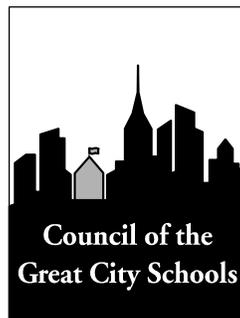


Analysis of Mayor Adrian Fenty's Plan for the District of Columbia Public Schools



**By the
Council of the Great City Schools**

February 2007

Analysis of the Mayor's Plan for the D.C. Schools

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The Council of the Great City Schools summarizes Mayor Fenty's proposed legislation to take over the District of Columbia Public Schools, compares it to actions taken or proposed by the school board, and analyzes the potential of the mayor's plan to fix underlying school system problems identified by the Council in two recent reports.

Summary of Findings

- ★ The fundamental problems of low student achievement and dysfunctional finance and operating systems that were identified by the Council of the Great City Schools in two previous analyses of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) are not cured or solved in the mayor's current proposal to restructure the school system.
- ★ Mayor Fenty acknowledged in testimony before the D.C. Council that his proposed legislation does not address the basic reasons for the school district's low and stagnant student achievement or fix weak instructional practices in the schools.
- ★ The mayor's proposed legislation alters governance arrangements and the organizational structure of the school system but does not appreciably reduce multiple layers of bureaucracy overseeing the school system. To the contrary, the proposed bill may make it harder to coordinate across agencies. The complicated new structure, in fact, could require the mayor and/or deputy mayor to have to personally reconcile operational disputes that should be settled at a lower level of authority. Finally, the plan could lead to yet more turnover in school system leadership.
- ★ The mayor's plan does not streamline the budget process to any measurable degree, reduce layers of budget approval or interference, or make it easier to align instructional goals with financial resources. In fact, the proposal may cost the city considerable amounts of money just to move the organizational boxes.
- ★ The mayor's plan creates a separate school facilities authority to handle building renovation and repair, but the plan lacks a critical mechanism by which infrastructure decisions are coordinated with the schools or discussed with the public.
- ★ Similarly, the mayor's bill is not likely to streamline or accelerate operations. Indeed, it appears that some operations may actually slow down under the proposed new structure. And the bill is silent on payroll, procurement, and human resources.
- ★ Finally, the mayor's bill places more accountability in the hands of the mayor, but the bill is unclear about how the mayor actually is to be held more accountable to the public than the school board has been.

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Introduction

The Council of the Great City Schools prepared two critical reports on the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) over the last three years: “Restoring Excellence in the District of Columbia Public Schools” and “Financing Excellence in the District of Columbia Public Schools.”¹ The first report examined the school district’s instructional programs. The second reviewed the school system’s financial and other operations. These reports contained an extensive array of findings and recommendations for improving academic achievement and financial operations. In addition, the Council prepared a detailed report on the school system for the Control Board in 1999 after examining the school system’s personnel, facilities, finance and budget, procurement, special education, legal, transportation, technology, and other operations.

The Council has produced this current document to assist the school board, the mayor, the city council, the public, and others concerned with the educational achievement of the city’s children. Our analysis draws on the reports that the Council conducted over the last three years and on the organization’s expertise in big city school districts, and seeks to inform the public and policymakers on whether and how the legislation proposed by Mayor Fenty addresses the issues raised in those reports.

A. Student Achievement

The initial report published by the Council of the Great City Schools in 2004 examined the school district’s instructional program and investigated reasons that student achievement was low and stagnant. The analysis was based on groundbreaking research by MDRC and the Council on the reforms that were found to be common among major urban school systems across the country that were making substantial academic gains.² The initial report found that the D.C. school system was marked by a depressing litany of instructional deficiencies and predictably dismal academic outcomes. In the past two years, however, the school district has moved on many of the Council’s recommendations.

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Council for the Great City Schools 2004 Findings	DCPS and School Board Actions	Mayor’s Plan
Low and stagnant student achievement.	Set rigorous new academic standards.	Does not address this issue.
No strategic plan for better achievement.	Developed a Master Education Plan.	Relies on school district’s Master Education Plan.
No measurable goals for academic gains.	Set concrete goals for gains and school board bill names ambitious benchmarks.	Does not address this issue.

¹ Both reports are available at the Council’s Web site, www.cgcs.org, and provide additional background on the issues now before policymakers in Washington D.C.

² *Foundations of Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools. The report won first place in Institutional Research from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 2003.

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No internal accountability system.	Put superintendent on a performance contract, and strengthened assessments of principals and teachers.	Does not set accountability measures for city leaders.
No coherent curriculum, poor alignment, low expectations, and no rigor.	Adapted stiff new standards and trained staff on content and use. More work to do.	Does not address this issue.
Fractured and misaligned professional development.	Has begun to strengthen professional development.	Does not address this issue.
No mechanism to get reforms into classrooms.	Increased percent of certified teachers. More work to do.	Does not address this issue.
Weak use of data to inform instruction and training.	Developed the DC-CAS assessment system.	Requires SEO to develop tests and collect data – a new responsibility for it.
Weak strategy for lowest-performing schools and students	Clarified a strategy for lowest-performing schools and students.	Does not address this issue.
Dysfunctional and costly special education system.	Board bill proposes to build in-house special education capacity.	Proposes to overhaul special education system, consistent with school district plan.

- ✚ The Council’s 2004 analysis found that academic performance in D.C. public schools was low and stagnant, in part, because the school system “had abdicated its leadership responsibility for student achievement.” In response, the school district began addressing some of these core problems by setting new standards that are among the most rigorous in the country and by adapting a very stringent student assessment system to measure progress. The mayor’s proposed bill does not address student achievement.
- ✚ The Council’s 2004 report faulted the school district for its lack of a strategic plan or vision for raising academic achievement, something that faster improving districts have. The school system responded by developing a Master Education Plan on which the mayor’s bill appears to rely, an unacknowledged compliment to the work of the Board of Education and current Superintendent of Schools. The school board has responded to the Council report by participating in a number of professional development opportunities to strengthen its sense of direction.
- ✚ The Council of the Great City Schools also found that the school system did not have measurable goals for academic improvement by which it could gauge its progress or hold itself accountable, another element common in urban districts seeing academic gains. In response, the school district’s Master Education Plan incorporated concrete goals for improvement. In addition, the school board pledged itself in its “Emergency Student Achievement Act of 2007” to meeting two broad and ambitious benchmarks: raising the number of students at or above proficiency in reading and math by 10 percent in every grade, and outpacing average urban school gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The mayor’s proposed plan has no benchmarks by which academic progress could be measured.

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- ✦ The Council's report faulted the D.C. schools for not having an internal accountability system by which staff members are held responsible for and evaluated on meeting systemwide instructional goals, something that the nation's faster-improving urban school systems typically have. In response, the school board placed its new superintendent on a performance contract, and has strengthened the personnel-evaluation system for principals, assistant principals, and teachers. The mayor's plan highlights accountability, but it does not indicate how progress will be defined under the proposed governance structure. The mayor's plan also does not articulate what happens in terms of governance if student achievement does not improve under city hall's watch.
- ✦ The Council, moreover, found that achievement was low because of low expectations for student performance, haphazard and incoherent instructional programming, poor alignment of programs with goals, and a lack of instructional rigor in too many classrooms. In response, the DCPS adapted the Massachusetts state standards and provided training to staff on their content and use. Again, the mayor's bill is silent on academic standards, except to put them under the new state board and to indicate that reforms would be modeled on those in New York City. The plan does not indicate whether the mayor would also follow the lead of the New York schools and outsource the city's schools to private companies to improve student achievement.
- ✦ The Council's 2004 report also found that the school district's professional development and teacher-training programs were disjointed, and misaligned with any broader academic goals. In response, the school district has begun to strengthen and define its professional development system although it still has a long way to go. The mayor's plan is silent on this critical mechanism for raising student achievement.
- ✦ The Council's report also faulted the school system for not having any credible mechanism to ensure that policies articulated at the top of the system were reflected inside the classrooms. The DCPS has made some headway by increasing the percent of certified teachers, but the mayor's plan is again silent in this critical area.
- ✦ In addition, the Council's report noted that the school district's instructional data systems and its use of data were lame, ineffective, and incapable of informing and guiding pedagogical and professional development decisions as is done in urban school districts making faster gains. In response, the school district developed the D.C.—Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS), modeled after the Massachusetts state test, and implemented it for the first time in the spring of 2006. The mayor's plan would transfer test development to the State Education Office (SEO), although the plan is silent on who administers the tests. It will take time, however, for the SEO to acquire the expertise needed to develop its new assessment functions. The mayor's plan, moreover, would transfer other data collection activities to the SEO but is silent on the additional costs necessary to develop expertise in the SEO to handle them.
- ✦ Finally, the Council's 2004 report faulted DCPS for not having a clear strategy for raising the achievement of its lowest-performing schools and students, especially its

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students with disabilities, and for not establishing a clear sequence or rationale to its reforms—a critical element in whether an urban school system improves student achievement. The district has begun to build an instructional strategy for its lowest-performing schools and has proposed a series of actions to bring special education programming in-house. The mayor’s plan generally mirrors the school district’s white paper on special education.

- ✚ In summary, the mayor’s plan is almost completely silent on the instructional reforms that the best research indicates urban school systems need to raise academic performance, including a clear vision, measurable goals, strong internal accountability, coherent and rigorous curriculum, effective professional development, good data systems and data-driven decision-making, an extra focus on the lowest-performing schools and students, and a clear sequence of action.

The research also indicates that mayoral control of big city school districts has no discernable or consistent impact on student achievement. In fact, test data would indicate that systems under mayoral control saw faster improvements between 2003 and 2005 in fourth-grade NAEP math scores—whereas fourth-grade reading scores and eighth-grade reading and math scores improved more in systems controlled by traditional boards of education.³ (Appendix A.) The bottom line is this: mayoral control in and of itself does not lead to better student performance. And the mayor’s proposed plan is silent on how city hall would make it so in the District of Columbia.

B. Governance and Organizational Structure

The Council’s 2004 report also showed that DCPS had multiple and intrusive governance layers and a poorly articulated internal organizational structure. In most urban school systems, the *internal* structure and alignment of staff and functions are usually more important to efficiency and effectiveness than is the *external* governance and organizational structure.

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Council for the Great City Schools 2004 & 2005 Findings	DCPS and School Board Actions	Mayor’s Plan
Overlapping governance structure and decision-making.	Board bill proposes cleaner and simpler organizational structure.	Does not reduce decision-making layers.
Complicated and redundant decision-making.	Board bill proposes cleaner and simpler organizational structure.	Would make decisions harder to coordinate.
Top-heavy and inefficient instructional leadership.	Moving more decisions into schools.	Makes decisions more top-heavy.
No clear vision about direction of district.	Developed a Master Education Plan.	Does not address this issue.
Poor board cohesion and	Participated in several board	Turns school board into a

³ 2003 and 2005 are the only years in which all 10 participating cities took reading and math NAEP tests in both fourth and eighth grades.

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leadership.	and leadership retreats.	largely advisory body.
Frequent turnover of leadership.	Has retained leadership for two consecutive years so far.	May turn over leadership again.
Overlapping local and state functions.	Board bill separates local and state functions, and place SEO in Department of Education.	Would have both report to deputy mayor with same conflicts as present.
Little accountability for results.	Board bill invites new accountability for higher student results.	Places accountability with mayor and reorganizes boxes.

✚ The Council’s 2004 and 2005 reports found redundant and overlapping governance and decision-making that undermined any sense of ownership for problem-solving in the D.C. schools. New school board leadership has proposed to begin solving this problem by streamlining reporting lines. The mayor’s bill, however, does not reduce the number of bureaucratic layers. Instead, the bill eliminates the school board as a local entity; puts its decision-making authority largely in the hands of the SEO and the deputy mayor; and establishes the school system as an agency under the mayor. It would have the superintendent appointed by and reporting to the mayor. And it would create a deputy mayor for education, who would head a new Department of Education, which would oversee the SEO, an Office of the Ombudsman, and a Public School Facilities Management and Construction Authority (facilities authority). A state board of education (the former school board) would advise the SEO, as would a consolidated Public Charter School Board. No layers are actually eliminated or streamlined—just rearranged. The mayor’s proposal, moreover, is not clear on how disputes between the school district, the SEO, the state board, the deputy mayor, the mayor, and city council are to be resolved. The result may be even more cumbersome decision-making because it puts the mayor and/or the deputy mayor in the position of having to reconcile operating disputes among the units when the units cannot do so on their own. (Appendix B.)

Example: The mayor’s bill presents a number of potential organizational conflicts if a school is identified for corrective action under the federal *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) law, based on rules suggested by the advisory state board of education. Suppose the superintendent recommends extending the school day and putting a new curriculum into place, options that are available under NCLB. But suppose the city council will not approve the necessary budget-reprogramming request to implement the corrective action because the deputy mayor wants to turn the school over to a private management firm or use some other strategy. Who resolves such a dispute and how is it done under the mayor’s bill? The proposed legislation does not say.

✚ The school system currently is organized in a vertical and multilayered manner, as the Council of the Great City Schools noted in its two reports. The school system responded in part to this concern by recruiting new talent to lead school district functions that were badly in need of new blood, but did not reorganize to any significant degree. The mayor’s plan attempts to flatten the organizational structure of the schools by separating the school system, budget, facilities, charters, and other activities and having them report independently to the deputy mayor or the SEO—but

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does not reduce decision-making layers as such. Instead, it raises concerns about how the units will coordinate with each other.

- ✚ The Council's report also faulted the DCPS and the city for the school system's repeated turnover in leadership. This continuous churning has made it virtually impossible for the district to create and maintain any momentum behind its reforms. The school district has responded by attempting to keep its superintendent. If enacted, the mayor's proposal may—once again—contribute to the turnover of school district leadership and may make it harder to recruit a new superintendent if he or she does not have stronger control over critical functions such as budget, cost accounting, and facilities. Since 1996, when Franklin Smith left the superintendency, no person has held the top school post for longer than two years. In those 11 years, the DCPS has had six superintendents or acting superintendents (and ten superintendents in the last twenty-six years), experienced numerous changes on the school board, and gone through several structural changes. In contrast, the Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools has had only four superintendents in the last 24 years; and the Fairfax County (VA) Public Schools, another widely touted school system, has had only three superintendents in the last 22 years. All of this leadership change in D.C. has made it impossible for the school district to create any momentum or consistency behind its reforms over that period. The MDRC/Council research and studies by others have found that stability in leadership was a key ingredient in urban school systems with improved achievement.
- ✚ The Council's report notes problems with having the state education agency and the local education agency under the DCPS, an unnecessary redundancy that creates conflicts of interest and weakens accountability. The school board's bill proposes to separate these functions by moving most state agency functions to an independent SEO. The mayor's proposed bill, however, would maintain the current problem by having both entities under a single authority, this time the deputy mayor. It is not clear how conflict of interest problems are solved this way. In addition, the new organizational structure called for in the mayor's proposal would take effect on October 1, 2007, too soon to have moved complex state functions into place.
- ✚ The Council did not have a specific finding in its reports on community participation, except to note that it was weak. The mayor's bill proposes establishing an ombudsman to receive and handle community complaints, a good idea that the school board also included in its bill. The mayor's bill, however, would eliminate the school board as a local education agency and potentially undermine and weaken the rights of citizens to participate in decisions about their public schools. Neither the mayor nor the school district has a clear strategy for boosting parental involvement.
- ✚ In summary, the mayor's new proposal does not strengthen accountability so much as it rearranges organizational boxes and consolidates authority. In some respects, the public may find that it has a more difficult time holding its elected officials accountable because all information about their performance would come through them. In addition, a measure of accountability for education is bound to be lost under

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the proposed changes because city hall would be in charge of both operations and oversight at the same time.

C. Finance and Budget

The second Council report, published in 2005, covered the school district’s budget and financial operations. It painted a picture of a school system that faced daunting operational and budget challenges. The criticism of the district’s finances is ironic, however, in that the school district is not actually in full control of them.

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Council for the Great City Schools 2004 Findings	DCPS and School Board Action	Mayor’s Plan
Weak internal controls, redundant processes, not in charge of resources.	Attempting to build capacity and board bill proposes new benchmarks to regain control.	Would take away control of budget and make it harder to build system capacity.
Had cumbersome budget decision-making processes.	Board bill proposes own CFO once/if benchmarks are met.	Would give line-item authority to city council.
Has poorly aligned budget operations.	Board bill streamlines budget process and aligns school year and fiscal year.	Would make school district budgeting harder to align with school year.
Has awkward and slow budget modification process.	Does not address this issue.	Would give budget modification process to city council; may slow process.
Local school district has to subsidize state agency functions.	Board bill separates local and state functions.	Would have to increase funds to cover costs or take from foundation aid.
Poor alignment of budget with instructional goals	Moving towards a priorities-based budget.	Does not address this issue.

✚ The Council’s 2005 report concluded that the school system was not yet ready to assume full responsibility for its budget and that it was plagued by weak internal controls, poor staff training, weak financial procedures, redundant processes, poor position control, and out-of-date technology. The Control Board attempted to fix these and other problems by having the school district’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO) report directly to the city CFO. The school system has made some progress in fixing its financial operations, but does not have full control over its budgeting, as do other major city school systems— including those under mayoral control. This lack of control has made it harder than it is in other cities to align financial resources with instructional priorities, develop and maintain effective business systems across the organization, strengthen capacity to handle its own affairs, and build stronger accountability within the school district. The mayor’s bill would place school district budget authority in the hands of the mayor, retain a bifurcated CFO arrangement, and propose line-item veto authority for the city council over the school district’s spending.

The mayor has indicated that the intent of his proposal is to streamline the budget process and eliminate layers of approval. It is not clear that this intent is met in the

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proposal itself. The only layer of budget development or approval eliminated in the proposed bill is that involving the school board. But once this bureaucratic level is replaced with a beefed-up city council oversight and approval role, the public may find that the city council role may end up being every bit as intrusive as what it is replacing. All other budget check-offs remain in place under the mayor's proposal.

- ✦ The Council's 2005 report also noted the unorthodox nature of having the school district's CFO report to the city CFO. This arrangement has helped the city maintain strong financial standing before Congress and in the bond markets, but it has made it harder for the school system to develop any independent capacity to manage its own books. The Council proposed having the city and the school system jointly develop a set of operational and financial benchmarks, consistent with best practices and defined by Government Finance Officers Association standards, and move CFO responsibilities back to the school district if and when those standards were met and certified. The school board incorporated this recommendation into its Emergency Student Achievement Act. The mayor's bill, however, would strip the school system of its budgetary responsibilities and make it impossible for the school system to develop any independent capacity over the long term. In some ways, the mayor's proposal may actually perpetuate current problems rather than solve them.
- ✦ The Council also noted that the city council is precluded today from micromanaging the school system's budget by provisions of the Home Rule Charter. These provisions would be repealed by the mayor's proposal, however. While the D.C. Council currently can specify how funds will be spent in the police or public works departments, the council's role with regard to DCPS is limited to approving total funding. Giving the city council the same kind of authority over the school system's budget as it has today over recreation and other agencies is an invitation to mischief, as several council members themselves have suggested. Individual members of the city council would be able to specify certain funding for schools in their wards, for example, as they have done in the past with regard to other agencies. The city council had this line-item authority during the control board period in the 1990s and used it sparingly, but did use it—including restricting standardized testing to once rather than twice a year, and specifying total funds to be allocated to local schools as distinct from the central administration. The mayor's proposal does not provide specific criteria for when the council can add or subtract items from the school system budget. Moreover, the U.S. Congress would continue to have the authority—untouched by the mayor's proposal—to make line-item changes to DCPS expenditures.
- ✦ The Council's 2005 report also faulted the city and its school system for the cumbersome and time-consuming way it made budget modifications. The mayor's proposal appears to give full approval authority to the city council, however, for school district budget reprogramming requests of any size. This provision is likely to further slow the ability of the school system to make modifications to its budget in order to address immediate needs, tailor spending on particular instructional programs or priorities, or align instructional goals and resources. The amount of time required to sign off on these budget modifications today contributes to the school district's inability to spend federal funds on a timely basis and adds to its carryover amounts.

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- ✦ The mayor's proposal on budget and procurement is also inconsistent with the finances of any other major city school system in the country—including those in New York City, Boston, and Cleveland. These and other city school systems, even those under the control of city hall, have their own CFOs and procurement operations to handle the unique budget and purchasing needs of a school system. The mayor's proposal would continue the current redundancy and confusion on fiscal issues.
- ✦ The Council's 2005 report also found that the school system devoted a large amount of its resources to its state agency responsibilities. The mayor's proposal to move DCPS authority for state education-agency activities to the revamped State Education Office (SEO) would cost the city council more money than has been acknowledged because the school district underwrites about \$20 million of those expenditures each year. The city council would have to increase its appropriation to the SEO by at least this amount just to transfer the functions, or it would have to take the resources away from the DCPS. If funds are taken from the DCPS, adjustments would have to be made in the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) to lower the foundation aid that the DCPS and all charters receive.
- ✦ The school district's Weighted Student Formula (WSF), which allocates UPSFF funds directly to the schools, was designed, in part, to prevent the politicizing of school allocations, which was common before the WSF was instituted. The school board has studiously avoided tinkering with the formula—which was developed by a committee of principals, Local School Restructuring Team (LSRT) members, advocates, internal staff, and unions. But the city council may not be as restrained. As enrollments decline, schools that are scheduled to lose money under the formula already put pressure on council members for extra funds over and above what the WSF provides. Ensuring equity and transparency in the distribution of funds to schools may be harder under the mayor's plan.
- ✦ The Council's 2005 report also found that the school district spent a larger share of its resources on special education, transportation, and operations than did school systems in other cities. The district also spent a smaller share on direct classroom instruction. Further, the report showed that despite a high per-pupil spending rate, the DCPS had little budgetary room in which to upgrade its antiquated operating systems or to build internal management or instructional capacity. Most importantly, the report found that the school district did not deploy its resources in a way that supported the goal of raising student achievement. This important set of related problems would actually be more difficult to solve under the mayor's proposal because instructional decision-making and budgeting would be housed in two separate entities. The mayor, deputy mayor, and chancellor (the proposed new title for the school superintendent) would set educational policy while the city council could use its line-item authority to countermand or circumvent that educational policy. In a circumstance like this, it would be almost impossible for the school district to better align its resources with its instructional priorities and goals.
- ✦ Finally, the Council's report recommended that the district establish an external financial advisory committee, improve accounts-payable operations, upgrade

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technology systems, make greater use of cross-functional staff teams, augment internal auditing, and improve budget formatting. The mayor’s plan is silent on these issues.

D. Facilities

The Council’s 2005 report also considered facilities. It found that the number of buildings under DCPS management was a drag on the school system’s budget and workforce, and that having to maintain so many buildings inflated operating costs, robbed funds from the classroom, and made it harder to keep facilities in good repair.

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Council for the Great City Schools 2005 Findings	DCPS and School Board Actions	Mayor’s Plan
Lack of strategic plan to handle building renovation.	Developed Master Facilities Plan.	Would take control of Master Facilities Plan.
Fractured planning for repairs and renovation.	Worked with City Council on modernization oversight; board bill would create a facilities commission under the board.	Would create a facilities authority under the mayor.
Has too many schools to maintain properly.	Voted to close and consolidate schools; developed a Master Facilities Plan (MFP).	Would implement MFP or develop own strategy.
Poor coordination of facilities work.	Board bill would create a facilities commission under the board.	Would require “consultation” with school board but not coordination.

✚ The Council’s 2005 report recommended a school-facilities authority to oversee new funding provided to fix the school district’s buildings. Both the mayor’s bill and the school board’s bill, in fact, would create facilities authorities. The school board would create a Facilities Oversight Board under the aegis of the school system, a practice consistent with similar groups in some other cities. The mayor’s bill would create a wholly separate facilities authority that would manage the building modernization program; take control of the Master Facilities Plan (developed by the school system); design buildings; handle construction, renovation, maintenance, and repair; hire personnel; and procure goods, enter lease agreements, and furnish buildings. A Modernization Commission would advise the authority, which would be a brand new bureaucracy under the mayor’s bill that would detach building maintenance, repair, renovation, modernization, and construction from the educational process. The result could easily be better buildings, but not necessarily better schools.

✚ The mayor’s plan would require the head of the facilities authority to “consult” with the chancellor (or superintendent) on facilities and repair decisions. No collaboration or coordination would be required. No major city school system in the country has a facilities authority with this level of independence. For example, the facilities authorities in New York and Los Angeles—the sites of the largest educational public works initiative in the country—all have explicit coordination and sign-off

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requirements with the school system. The separation of infrastructure and instructional functions into two separate entities under the mayor’s plan would make coordination between instruction and renovation harder, even if it were mandated. Under the mayor’s plan, there does not appear to be a ready way for the school district to exert its wishes on the location, size, nature, or order of renovations or repairs.

Example 1: The facilities authority decides to replace windows and window frames in selected schools and sends repair crews to those schools, but the crews discover that repairs have been scheduled on days when students are scheduled to take their quarterly assessments. How are such situations avoided if the facilities unit and the instructional unit do not have to coordinate with each other?

Example 2: The school board wants to establish a series of career-oriented academies in its high schools, but the facilities authority does not want to build or renovate the labs or shops necessary to support the programs. Who resolves this problem and how?

Example 3. The school authority wants to build regional special education facilities but discovers that the move would substantially increase transportation costs—above their current high levels. Who pays the additional costs—the school district, the court, or the city council?

- ✚ The mayor’s plan also includes no clear mechanism for the facilities unit to coordinate its work with special education and transportation. The transportation unit is under the control of the courts, making coordination more problematic.
- ✚ The mayor’s plan fails to specify a process for establishing community partnerships or creating joint-use opportunities for unused space; nor does the plan mention what should be done about school buildings that are substantially underused. Considerations of these kinds necessitate the involvement of the local school community to ensure that instructional programs are kept intact. Under the plan, the schools’ chancellor can make recommendations to the mayor on excess space, but it is unclear what requirements the facilities authority has to vet decisions with the school system or the local school community when determining building use and partnership agreements.
- ✚ The mayor’s plan implies—but does not state explicitly—that building engineers would report to the facilities authority rather than to the principals as they do now. The time that it currently takes to get repairs done could be lengthened further under such a reporting relationship. The plan might also necessitate revising the UPSFF and the Weighted Student Formula to pull funds for these slots out of the foundation aid to each school and place them under the authority.

E. Operations

The Council’s reports have also examined various operating systems of the school district. But the mayor’s plan is largely silent on the operating functions of the school district that present the greatest problems.

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Council for the Great City Schools 2004 and 2005 Findings	DCPS and School Board Actions	Mayor’s Plan
Weak and redundant payroll and procurement systems.	Put a new school procurement system into place, but does not have full control.	Does not address this issue.
Ineffective human resource and personnel operations.	Has not made significant improvements.	Does not address this issue.
Weak and ineffective position control systems.	Does not address this issue.	May exacerbate problems by separating hiring from budgeting.
Costly transportation system.	Proposes bringing system back in-house.	Does not address this issue.

- ✦ The Council’s 2005 report takes the school district to task for its dysfunctional operating systems. The mayor’s proposed bill is largely silent on these systems and their problems. In particular, the mayor’s plan makes no mention of the school district’s most problem-plagued operations: personnel, procurement, and payroll.
- ✦ No one in city government would suggest that the Office of Contracts and Procurement and the D.C. Office of Personnel, both under the mayor’s authority, are operating efficiently today; and the legislation is silent on whether these dysfunctional agencies would be expected to bring about improvements in human resources and procurement within the DCPS.
- ✦ Finally, the Council’s 2005 report made note of the school district’s weak and largely ineffective position-control system. The mayor’s proposal is not clear on what it would do to address this problem, but the mayor’s bill might make it harder to fix because separate units would be handling hiring and budgeting. How this issue is settled will affect efforts to give principals greater authority in hiring teachers and staff.

F. Legal and Other

- ✦ Mayoral control over DCPS requires amending the D.C. Charter because the charter (D.C. Official Code §1-204.95) explicitly provides that the school system shall be governed by a Board of Education. Changes in the charter will require congressional approval. It is not clear that city hall has thought about the possibility that Congress will add unwanted provisions to any charter-change legislation it considers.
- ✦ Direct mayoral control over budgeting for the DCPS conflicts with the charter because the charter also explicitly provides the Board of Education with substantial autonomy in the budgeting process.
- ✦ The mayor’s proposal creates a Public School Facilities Management and Construction Authority to manage school facilities. In order to provide this new unit with the broad contracting and leasing powers that the mayor proposes, several provisions of the charter would have to be modified.

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- ✦ The mayor's proposed changes to the procedures for public charter school oversight cannot go into effect without congressional approval, because these procedures were originally enacted by Congress in the District of Columbia School Reform Act of 1995, Pub. L. 104-132. Specifically, the mayor's proposal would effectively revoke the powers of the Board of Education as an eligible chartering entity and would establish the State Education Office as a charter authorizer by way of appeal in both the petitioning and charter revocation phases of the chartering process. The act also requires performance reviews of public charter schools every three years and clarifies that a school chartering authority may revoke a school charter for insufficient academic performance.

Summary and Conclusions

Analyses conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools and others over the last three years indicate that the District of Columbia Public Schools suffer from a variety of instructional, organizational, financial, and operational problems. Many of these problems stem from a mix of interrelated factors: misaligned, poorly focused, and weak instructional systems; multiple layers of accountability that ultimately result in no one being responsible for student performance; and overlapping and redundant operating systems. It is the opinion of the Council that the mayor's legislation as currently drafted would do almost nothing to fix the fundamental problems that actually plague the school system and perpetuate poor student achievement.

Instead, the mayor's bill separates and rearranges a number of critical functions but does not do so in a way that would improve academic performance, streamline decisions, strengthen operations, or heighten accountability. In fact, the proposed legislation is silent on the critical mission of raising student achievement, except to defer to a school system that the legislation implies is incompetent. The bill, moreover, does not reduce the layers of school-district decision-making or improve operations. If anything, the proposed bill adds complexity by creating a new department of education and an expanded state education office; involving the city council in budget decisions it did not make before; and initiating quasi-independent entities that will be hard to coordinate. In addition, the bill fails to help the school district build the capacity it needs to address its problems over the long run.

Finally, the proposed bill does little to spur additional accountability. It puts more responsibility onto the mayor but does not articulate how the public leverages that accountability or how it is shared by anyone else.

In sum, the changes in governance proposed by the mayor would do little to fix the instructional, budgetary, and operational problems that external analyses have identified. Not all the problems articulated here can be addressed through legislation. But the onus is on the mayor to articulate how the pending governance bill would improve school district performance, and how the legislation would be coupled with a clear and specific plan of action.

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When measured against the Council's strongly critical report in 2004, the D.C. Public Schools have shown that they have both made progress and have a long way to go. Political leaders joined together to recruit a new superintendent; the system has adopted rigorous standards and improved its instructional program; and political leaders collaborated to increase support for school modernization. The problems remain acute, however: poor achievement, flawed operations, and too many inhospitable buildings. Nevertheless, political and organizational stability over a prolonged period and consensus on educational reform strategies are necessary prerequisites to meaningful change. The Council has never seen sustained improvement in any urban school system in the country without these key ingredients.

The voters of the nation's capital elected new and energetic leaders in both city hall and the school system to breathe a sense of urgency into the school district's reforms. But those leaders need to be working *together* to solve the educational problems that all agree must be fixed. There are numerous examples across the country where mayors and school leaders work in partnership to that end. The current debate over who should run the city's dysfunctional school system is counterproductive. It detracts from the mission of improving student achievement, and does little to solve the problems outlined in reports by the Council and others.

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Appendix A. Trends in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Scale Scores Among City School Districts Participating in the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)

4th-Grade NAEP Reading⁴

City School Districts Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05*
Boston	206	207	1
Chicago	198	198	0
Cleveland	195	197	2
New York	210	213	3*
Average			1.5

City School Districts Not Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05*
Atlanta	197	201	4*
Austin	--	217	--
Charlotte	219	221	2
Houston	207	211	4*
Los Angeles	194	196	2
San Diego	208	208	0
Average			2.4

⁴ Data are average scale scores for 2003 and 2005, the last two NAEP testing cycles and the only two cycles where all 10 cities participated. A scale score of 208 is considered basic; a scale score of 238 is considered proficient

* Denotes a statistically significant increase in scale scores between 2003 and 2005.

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4th-Grade NAEP Math⁵

City School Districts Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05*
Boston	220	229	9*
Chicago	214	216	2
Cleveland	215	220	5*
New York	226	231	5*
Average			5.25

City School Districts Not Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05*
Atlanta	216	221	5*
Austin	--	242	--
Charlotte	242	244	2
Houston	227	233	6*
Los Angeles	216	220	4*
San Diego	226	232	6*
Average			4.6

⁵ A scale score of 214 is considered basic; a scale score of 249 is considered proficient

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8th-Grade NAEP Reading⁶

City School Districts Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05
Boston	252	253	1
Chicago	248	249	1
Cleveland	240	240	0
New York	252	251	-1
Average			0.25

City School Districts Not Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05
Atlanta	240	240	0
Austin	--	257	--
Charlotte	262	259	-3
Houston	246	248	2
Los Angeles	234	239	5*
San Diego	250	253	3
Average			1.4

⁶ A scale score of 281 is considered proficient

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8th-Grade NAEP Math⁷

City School Districts Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05
Boston	262	270	8*
Chicago	254	258	4*
Cleveland	253	249	-4
New York	266	267	1
Average			2.25

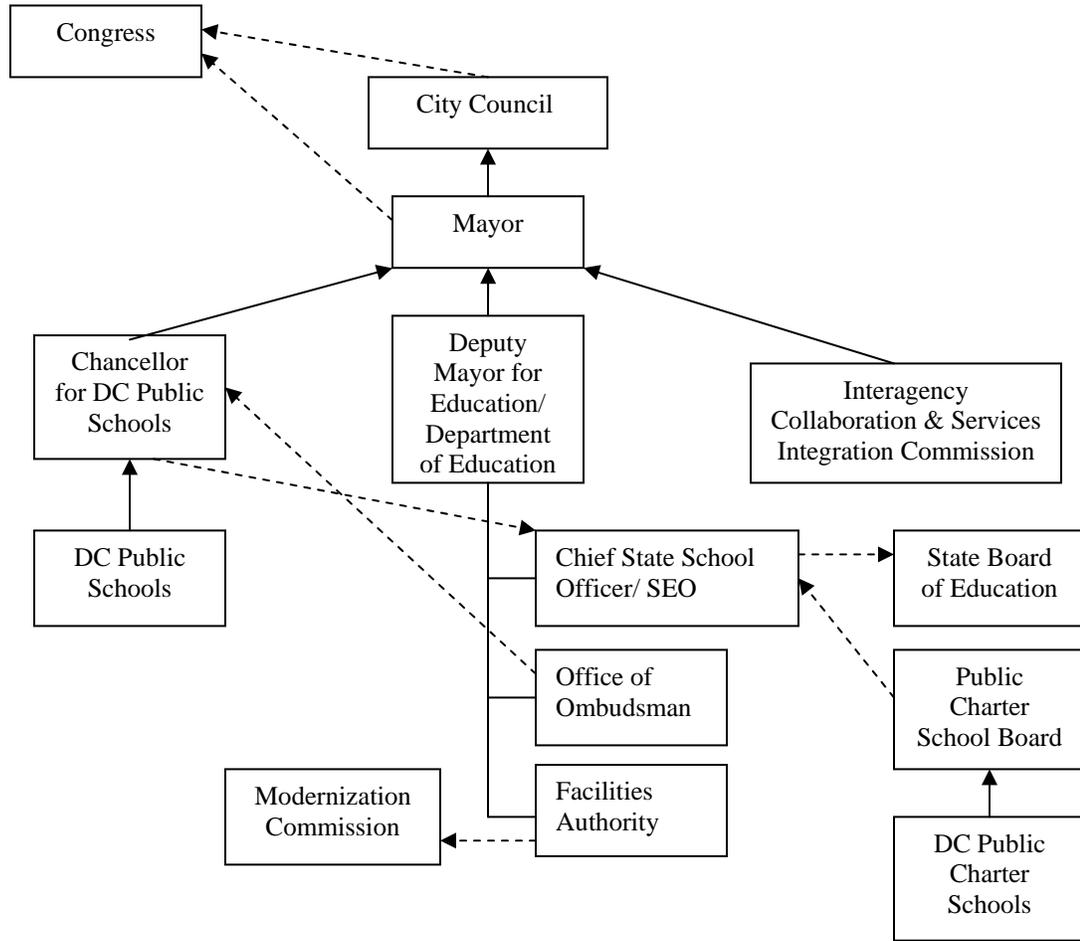
City School Districts Not Under Mayoral Control

	2003	2005	Δ 2003-05
Atlanta	244	245	1
Austin	--	281	--
Charlotte	279	281	2
Houston	264	267	3*
Los Angeles	245	250	5*
San Diego	264	270	6*
Average			3.4

⁷ Scale score of 262 is considered basic; scale score of 299 is considered proficient

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Appendix B. Proposed Organizational Structure of Schools Under Mayor’s Proposal⁸



⁸ Source: District of Columbia Public Schools