



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

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**Testimony to be delivered before the New York State Education Department**

**Re: Mayoral Control of New York City Schools**

January 18, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to testify tonight. My name is Kim Sweet, and since 2007, I have been the Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York.

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For more than 50 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York City students who face systemic barriers to academic success based on poverty, race, disability, language barriers, homelessness, immigration status, or involvement in the child welfare or juvenile or criminal legal systems. Every year, we help thousands of New York parents and students navigate the city's complex education system, where they are often overlooked, de-prioritized, and subject to discrimination.

We share the frustrations of many in the New York City advocacy community with aspects of the current governance system known as mayoral control. You have already heard from numerous parents, students, teachers, and other community members who have talked about feeling disempowered by the current system. We agree with calls for a commission of some sort to determine what a different system would look like. Given the importance of getting school governance right, any sort of commission must include a broad range of stakeholders and have the time and resources to study and debate the options and come up with the best possible solution.

At Advocates for Children, we want to make sure that any changes to the current model do not have negative unintended consequences for the student populations we serve. With that in mind, I am going to use the rest of my time to identify a few potential pitfalls that we want to be sure to avoid in any future restructuring:

First, just as we need more checks and balances against discriminatory and harmful decisions by the mayor, we also need to make sure that there are checks and balances against elected parent and community boards that may try to exercise their powers in a discriminatory way by, for example, siting schools for over-age students or students



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with disabilities in inconvenient or inappropriate locations or banning books with LGBTQ themes or characters.

Second, for highly mobile students, like students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care, consistency across districts and centralization of support can be very beneficial. To the extent a new model leads to greater decentralization, the impact on highly mobile students must be considered.

Third and finally, as a watchdog agency working to protect the rights of students, we know that there is a substantial and urgent need for improvement in our public schools. A successful model of school governance needs to achieve the difficult balancing act of improving checks and balances while making sure that leadership is not so fractured as to prevent large-scale change. For example, implementing Universal Pre-K in New York City required a relatively rapid commitment of resources and a high level of coordination of agencies. We want changes of this scale to remain a possibility for the children of New York.

None of the concerns I have raised means that we must stick with the status quo. Ultimately, it comes down to figuring out appropriate checks and balances between the power of the mayor and the power exercised by parents, students, and communities so that the school system functions optimally and equitably for the education of New York City students.

Thank you.

Kim Sweet  
Executive Director