



**Bringing a Public Voice to the
School Governance Debate:**

**The Campaign for Better Schools and
Mayoral Control in New York City**

NOVEMBER 2010



Research for *Action*

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, non-profit organization engaged in policy and evaluation research on urban education. Founded in 1992, RFA seeks to improve the education opportunities and outcomes of urban youth by strengthening public schools and enriching the civic and community dialogue about public education. For more information about RFA please go to our website, www.researchforaction.org.

About this report

Research for Action, with Professor Jeffrey Henig, explores the contribution that the Donors' Education Collaborative (DEC) makes to the building of effective coalitions in New York City through an intensive examination of the collaborative work of the Campaign for Better Schools. DEC's funding supports efforts that combine constituency building, advocacy, and research to affect policy and improve education. The Campaign is a diverse coalition working to broaden and deepen the debate about mayoral control of New York City schools, by incorporating the perspectives of low-income, immigrant and minority parent, and community perspectives in that debate.

About the authors

Eva Gold, Ph.D.

Eva Gold is a founder of Research for Action, where she is a Senior Research Fellow. She has nearly 20 years of experience studying a wide range of educational reform efforts in Philadelphia and other large urban school districts. She has served as primary investigator for numerous studies examining the dynamics of parent, community, school relations, with a special interest in the role of community and youth organizing in school reform. Her other research interests include civic capacity for school reform, the role of the private sector in urban education, high school restructuring, and the literacy practices of urban youth. She has co-authored reports, journal articles and book chapters on all these topics. She is a Lecturer in the Mid-Career Program at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, where she leads an inquiry seminar on problems in data analysis and reporting.

Jeffrey R. Heing, Ph.D.

Jeffrey R. Henig is a professor of political science and education at Teachers College and a professor of political science at Columbia University. He is the author or coauthor of nine books, including *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics and the Challenge of Urban Education* (Princeton, 1999) and

Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools (Kansas, 2001), both of which were named--in 1999 and 2001, respectively--the best book written on urban politics by the Urban Politics Section of the American Political Science Association. *Spin Cycle: How Research Gets Used in Policy Debates. The Case of Charter Schools* (Russell Sage, 2008) won the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Outstanding Book Award, 2010.

Elaine Simon, Ph.D.

Elaine Simon has an M.S. in Education and a Ph.D. in Anthropology. She is the Co-Director of the Urban Studies Program and Adjunct Associate Professor of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches courses in urban studies, ethnographic research methods, and urban education. She is a Senior Research Consultant with Research for Action. Her interests are in equity in urban education reform and the intersection of schools and community. Among the projects she has worked on at RFA are studies of curriculum and school governance reform, community organizing and civic engagement in public education, and the role of intermediary organizations in school improvement. She has contributed to published reports, articles, and books on such topics as well as on qualitative research methods, civic engagement, and community organizing for public education reform.

Megan Silander

Megan Silander is a Ph.D. candidate in education policy at Teachers College-Columbia University. Her experience centers on education policy and research; she has conducted research for a number of education and program evaluation studies, served as a member of a school design team supporting the start-up of a charter school in New York City and as a deputy and policy analyst for a member of the Los Angeles Board of Education. Her research interests include school accountability and governance, use of data to inform instruction and the connection between research and policy. Her dissertation research examines the school closure and reconstitution process in New York City. Megan currently works as a research assistant at the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. She holds a B.A. in Linguistics from Pomona College and a M.Ed. in International Education Policy from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Shani Adia Evans

Shani Adia Evans, M.S.Ed is a joint Ph.D. student in Sociology and Education, Culture and Society at the University of Pennsylvania. She is interested in the relationship between schools and social stratification. Most of her research has focused on urban high schools and school choice policy. She is an active member of her West Philadelphia community and a contributor to the Philadelphia Public School Notebook, an independent education newspaper. Prior to beginning doctoral studies, she was a Senior Research Assistant at RFA. Prior to joining RFA, she worked in a variety of educational settings and served as a Peace Corps volunteer.

Deborah Good

Deborah Good, M.S.W., is a Senior Research Assistant at RFA, where current projects include an evaluation of a high school dropout prevention program, an action research project with youth, and a case study of youth organizing campaigns in Philadelphia. Her interests lie in community-based and participatory action research, as well as the study of civic engagement and community organizing. She has experience in qualitative and quantitative program evaluation. She is a writer and editor, and has worked in Philadelphia public middle schools as a teacher's assistant and social service coordinator.

Jesse Gottschalk

Jesse Gottschalk came to Research for Action through the Philly Fellows program for 2009-2010, and served as a research assistant and communications coordinator. Jesse is a graduate of Swarthmore College's Honors Program, with a concentration in Educational Policy. His interests lie in issues of civic engagement and education, the role of collaboration in producing successful educational transformations, and equity of access to high quality education. Prior to his work at RFA, Jesse worked in both political advocacy and journalism. He currently works as an education organizer and an afterschool teacher in Philadelphia.

Joseph Kay

Joseph Kay worked at RFA as a Philly Fellow in 2008-09, where he served as a research assistant and communications coordinator. In addition to DEC, Joseph contributed to *Effective Organizational Practices for Middle and High School Grades: A Qualitative Study of What's Helping Philadelphia Students Succeed in Grades 6-12* as well as an outcome evaluation of the Need in Deed service-learning program. Joseph has a B.A. in psychology and philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania and an interest in child and adolescent development and education. He is currently working at The Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CIRP) at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. At CIRP he is conducting research on safe teen driving and helping develop evidence-based interventions to improve teen driver safety.

Acknowledgements

We wish to extend our thanks to the Coordinating and Steering Committees of the Campaign for Better Schools as well as the Campaign staff and organizers, all of whom welcomed us into their work and took time to speak with us extensively about their efforts. We also wish to express appreciation to the many education stakeholders in New York City and Albany that spoke with us about the environment in which the debate about mayoral control of the schools was happening. This report was greatly aided by a number of interns and graduate assistants including Matthew Tossman, an Ed.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania; Alyshia Brooks Bowden, Ph.D. candidate at Teachers College; Katherine Saviskas from Temple University; and Maggie Larson from Bryn Mawr College. Susan Cahn and Norma Rollins, consultants to DEC, were invaluable liaisons between the research team and DEC, and they and several other DEC funders and Campaign members provided important feedback to early drafts of the reports. Laura Mandeles, from WolfBrown, provided invaluable editing support. The authors, of course, alone, bear responsibility for any shortcomings of the study.

Preface

The Donors' Education Collaborative (DEC) is a partnership of 13 New York City funders that “support policy reforms aimed at making the New York City public school system more equitable and responsive to the needs of all children.” During 2008-09, DEC funded the building of a coalition of New York City groups active in education reform with two related goals in mind: (1) bring parent and community voices into the debate on the future of mayoral control of NYC schools, which was to sunset on June 30, 2009; and (2) facilitate a broader and more vigorous public discussion than had occurred when the mayoral control legislation was first passed in 2002.

This volume describes and analyzes the formation of the coalition, called the Campaign for Better Schools, its activities, and its successes and challenges. The volume contains two reports. The first examines the initial development of the Campaign and the formation of its platform, describes its status and progress at the end of one year, and draws some preliminary conclusions about the coalition's evolving role in the mayoral control debate. The second report, written nearly one year after the August 2009 passage of the mayoral control legislation, provides an overview of the two years, including a look at Campaign goals and strategies; the impact the Campaign had on the debate; as well as both the immediate policy outcomes and longer-term effects on the NYC educational reform environment. The report also assesses the role of DEC funding in the conduct and effectiveness of the Campaign.

In addition to the two reports, this volume contains an Executive Summary which combines the findings from the Year One and Two reports; and a set of appendices that are relevant to both reports. Of special interest is our media addendum. Conducting a media scan over the two-year study period and analyzing media coverage of the mayoral debate were important tools for assessing the success of the Campaign in gaining visibility for its platform advocating changes to mayoral control. The addendum presents media scan methodology, data, and findings.

Although this report was written primarily to assist the DEC funders assess the impact of their grant making, we anticipate that the groups that participated in the Campaign will also find it useful, both as a recorded history of their work and experiences, and an analysis of strategies and impact. We also hope that these groups, and others engaged in the difficult work of building coalitions to further educational equity and democratic participation, will find useful lessons for future work.

Table of Contents – Full Volume

Executive Summary

Origins of the Study	i
A Strong Beginning: Diversity, Collaboration, and Strategic Compromise	ii
Campaign Execution: A Changing and Challenging Environment.....	iv
Competing Voices.....	iv
The Paradigm of Public Engagement.....	iv
Policy Context.....	iv
Political Uncertainty.....	iv
Legislative Outcomes	v
The Long Term Effects of the Campaign’s Efforts and the Mayoral Control Debate.....	viii
A Changing Political Environment.....	viii
Challenges to the Mayor’s Claims and Authority.....	viii
Outcry about School Closures.....	viii
Reframing the Question.....	viii
Broadened and More Diverse Networks.....	ix
Deeper Policy and Legislative Expertise.....	ix
In Conclusion: The Impact of DEC Funding.....	ix

Year One Report

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Promise of the Campaign and the Challenges it Faces.....	4
The Promise.....	4
DEC’s Funding Strategy	4
Past Funding.....	5
Role of Current Funding.....	7
The Challenges	8
Holding Supporters While Winning Allies: A Balancing Act.....	9
Adding to the Challenge I: An Unusually Powerful Opponent.....	10
Adding to the Challenge II: Competing Claimants to the Role of Parent and Community Representatives.....	10
Adding to the Challenge III: Fighting in Two Venues.....	11
Chapter 3: The Context – Unforeseeable Events	13
Fiscal Crisis	13
Term Limits	13
Shifting Ground in Albany	14

The Obama Election	15
Chapter 4: The Development of the Campaign for Better Schools.....	16
The Planning Phase	16
Laying the Ground for the Campaign.....	16
Launching the Campaign.....	17
Platform Development	18
The Campaign’s Structure and Decision-making Process	19
Timing and the Two-Step Strategy.....	20
Evolution of the Platform	20
Checks and Balances	21
Transparency	22
Public Participation.....	22
Strategies for Building Constituency and Gaining Visibility.....	24
Grassroots Strategy.....	24
Strategy to Educate Elected Officials	27
Media and Messaging Strategy	27
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	29
Year One References.....	32

Year Two Report

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Study Framework, Research Questions and Methodology.....	2
Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis.....	3
DEC’s Contribution - Taking a Long-Term View.....	4
Overview of Year Two Report.....	5
Chapter 2: The Story of the Campaign and the Hurdles It Faced.....	6
Year One of the Campaign: A Review of Its Accomplishments.....	7
A Solid Foundation	8
Strong Infrastructure	8
A Strategic Approach	8
Visibility and Legitimacy	9
Constituency Building	9
Year Two of the Campaign: Accomplishments in the Face of Challenge	12
Competing Claims about Who Represents Parents.....	13
The District Context: The DoE and Its Paradigm of Parent Engagement.....	17
The Need to Adapt to Changing and Complex National and State Political Environments	18
Tensions within the Campaign	20
Chapter 3: The Legislative Outcomes.....	23
The Landscape: What were the issues?.....	24

The Landscape: Who would be the important players?	26
The Outcome: What was in the legislation?.....	27
The Process: How did the legislation come to be?	29
The Campaign: Wins and Wild Cards.....	33
Wins: Transparency	34
Wild Card: Public Participation	34
Chapter 4: The Long Term Effects of the Campaign’s Efforts and the Mayoral Control Debate	37
Building on the Mayoral Control Battle: A Changing Political Environment	38
Building on the Mayoral Control Battle: Challenges to the Mayor’s Claims and Authority ...	39
Contesting Student Performance Gains	40
Dissent on the PEP	41
Outcry about School Closures	41
Reframing the Mayoral Control Question	42
Building on the Mayoral Control Debate: Increasing Civic Capacity for School Reform	43
Looking Toward the Future	46
Chapter 5: Conclusion – The Impact of DEC Funding	48
Year Two References	52

Media Report

Media Addendum	1
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	1
Media scans.....	1
Media coding	3
Evolving Attention to Mayoral Control – General Factors	3
Major Voices in the Mayoral Control Debate	5
Campaign for Better Schools	5
Parent Commission on School Governance.....	7
Learn NY	8
Other Actors in the Mayoral Control Debate	9
Opinion Articles about Mayoral Control	10
Concepts Relating to Mayoral Control	11
Concepts Pushed by the Campaign for Better Schools	12
Concepts pushed by Mayoral Control Proponents.....	14
Aftermath.....	16
Conclusions.....	16
Detailed Breakdown of Media Scans	17

Appendices

Appendix A: Fieldwork and Data Analyzed	A1
Appendix B: Campaign Initiating Groups.....	A5
Appendix C: Campaign for Better Schools Steering Committee.....	A6
Appendix D: Final Campaign Platform.....	A8