

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE:

Whose Job Is It?

Presented to:

Temporary State Commission
on New York City
School Governance
270 Broadway
New York, New York 10007

Presented by:

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Speaking on behalf of the Board

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The Community School Board of Staten Island, District 31, is pleased to have this opportunity to address the Temporary State Commission on New York City School Governance. We understand that the primary concern of this commission is the provision of a high quality education for all children in the City of New York. I am sure no school district throughout the entire school system of the City would disagree with that. I am also equally sure, however, that many of the school districts throughout our great city, including District 31, do have reservations about the methods you propose in making the educational system of the City better.

Although in no priority order, the school District of Staten Island is concerned about the following areas:

In a time of fiscal instability, and looking to the future of less government involvement and bureaucracy, it is not wise to consider establishing 50 school districts. The increase cost in administration, staffing, building space and generally wasteful duplication of services, does not appear to be effective management. Particularly as this relates to Staten Island, be mindful, Staten Island is often applauded for its unique and thoughtful management systems at District office. If we are in the forefront in leading the way to effective management of education, then, would it not make sense for this Commission to study our school district and have the other 31 school district apply the same systems in their districts.

In this same regard, the Commission should make it its responsibility to reward District 31 by recommending we become a pilot LEA. There is no question in our mind, and there has not been a question in the minds of educators around our State who have recognized us for our achievements,

that we would provide a superior educational program for pupils from Pre-K through Grade 8, and at the same time give evidence to how effective real decentralization can be. If we failed in this regard, then full centralization should be restored. If we succeed, as we will, then the New York City Board of Education must be willing to cut its ties with districts, rather than weighing them down with redundant management.

In regard to redundant management, School Board members of District 31 fail to see the need for and the legitimate use of a district fiscal officer as defined in your commission report. This person, acting independently, can be viewed as a 'watchdog.' Is not the superintendent of a school district the Chief Executive Officer? Is it not he who should assemble the staff to do the most effective job? Clearly by this Commission suggesting the need for a district fiscal officer, the Commission gives the appearance school districts do not have the ability to carry out such a function effectively. The failure of a few districts in New York City should not and must not cloud your responsibility to encourage innovative school management which is also cost effective. Establishing a district fiscal officer is wrong.

The School Board of District 31 feels decentralization as presented in the Commission report is more cosmetic than substantive. The Central Board of Education glows in its emanate position of being banker and broker for the dollars needed by the districts: "We have all the responsibility and the Central Board has all of the Fiscal." If this quote sounds familiar, it should.

Educators and administrators at the district level say it repeatedly. Not only is there fiscal distribution from on high, but determination as to programs and procedures that emanate 'ex cathedra.' We would not object so much if the needs of every school district were similar. But, you and I know that is not the case. To compound the matter there are levels of expensive monitoring agents nitpicking in every corner. There appears to be a good case made for this Commission to believe school districts are 'dens of thieves.' If anything, school district 31 of Staten Island is a Robin Hood. Wherever we can get the money from the bureaucracy of the Central Board and give it good use in instructional programming, we do. Why thwart the school districts?

IN addition, this Commission should not add to the duality of the operation of education by adding the school level of governance, while adding carrots of school budget control, unit approach to allocations, curriculum modifications and the involvement of hosts of committees.

Is it not obvious to this Commission, the education guidelines set forth by the Commissioner of Education in New York State represent the direction we must take in fulfilling our commitment to the children we serve? The school districts should be answering to the Commissioner, not an encroaching parasite like our Central Board of Education.

In summary the School Board of District 31 feels:

1. The report on New York City School Governance presented by this Commission, seems not to support real and genuine decentralization, rather, in reality, gives more power to the Chancellor of the New York City Board of Education.
2. Any increase in school districts, particularly on Staten Island, would not be cost effective, and may even create segregation - districts of haves and have nots.
3. Any change in the way education will function in New York City must promote real and full funding to the school districts of the city.
4. School District 31 has earned the right to be a pilot LEA in order to set the standard for the districts downstate.
5. We do not believe an increase in the size of the Central Board of Education members will give greater substance to the governing body. It is not who is responsible for education at the Central Board level, after all, it is how the districts are managed by the superintendents and staff.
6. We reject your recommendation to the procedure of appointments. It is our firm belief, having the responsibility of the district, the school board should receive three choices or recommendations from the Superintendent of principals, and the board making the final decision.
7. Concerning Special Education, the school based support team for a district should report^{to} and be

guided by the school district. This is long over due.

8. Concerning options for students to select schools within the public school system, particularly on Staten Island, who is going to pay for the transportation? You may also ask, where is the transportation system to do this? Granted there may be modified options on the high school level, but the concept of options is just that, just a concept with no practical future, particularly if Staten Island has to divide into three school districts.
9. Finally, we in the education business on Staten Island cringe when we think about the bureaucracy needed to set up two more districts on Staten Island. We want the State Legislature to make it easier to bring quality education to our children. That means, getting the funding for a much needed school on the south shore. P.S. 56 is much more important to the educational community of Staten Island than more school districts.

The members of the school board of district 31 on Staten Island hope our suggestions will stimulate this Commission to rethink some of its recommendations and then formulate recommendations to the state legislature which will give our school districts the opportunity to shine in the sun, without having a central board of clouds continually raining on our parade.