Report on Education Council Elections

Created by a task force appointed by Mayor Bill de Blasio

October 31, 2019

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I.   Introduction:

During the 2019 legislative session, the New York State Senate and Assembly passed, and the Governor signed, legislation to extend mayoral accountability of the New York City school system.

Currently, Community Education Council (CEC) and Citywide Council on High Schools (CCHS) members are only elected by Parent Association/Parent Teacher Association (PA/PTA) officers. There were a number of changes in the mayoral accountability legislation, including that CEC and CCHS members will be elected by public school parents starting in 2021.

Additionally, the legislation created a task force to examine the election process and submit a report to Mayor and Chancellor with recommendations. The following document was created by this legislative task force and contains recommendations regarding the new election process.

Note: Additional information on Education Councils can be found at:
https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-life/get-involved/education-councils

II.   Statutory language:

Subdivision 9 of section 2590-c of the education law:

The mayor shall appoint a task force on community district education councils consisting of parents whose child or children are attending a public school within the community districts and other members with relevant expertise. The task force shall review the eligibility criteria to serve on a community district education council, the process for selecting community council members, and their terms of office. The task force shall submit a report concerning its findings and recommendations to the mayor and the chancellor by November first, two thousand nineteen.

III.   Task Force Members:

The below individuals were appointed to the CEC Election Task Force by Mayor de Blasio.

*Adrienne Austin, Acting Deputy Chancellor, NYC DOE
*Ayishah Irvin, Recording Secretary of Education Consortium Council
*Rini Fonseca-Sabune, Chief Democracy Officer, Democracy NYC

Teresa Arboleda, Former President, Citywide Council on English Language Learners; Former Member District 3 Community School Board
Constance Asiedu, honorary member, Special Education Committee at the UFT and others; and former Citywide Council on High Schools Member
Sarah Calderon, Managing Director, ArtPlace America
Michael Freedman-Schnapp, Vice President, Forsyth Street

DeNora Getachew, New York Executive Director, Generation Citizen
Sheree Gibson, self-employed consultant; and Member, Queens District 29 President's Council
Community Education Council
Celia Green, President of the Citywide Council on High Schools and President of the
Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council, Community Education Council D75
Pamela Hamilton-Johnson, Family Community Advocacy and Engagement Outreach
Consultant, DOE; and Member, Community Education Council D1, CCHS
Timothy Kremer, Executive Director, New York State School Boards Association
Ellen McHugh, Citywide Council on Special Education, Co Chair
Alan Ong, First Vice President, CEC26.
Celina Su, Professor of Political Science, Brooklyn College
R. Dimple Willabus, President of The Stalwarts Youth Corporation, Former President &
Brooklyn Borough President Appointee CEC 22

Note: Hydra Mendoza, former Deputy Chancellor, and Nisha Agarwal, Senior Advisor in the
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives, also participated in the task force.

*Task Force Co-Chairs

IV.   Meeting dates:

The task force met on the following days and times:
- July 10th at 6:00 pm
- August 7th at 6:00 pm
- August 20th at 6:00 pm
- September 24th at 10:00 am
- October 10th at 6:00 pm
- October 25th at 10:00 am

V.   Recommendations:

1. **"Who can run for Education Councils?"**
    a) The DOE has a longstanding definition of how to define a parent for purposes of
       education councils. This definition is stated Chancellor's Regulations D-140 and
       D-160:
       i. "A parent is defined as a parent (by birth or adoption, step-parent or foster
           parent), legal guardian, or person in parental relation to a child. A person
           in parental relation to a child is a person who is directly responsible for the
           care and custody of a child on a regular basis in lieu of a parent or legal
           guardian."
    b) The task force recommends no change to this definition.

2. **"Who can vote for Education Councils?"**
   a) The task force had substantial discussion about whether voting weight should be based on the number of children in schools or each parent as an individual voter.
   b) The majority of task force supported "one child, one vote"; however, there was not consensus.
       i. Pros: There is an ascertainable number of potential votes and a potential to facilitate broader participation through clear mechanism for voter qualification.
       ii. Cons: A one child, one vote approach doesn't give every individual parent a vote. What if parents don't agree on who to vote for?
       iii. Overall: A one child, one vote approach gives more voting to parents with more than one student.
   c) Many members of the task force preferred "one parent, one vote".
       i. Pros: One parent one vote means each individual parent would get an individual vote. This system would allow for parents who live in separate households, or parents who disagree on who to vote for to still exercise their individual choice.
       ii. Cons: A one parent one vote approach makes it hard to ascertain the number of potential votes; concerns around verification of voters; more weight given to multi-parent households, with potential socioeconomic inequity.
   d) It was agreed upon that being a candidate for education council should not preclude you from being able to vote.

3. **"How to vote for Education Councils?"**
   a) Mirror NYC School Survey: give out an access code for an online vote.
       i. Provide mobile application to vote, if possible.
   b) Provide in-person options to vote, in addition to remote ability. Not all parents have, or want, online access.
       i. In-person voting will still take place online at schools. This may have logistical and labor implications.
       ii. Voters should be permitted to bring someone to assist.
       iii. Parent coordinators can assist if requested by voter.
   c) Voter must be able to vote in their preferred language.
       i. Ballot and voting information must be translated in all nine DOE languages.
       ii. Must be accessible for the visually and audibly impaired.
   d) Candidate profiles must be accessible through the voting interface.
   e) Give at least two-weeks to vote.
       i. Important to give voters enough time to vote while also keeping urgency.
       ii. Create an election calendar with a buffer in case of any operational issues.
   f) Remove or expand the 90-day window in current Chancellor's Regulations.

4. **Additional recommendations for the voting process:**
   a) Must make sure whole school community is involved in the voting process.

  i. Need a thoughtful engagement plan, including early education about education councils' role and election process.

  ii. Explore specific and appropriate incentives for voting.

b) Ensure that that the action of voting is not done in a vacuum; use elections as a way to encourage additional parental involvement in their student's education.

  i. Provide education on education councils' role and elections throughout the school year.

c) Create a specific voting process for Citywide Council on Special Education and Citywide Council on English Language Learners that is incorporated into larger voting process.

  i. Parents can vote in all relevant categories.

d) Provide appropriate flexibility in regulations or change regulations if external factors necessitate such action.

e) Partner with a responsible, experienced and quality vendor(s) that can handle increase of going from ~5,400 voter universe to over ~1 million.

f) Consult with experienced external partners in advance of finalization of process.

g) Ensure that the elections process is appropriately resourced, including additional funding for staff and technology.

h) Continue to discuss campaigning rules and process with stakeholders, including parent leaders.

i) In order to ensure that there is a high number of quality candidates, education council members should be referred to as elected officials in all communication by the Department of Education.

j) Provide an opportunity for the public to provide feedback on these recommendations prior to new regulations being finalized.

VI. Conclusion:

The task force respectfully submits these recommendations to the Mayor and Chancellor for their consideration and action.

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