

Mayoral School Leadership and Integrated Governance

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Introduction – National and State Background

The past two decades have seen an emerging trend in urban school governance: mayors taking the reins of school district leadership. So far, mayors in the nation's largest cities have been most likely to seek or be given this new role. Chicago and Boston have been working under this new governance model for more than ten years and Philadelphia for more than five years; New York has recently joined the trend, along with Cleveland, the District of Columbia, and Los Angeles. Still other large cities, such as Milwaukee, are seriously exploring the concept at this time.

The impetus for putting the mayor in charge of a city's schools usually stems from at least one of the following being documented or generally perceived about an urban school district¹:

- Lack of accountability
- Poor fiscal status
- Low student academic performance

When these factors are present singly or (more often) in combination, the urban school district's reputation suffers, students and parents are shortchanged, and blame is assigned from many quarters. Different stakeholders blame different entities; for example, elected school boards may blame state bureaucrats or legislators for providing inadequate resources or creating too many rules and regulations, or state officials may blame district administrations for mismanagement. Within the district, ripple effects may include dropping home prices, declining student populations as families move to other districts; and escalating state and federal sanctions. These effects are intertwined with economic and cultural effects throughout cities and states, such as lower earnings and higher crime rates². Under these conditions, the mayor may be perceived as a single locus of accountability for academic and fiscal performance of the school district as well as economic and service management for the city.

This report summarizes the recent research and policy literature regarding mayoral control of urban schools, outlining potential benefits and limitations of this governance approach. The report outlines the basic elements of a mayoral reform plan and sample performance indicators for success. Finally, the report references the special case of mid-size cities, which face similar challenges to large metropolitan centers, but often with fewer resources. It is at this level that a future wave of mayoral school governance may be expected.

¹ Allen, V., Henken, R., & Dickman, A. (2009). *School district governance reform: The devil is in the details*. Milwaukee, WI: Public Policy Forum for the Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

² McKinsey & Company (2009). *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*. Washington, DC: McKinsey & Company.

The Special Case of Mid-Size Cities

America's largest cities get most of the media attention when it comes to reporting on urban problems and attempted reforms. However, across the country, more people live in mid-size cities than in big cities³:

- In 2000, 22.9 million people lived in the nine U.S. cities with populations over one million people.
- The 49 cities with populations between 300,000 and one million were home to 24.3 million people.
- Nearly 29 million people lived in the 185 cities with populations between 100,000 and 300,000.

While some of these medium-size cities are growing quickly, many others struggle with the same challenges faced by larger urban centers: declining populations, increasing concentrations of poverty, and increasingly unequal distribution of wealth between city and suburban areas. Many of these declining or stagnant cities have eroding traditional economic foundations of industry and agriculture-related commerce, and now face economic declines.⁴

Mid-size cities fall into two main groups: those that are part of a larger metropolitan area, and those that are the single largest commercial hub in their region. The cities can also be categorized by their growth rates as calculated using decennial census data. Mid-size cities with declining populations are mostly found in Michigan (highly dependent on the automobile industry and its subsidiaries) and in the Northeast. Rapidly growing cities are mostly found in the coastal regions and the southwest. In Illinois, four cities with populations between 100,000 and 170,000 were categorized in a 2000 census analysis:⁵

City	Growth Category
Peoria	No Growth (-2 to 2%)
Springfield	Low/Moderate Growth (2-10%)
Rockford	Low/Moderate Growth (2-10%)
Aurora	Rapid Growth (>20%)

Aurora is part of the much larger Chicago/collar county metro area, and is growing primarily because of a rapid influx of Hispanic residents. Peoria, Springfield and Rockford are all low- or no-growth cities and are also the largest commercial hubs in their regions. Therefore, the economic and social consequences of their stagnation are experienced regionally, well beyond the city and even county boundaries.

³ Eichenthal, D.R. (2005). *Why mid size cities grow*. Presentation to the Chattanooga Community Research Council, September 30. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy.

⁴ (2003). *The mid-size city: Exploring its unique place in urban policy*. Summary of the Rochester Conversation on Mid-Size Cities. Rochester, NY: Office of the Mayor.

⁵ (2002). *Demographic change in medium-sized cities: Evidence from the 2000 census*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, in collaboration with the National League of Cities.

Like Chicago, Illinois mid-size and urban fringe cities with significant numbers of poverty students struggle with below average student performance and financial status, two of the criteria usually cited as impetus for mayoral control.

The table below shows comparative data for Illinois' largest cities and their school districts. State data have been included for comparison⁶.

Rank	Name	Population	District Low-Income %	Minority %	% Meeting Standards	Financial Status (ISBE)	Type (ISBE)
1	Chicago*	2,836,658	84%	92%	60%	Review	Urban
2	Aurora	170,855	East – 63% West – 45%	East – 94% West – 65%	East – 56% West – 71%	E-Financial Watch W-Review	E - Urban Fringe W - Urban Fringe
3	Rockford*	156,596	72%	60%	62%	Recognition	Mid-Size City
4	Joliet*	144,316	HS – 56% Elem – 65%	HS – 63% Elem – 83%	HS – 43% Elem – 72%	HS-Recognition Elem-Review	Mid-Size City Mid-Size City
5	Naperville	142,479	7%	24%	91%	Recognition	Mid-Size City
6	Springfield*	117,090	59%	47%	64%	Recognition	Mid-Size City
7	Peoria*	113,546	70%	70%	62%	Early Warning	Mid-Size City
9	Elgin	104,288	43%	50%	74%	Early Warning	Urban Fringe
9	Waukegan	91,138	43%	90%	61%	Early Warning	Urban Fringe
10	Cicero	80,976	83%	96%	60%	Recognition	Urban Fringe
	State	12, 901,563	41%	46%	75%	Recognition – 72% Review – 19% Early Warning – 7% Financial Watch – 3%	NA

⁶ Sources: U.S. Census Bureau 2008 Estimates, Illinois School Report Card, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Annual Financial Profile.

NOTES: Starred districts (*) indicate those that are Illinois charter districts. School districts with financial “recognition” status receive commendations from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Districts in “review” status must develop 3-year plans and establish a financial committee of the school board. Districts in “early warning” status must add detailed projections of revenues and debts and develop a reorganization study. Districts under “financial watch,” in addition to taking the steps outlined for review and early warning districts, may be required to establish an external financial oversight panel. Both early warning and financial watch districts may be certified as being “in financial difficulty” by ISBE.

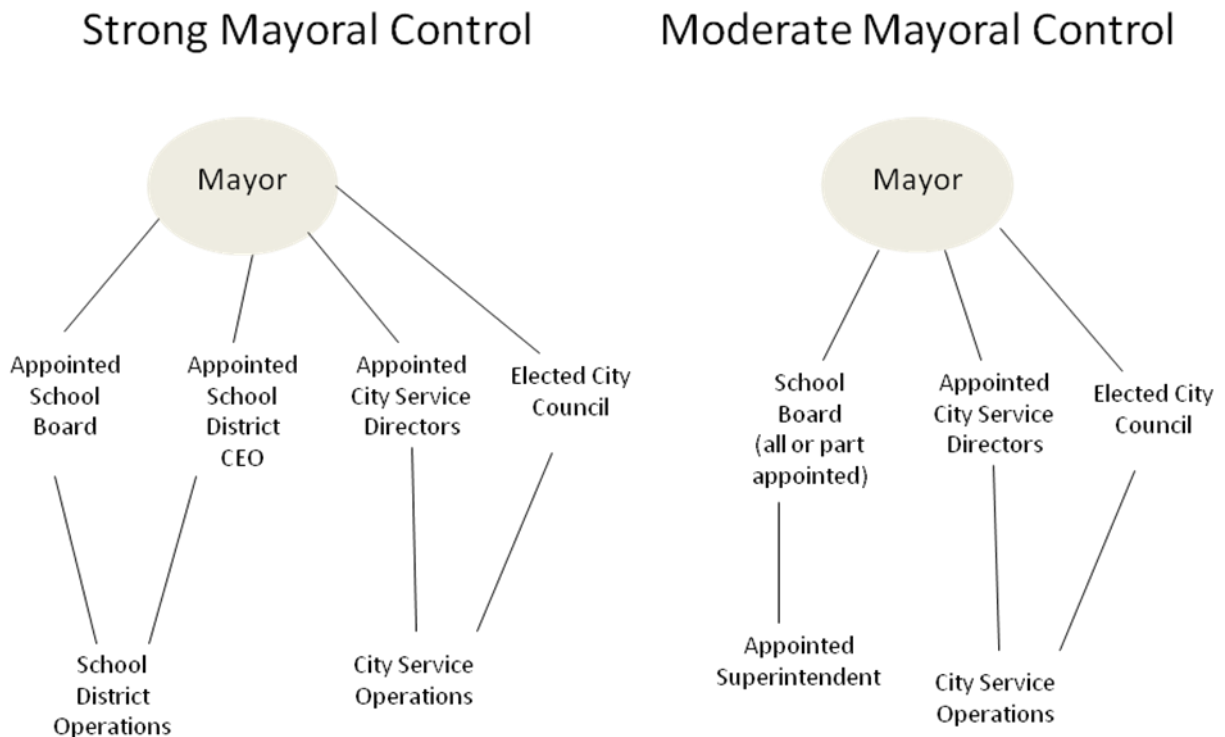
Integrated Governance

For most of the twentieth century, U.S. school districts maintained autonomy from local municipal governments. As described in the introduction, that scenario began to change when mayors of several large cities took the reins of control during the 1990's. *Integrated governance* occurs when the city government and the school district are operated jointly under mayoral leadership for both accountability and management.⁷ In many cases, along with accountability for school performance, the mayor is given the power to appoint school board members.

Integrated governance has the potential to affect not only the school district, but many of the city conditions that affect families and students. Cross-coordination of community and school projects, resource allocation, and policy development can potentially enhance planning and delivery of both municipal and educational services. Quality of schools is universally recognized as an important factor contributing to the economy and the quality of life in cities. An integrated governance approach attempts to strategically organize municipal government efforts toward improving all these city characteristics.

Having contiguous boundaries for the city and the school district is generally one prerequisite for integrating governance. If the boundaries are not the same, or the district is not completely encompassed by the city boundaries, this creates the need to examine other governance structures that may affect the school district and its residents.

For different cities, mayors have different authorities and responsibilities. Two examples of integrated governance models are displayed in the graphic below. Other variations are also possible.



⁷ Wong, K.K., Shen, F.X., Anagnostopoulos, D., & Rutledge, S. (2007) *The Education Mayor: Improving America's Schools*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

The Research on Mayoral Control of Schools

What happens to districts' student achievement and financial status when mayors lead? The research literature is still being compiled, since this trend is still relatively new. However, for the data currently available, analysis reveals the following findings:

- District performance analysis shows that having mayor control of education with an appointed school board raises student achievement in reading and mathematics, especially in the lowest-performing schools.⁸
- Mayor-controlled districts improve financial status by reducing administrative expenses and containing labor costs.⁸
- Mayors have considerable influence with municipal and business leaders as well as state officials, and thus are better positioned to promote and coordinate educational interests than isolated school boards and/or superintendents.⁹

The data for these studies also reveals that every city is different, as is each mayor. What works in one city may not work in another, and factors are difficult to compare across cities. Many different factors contribute to school and district performance, not all of which are in a mayor's, a superintendent's, or a school board's control.

With these cautions in mind, it is still feasible to say that integrated governance and mayoral leadership hold the possibility for improving conditions and outcomes in urban schools.

Potential Benefits and Limitations of Integrated Governance/Mayoral Control

If the decision is made to integrate school district governance with municipal government, the change will create the conditions for a range of potential benefits. However, governance changes alone can have only limited impact on district operations and student achievement. A summary of potential benefits and limitations for the integrated governance model are summarized in the table below.

Potential Benefits	Limitations
Consolidated accountability in the Office of the Mayor	Perceived loss of representation with an appointed board
Unified vision and goals for Mayor, District CEO and School Board	Possible policy/direction changes with new mayoral elections
Depending on the health of city finances, reallocation of resources between the city and the school district and possibility for new resource acquisition	Student achievement effects take several years to realize; mayoral leadership may <i>enable</i> but not <i>cause</i> improvements
Greater fiscal discipline and administrative efficiency	Concerns about partisanship and patronage

⁸ Wong et al. (2007).

⁹ Hess, F.(2008). Assessing the Case for Mayoral Control of Urban Schools. *Education Outlook No. 4* (August). Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

Necessary Conditions for Success

From those large urban districts that have shifted to integrated governance and mayoral leadership for schools, several lessons have been learned and shared with those contemplating such a change. Ideally, a shift to integrated governance should have in place the following factors:¹⁰

- The mayor should have broad political support and high political capital, as evidenced by recent election results.
- The city should create a strong and diverse coalition supporting an integrated governance model.
- The mayor should have a plan with a strong rationale and clear goals with mechanisms for achieving them.
- Accountability should include specific performance indicators and measures for each goal.
- The appointed school district CEO should have strong credentials and be in clear agreement with the mayor's plan.
- The city should be in stable financial condition and the mayor should have the authority and ability to acquire and mobilize resources on behalf of the schools.
- The mayor should express a strong personal interest and long-term commitment to school improvement.

Several mayors who have taken on the role of school leader have weighed in with personal advice:¹¹

"Education has so much to do with the quality of life and the future of a city; in fact, it is the driving force. The educational system is so crucial that mayors have to have input."

Hartford, CN Mayor Eddie A. Perez

"Do what it takes to ensure constructive problem-solving....build and value partnerships."

Trenton, NJ Mayor Douglas H. Palmer

"I accepted this responsibility because I believed that only by making the Mayor directly responsible to people - and by making the Board and its President directly accountable to me - could we take the bold steps needed to reform our schools."

Chicago, IL Mayor Richard M Daley

¹⁰ Levy, M. (2004). *Mayoral Control of Public Schools: Lessons from Other Cities*. Washington, DC: Public Education Reform Project, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs.

¹¹ United States Conference of Mayors (2006). *Mayoral Leadership and Involvement in Education: An Action Guide for Success*. Washington, DC.

Components of a Mayoral Education Leadership Plan

In order to create public confidence and understanding for mayoral school leadership and integrated city governance, a mayor must create a plan that lays out the essential components of the new system.

The plan starts with the city's context, including demographic, economic and educational information relevant to the proposed governance change. The rationale for the change includes information about the school district's academic and financial status, and provides justification for the proposal to alter governance to foster improvement.

The bulk of the plan lays out the specifics of the new governance structure, the educational goals and the mechanisms to attain them, the financial goals and mechanisms, and specific performance measures for each goal.

The following sections provide detail about designing a mayoral education leadership plan.

Context and Rationale

- ***The context describes current city conditions***, providing relevant data that lays the foundation for the governance redesign plan. Demographic information includes census and school district data, including current population and school enrollment, poverty and minority population data, and trend data with projections for the future. Economic information includes workforce preparation information, employment data, and projections for future growth and/or decline. Educational information includes student performance data and financial information for the school district.
- ***The rationale specifically describes the “trigger(s)” for the governance change***. These most often include the need for better student achievement, better financial management and stability, and greater accountability for results.

Governance Structure, Educational Plan and Financial Plan

- ***The governance structure describes clear lines of authority and accountability***. It includes the interrelationships of the mayor, the school board, the district superintendent or CEO, and the city council. It describes how school board members and the superintendent/CEO are selected, how long they serve, and their respective responsibilities.
- ***The educational plan describes the education goals***; mechanisms for attaining the goals; timelines, roles and responsibilities, and educational performance indicators and measures. The goals should specifically reference student achievement and graduation, staffing, curriculum and instruction, school climate and safety, and other relevant factors that affect student learning.
- ***The financial plan describes the fiscal goals***, mechanisms for attaining the goals, roles and responsibilities, and financial performance indicators and measures. The plan should describe how the new governance structure will be expected to impact district operations and financial stability. If the district has been designated as having early warning or financial watch status, the plan should include how the new structure will address state requirements.

Sample Performance Indicators

Performance indicators should accompany each goal (governance, educational and financial), and should be assigned to specific members or entities within the new governance structure. While indicators will be specific to each goal, some general examples of indicators come from the Chicago Public Schools:¹²

Mayor

- Appoint highly qualified people to the school board.
- Appoint a highly qualified CEO.
- Articulate clear, realistic and meaningful educational and financial goals.
- Increase the financial resources available to the school district.
- Provide a public forum for citizen input into school governance.
- Report regularly to the public on progress related to performance indicators.

School Board

- Promptly perform all assigned governance responsibilities.
- Negotiate fair and realistic labor contracts.
- Address teaching and learning policies as a priority in board business.
- Support the work of the CEO with policies and resources.

CEO/District Central Office

- Hire, retain and support highly qualified personnel.
- Implement improvement plans at every level (district, school, program, classroom) and track progress on a regular basis using designated performance measures.
- Maintain safe and orderly schools where learning is a priority.
- Reduce administrative waste and over-spending.

Each indicator should be accompanied by specific data sources and measures, specific performance targets, and projected timelines.

A system for public progress reporting should also be established. Increasingly, districts are using web-based “dashboard” systems to publicly display progress data (see Resources section for examples).

¹² Wong, K.K., Dreeben, R., Lynn, L.E. Jr., Sunderman, G.L. (1997). *Integrated Governance as a Reform Strategy in the Chicago Public Schools: A Report on System-wide School Governance Reform*. Chicago, IL: Department of Education & Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago.

Sample Cases of Mayoral School Leadership and Integrated Governance

As noted earlier in this report, every city and school district has its own character and unique circumstances. Therefore, it is not possible to prescribe a “one-size-fits-all” model that will work in every situation.

Studying other cases can help in adapting components for a plan that meets local needs. Following are several brief summaries of mayoral leadership models that illustrate various approaches to integrated governance.

NEW YORK, NY

Mayor Michael Bloomberg received legislative authority to manage the city schools in 2002. He hired a school chancellor who reports directly to him and carries out his policies. The legislation abolished the 32 locally elected school boards in the city and gave the chancellor the power to appoint the local superintendents. The independent district Board was replaced by a “Panel for Education Policy.” Of its 13 seats, eight are controlled by the Mayor. A criticism of this arrangement is that the Mayor is perceived to have relegated this panel to little or no role in policymaking and governance. Political challenges include perceptions of uncertainty during election years, when the continuity of the Mayor and the chancellor are in question. The law giving the mayor power sunsets in 2009, creating debate in the legislature as to its continuation.

CHICAGO, IL

Mayor Richard M. Daley received legislative authority for school control in 1995. He hires the district CEO, who reports directly to him. Of the three persons holding the CEO job in the past 14 years, none has been a professional educator. The Mayor also appoints the corporate-type five-member school board, which includes a Chief Education Officer. The education system has become a department of city government. The city now contracts for school construction and maintenance through a bidding process, rather than the district hiring union workers as in the past. The Mayor and CEOs have been generally praised for improving the district’s fiscal operations and efficiency and for promulgating creative approaches to education reform such as establishing full-service community schools and abolishing social promotion. The Mayor and CEO have also established an unusually collaborative working relationship with the teachers union in the district. Student performance has risen according to several measures, but the district has made slow progress in closing racial and low-income achievement gaps.

HARRISBURG, PA

Mayor Stephen Reed has controlled the Harrisburg schools since 2000. The authority was given by the State Board of Education based on low academic performance. The Mayor appoints a Board of Control which makes policy decisions for the district. A Board of Education exists, but its only function is to set tax rates. The Mayor hired the Superintendent, who has sole authority for the hiring and performance of staff, thus curtailing board micro-management of operations. Since 2000, attendance and test scores have risen, but not as quickly as the Mayor and potential mayoral candidates would like. The Mayor’s authority expires in 2010, but could be renewed by the State Board of Education.

Conclusion

As the relationships among education, the economy, and quality of life are explored, it is increasingly clear that strong schools are essential to creating better life chances for city residents.

Urban school districts, including those in mid-size cities, face many challenges, both academic and financial. An emerging trend is that of creating integrated governance structures that establish the Mayor as being accountable for education and city services.

Since all cities are different, integrated governance options must be examined while taking into account the social, economic and educational needs of each unique situation. Early research indicates that mayoral leadership and integrated governance can improve student outcomes.

A new governance system with a strongly committed mayor, an appointed board, a coherent plan, and designated resources “offers an opportunity to reshuffle the deck, upend routines and politics that hinder improvement, and create opportunity for responsible governance” (Hess, 2008). This approach can potentially set the stage for better student learning and a more optimistic outlook for struggling cities.

Resources

In addition to the references cited as footnotes in this report, the following resources may be useful.

BOOKS

Chambers, S. (2006). *Mayors and Schools: Minority Voices and Democratic Tensions in Urban Education*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Henig, J.R. & Rich, W.C. (2004). *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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Lee, C.J. & Chute, E. (2009). *Mayors in the Schools: Will city join in trend to give more control over board members?* Pittsburg, PA: Post-Gazette.

Chavous, K. (2007). *Should Mayors Take Over Schools in their Cities?* Washington, DC: Black Alliance for Educational Options.

REPORTS

Swanson, C.B. (2009). *Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap. Educational and Economic Conditions in America's Largest Cities*. Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education, Inc.

Institute for Youth, Education and Families. *Action Kit for Municipal Leaders: Improving Public Schools*. Washington, DC: National League of Cities.

WEBSITES

Charlotte-Mecklenburg NC School District sample progress dashboard:

<http://pmd.cms.k12.nc.us/District%20Data%20Dashboard/Performance%20Summary/2007-2008.aspx>

United States Conference of Mayors: <http://www.usmayors.org/>