ELL services. Both the parent training center and the legislation provisions increasing transparency and participation are evidence that the Campaign achieved important “wins” for participating groups' members.

The potential of such changes to be influential in the long term is still dependent, however, on the extent to which increased capacity for parent mobilization and education can be built and maintained. We have demonstrated that the Campaign's constituency-based work during the 2008-09 year, which focused on educating group members about school governance issues and state-level politics, already has shown promise in that regard. DEC support has been crucial to the process, creating the capacity for flexible and ad hoc coalition work, and providing funding for essential, if temporary, coalition infrastructure, such as staff and media relations. Such infrastructure enables constituency-based and interest groups to build civic capacity—through education about policy issues such as school governance—and to learn the lessons of working collaboratively to affect policy at multiple levels of government. The Campaign also showed that the type of funding DEC provided can ensure that grassroots coalitions are an ever growing circle, with groups that previously had little or no coalition experience gaining sophistication in coalition building and policy issues beyond their immediate interests.

There are several possible scenarios for the future. With four more years, the mayor and chancellor might have the chance to institutionalize a form of school governance in which parents have little input to policy formation and other decision-making—other than as consumers in a greatly expanded school marketplace. On the other hand, the legislation provides some new handles for parents so that they may continue to use to carve out a role in decision-making. If that happens, it is possible that, over time, the public may come to expect a greater measure of participation in school governance.

The mayor took over the schools at a time when the general climate was to reject past practice and it was easy for him to paint those who challenged mayoral control with the brush of a discredited governance arrangement. The next time the legislation is up for consideration in 2015, the city will be responding to a different history of school governance—the experience of twelve years of this highly centralized form of mayoral control, with, if early signs continue to develop, gradually increasing parent participation. The work of the Campaign, a result of the sustained investment of DEC in building the capacity of grassroots groups and their ability to work in coalition, helped to shift the terrain and set the stage for increasing public participation in education and perhaps on other citywide issues as well.

Lastly, it appears that a number of the Campaign groups emerged from the experience of the debate with increased commitment to support each other. Such collaboration, which has been encouraged by DEC in its grant making, is a good indicator that experiences of collaboration, compromise, and joint organizing that those groups gained in the Campaign are important to building civic capacity for school reform, which as pointed out earlier in this report, is critical to the sustainability of district reform efforts. The mayor and chancellor risk the sustainability of their reforms if they overlook organized and widely representative groups such as those that participated in the Campaign.<sup>65</sup> The mayor and chancellor have claimed to be the champions of the civil rights of New York City school children. As our analysis of the Campaign and member groups' fight to participate in education decision-making shows, the mayor and chancellor will have to be much more inclusive in policy formation to earn their right to make such a claim.

One of the authors of this report, Jeffrey Henig, in a forthcoming publication, discusses the changing national political environment in which the policy discussion about education is being

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<sup>65</sup> Gold, E., Henig, J. R., Orr, M., Silander, M., and Simon, E. (Forthcoming)

played out and the challenges this new environment presents for the kinds of groups that made up the Campaign. The changes include an expanding role for the federal and state government in local education, shifting demographics, and the declining power of locally elected school boards. These are accompanied by the expansion of school choice and other types of privatization in education. These conditions pose particular challenges to grassroots education organizers, Henig surmises, whose tactics often emerged “during a period when local school boards and superintendents called the shots and parents were organized naturally within spatially defined school attendance zones, . . . and [when] the demarcation between public and private sectors was much more sharply defined.”<sup>66</sup> The new politics for public engagement, he continues, “does not make these earlier strategies obsolete so much as it raises the premium on tactical flexibility and range of operating modes.”<sup>67</sup> Henig speculates that the new political environment does not entirely nullify the value of earlier strategies, which focus on nurturing relationships with local players, but creates the need for new tactics. Specifically, he surmises that groups will need to be able to operate effectively at different policy levels, and that to do this groups with different consistencies and skills will need to be flexible and able to join together in ad hoc coalitions to pursue shared policy interests, even while maintaining their individual agendas. In this new environment, access to and ability to interpret research and the law are crucial. In the change from education being “local” to this new state and federal stage, groups increasingly will need to work across government levels and in multi-issue coalitions that can ultimately affect general-purpose elections.

In fact, the DEC funding strategy is promoting the kind of organizational capacity and response that this new environment requires. It is likely that the Campaign and its battle over mayoral control will have left the member groups better prepared for the kinds of challenges that face those hoping to inject a stronger and broader community voice into debates about future educational priorities and policies. Differences in perspective and core interests remain, and in some cases are more clearly understood by the member groups than they were previously. Yet, it appears that the level of communication and trust among them increased and may be sustained. For the member groups that most often operate at the local grassroots level, the experience provided greater understanding about political strategy. For those that find themselves strategizing in the corridors of power, the passion of the grassroots undergirded their often pragmatic focus. The Campaign was able to build its power by balancing the principles that mobilize action with the practicalities that allow for a strategic focus on achieving gains within the realities of the political moment.

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<sup>66</sup> Henig, J. R. (Forthcoming) The Contemporary Context of Public Engagement: The New Political Grid. In *Public Engagement for Public Education*, (Eds. Marion Orr and John Rogers). Stanford University Press. p.77.

<sup>67</sup> Henig (forthcoming) p.77-8.

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