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Mayoral Control Alone Doesn't Fix Schools, Rutgers Institute Study Finds

BY ESME E. DEPREZ - OCT 12, 2010

Mayoral control, advocated by politicians pushing to overhaul underperforming school systems, fails to improve student achievement, according to a two-year study.

The [research](#), conducted by the [Institute of Education Law and Policy](#) at Rutgers University, looked at improvements in nine education systems where there were changes in how the schools were governed, led by Baltimore, Boston and New York City. The study will provide guidance to New Jersey policy makers as the state prepares to return schools in Paterson, Newark and Jersey City to local control after as many as 21 years under state operation, the authors said.

The findings, the subject of a seminar today at the university's Newark, New Jersey campus, raise questions about New Jersey Governor [Chris Christie](#)'s plans to overhaul the schools in the state's largest city by putting Mayor [Cory Booker](#) in charge, said Alan Sadovnik, professor of Education, Sociology and Public Administration and Affairs at Rutgers and co-author of the report in a telephone interview yesterday.

"Solving Newark's problems will require more than mayoral control alone," Sadovnik said. "Governance is one part of urban school improvement, which has to include effective school and administrative strategies and a variety of economic, community and health initiatives at the local level."

Facebook Donation

Facebook Inc. founder [Mark Zuckerberg](#) said on Sept. 24 that he will donate \$100 million to Newark's schools. Almost half of all students in the district don't graduate from high school.

Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington and Hartford, Connecticut, were the other school systems that were part of the Rutgers study.

New school leadership helped improve efficiency and reduce corruption in Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington. In almost all the cities, mayoral control was associated with increased funding by either the state or the private sector, the study found.

Increased stability enabled school leaders and the community to concentrate on improving student achievement, the report said. In Cleveland, which had 13 superintendents in 15, turnover ended once the new governance system was installed, while frequent strikes by the unions stopped after mayoral control in Chicago.

Successful Bargaining

Mayoral leadership in New York and Chicago resulted in successful bargaining agreements with the teachers' union to lengthen classroom hours and allow the creation of charter schools, the report also said.

At the same time, community input has diminished under the new models for running schools, the report noted. New York City parents, seeking a stronger voice in school policy, lobbied for changes in the mayoral control law, while parents in Chicago and Boston have complained they don't have enough say in school closings, the report said.

"That's a real negative," Sadovnik said. "Most of the research indicates that parental involvement is a key ingredient in increasing student achievement."

Christie has said he will give Booker a larger role in overseeing the district's schools and its 39,000 students, and the mayor will also get a say in picking a new superintendent. Christie's plan raises questions regarding the legality of the move without legislative action, the report said.

Mayoral involvement, or control, should be considered as part of an overall systematic approach to urban district improvement, the study said.

"The data certainly do not indicate that forms of governance with mayoral involvement have a negative effect on student achievement, but rather that governance may not be the most important factor; or, at the least, may be one of many factors in raising student achievement," it said.

The mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, is founder and majority owner of Bloomberg News parent Bloomberg LP.

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