

## **The Results of Mayoral Control in New York City**

When he was elected mayor in 2001, Michael Bloomberg inherited a decentralized school system almost universally delegitimated by the poor academic performance of many of its component school districts. At Mayor Bloomberg's urging, the New York State legislature, in June 2002, effectively ended school system decentralization by abolishing the local community school boards and the citywide Board of Education as well. <sup>1</sup> (The community school districts, as geographic entities, were retained because they were the subjects of a lawsuit brought under the national Voting Rights Act, and therefore protected by the federal Office of Civil Rights.)

The legislature's action effectively transformed a semi-independent school system into the New York City Department of Education, a city agency. The mayor was given the power to appoint the chancellor, structure the school system's budget, and set citywide education policy. <sup>2</sup> Among the handful of major American cities experimenting with mayoral control of schooling, New York City's reform was the most radical because it invested more power in the mayor than any other city's reform.

Bloomberg appointed Joel Klein as Chancellor in late July 2002, and the mayor and the chancellor announced a planning process to comprehensively restructure the school system. With funding from several foundations, and consultant support from some of the nation's leading organizational development firms, the chancellor initiated a planning process that involved many of the city's education policy experts, researchers, reformers, parent leaders and

constituency representatives. Though some participants suggested that the process's outcomes seemed predetermined, planning proceeded across the first semester of the 2002-03 school year. <sup>3</sup>

In the fall of 2002, to dramatize his determination to abolish the central education bureaucracy at 110 Livingston Street in Brooklyn, Mayor Bloomberg moved the offices of what he characterized as a “rinky-dink candy store” <sup>4</sup> to Manhattan’s Tweed Courthouse, a short walk from the Mayor’s offices in City Hall. Then, on Martin Luther King’s day in January, 2003, the mayor presented the product of Chancellor Klein’s six month’s planning process, the Children First initiative. The site Bloomberg chose for the announcement, the Schomburg Center in Harlem, helped accentuate the mayor and the chancellor’s commitment to Children First as a comprehensive effort to close the race-based achievement gap.

#### Terminating Parent and Citizen Participation

The state legislation that established mayor control essentially abolished both the locally elected community school boards and the appointed citywide board of education that had governed the city’s schools. But the legislation did not prohibit the mayor from establishing other forms of parent and citizen participation in accountability or education decision-making functions. Several major cities that had adopted mayoral control of schooling, including Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago, had retained their central school boards and, in Chicago’s case, their school-based decision-making councils as well.

But the Bloomberg-Klein regime centralized all education decision-making, and eliminated the participative roles of parents and community constituencies that decentralization had channeled through the local school boards. The regime did develop new structures that gave parents some limited roles. The chancellor created Community Education Councils (CECs) that represent parents in each community school district, and a Citywide Council on High Schools, both designed to function as advisory bodies.

The mayor created the Panel on Education Policy (PEP), a citywide consultative group established to provide advice to the chancellor. The mayor and the borough presidents appoint the members of the PEP, which meets monthly with the chancellor in public session. The PEP receives briefings and reports and approves major policy decisions, but not budgets, contracts or other major expenditure, since the Department of Education is now a mayoral agency. The process leading up to one of these policy decisions, early in the regime's first term, suggests the limits of the PEP as an advisory body.

The chancellor and the mayor decided that the school system had been practicing a form of social promotion that advanced too many students not adequately prepared to perform effectively in succeeding grades. To end this practice, the chancellor proposed a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade retention policy, based on the results of standardized testing, with intensive summer school remediation offered to students whose test scores indicated insufficient skills development. (An appeals process allowed local practitioners to present portfolios of student work

as evidence that test score results did not accurately represent these students' academic capacity.)

Much of the city's education community objected, given more than a half-century of research demonstrating that such retention programs produced little positive effects on students' subsequent academic progress, and a plethora of negative effects.<sup>5</sup> But the mayor and the chancellor rebuffed all objections and scheduled a vote on the retention policy at an upcoming PEP meeting. After a majority of the PEP members indicated that they would oppose the retention policy, the mayor removed three of his PEP member appointees on the evening of the vote, and replaced them with new members who supported his policy.<sup>6</sup>

#### Reform as Centralization

Children First introduced an organizational restructuring and a K-12 instructional intervention, both systemic in scale and scope. The restructuring abolished the community school districts as governance units and administrative agencies. To replace them, Children First created ten large geographic regions designed solely as administrative units, with no parent or citizen governance, participation or accountability functions. Each region included some 100 – 150 schools grouped into networks, and each network of 10 or more schools was supervised and supported by a Local Instructional Supervisor. The regions were administered by Regional Instructional Superintendents and supporting staff, and were focused solely on instructional management. A separate structure, administered by six Regional Operations Centers, handled operations functions,

while another administrative structure focused on student and family support services.<sup>7</sup>

This separation of instruction from operations and support functions, which had previously been integrated in the community school districts, was characterized as a design flaw by many of the city's education policymakers. Although the purpose was to foster an unimpeded concentration on instruction, critics feared that separating instruction from operations and support would complicate citywide and regional management, and increase the burdens of school-level administrators forced to deal with separate systems.

Children First's instructional interventions involved both curriculum and pedagogy. The initiative imposed a single reading curriculum, Balanced Literacy, and a single math curriculum, Everyday Math, on all the system's schools. (The school system was forced to add a phonics-based program to the reading curriculum by the federal Department of Education, which threatened to withhold the city's share of Reading First funds if a phonics component was not included.) These universal reading and math curricula were mandated to standardize instruction throughout the system, to provide a base of curricular constancy to deal with high incidences of within-system student mobility, and to provide a common curriculum platform from which to improve teaching and learning.<sup>8</sup>

To help teachers effectively teach the new curricula, Children First provided reading and math coaches in every school. These coaches were quickly trained to model classroom lessons, observe teachers and help them improve their classroom practice, design and lead professional development sessions,

and intervene to help meet specific teacher needs. In addition to the coaches, Children First also recruited, quickly trained and placed parent coordinators in all the system's schools. These coordinators were to help parents support their children's learning, at home and at school, and to increase parental involvement in schooling functions.

The initial 3<sup>rd</sup> grade program designed to limit social promotion and improve students' skills was buttressed, across the succeeding years, by 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and eventually 8<sup>th</sup> grade retention programs. These multiple grade-level programs, along with the mandated curricula and the provision of coaches in every school, centralized instructional approaches and stiffened accountability measures across the system. This centralized reform approach was complemented by the imposition of measures to enhance student and teacher safety in selected high schools.

Rudolph Giuliani, the previous mayor, had installed uniformed police officers throughout the system's schools, had placed the school safety officers under the control of the city's police department, and had installed metal detectors at the entrances to many high schools, and even some middle schools.<sup>9</sup> Using data about school-level incidents collected through a process patterned after the police department's famous Comstat program, the Bloomberg-Klein regime identified a dozen high schools as prime candidates for even more enhanced security measures. These supposedly high risk schools were labeled Impact Schools, and were assigned additional police officers and an expansion of the regular security procedures – metal detectors at all entries,

hall sweeps, police surveillance during class changes – previously imposed on many of the system’s large, poorly performing high schools. During the Bloomberg regime’s second term, these security procedures were enhanced by periodic random screening visits.

As another centralizing initiative, Children First created a citywide Leadership Academy to recruit, train, place and support new principals and other leaders for the city system. Given a steep principal retirement rate, the school system was forced to struggle annually to identify and assign effective school-level leadership. Funded by private and foundation sources, the Leadership Academy has inducted more than 60 practitioners each year since 2004, and put them through a 15-month cycle of instruction and internship designed to produce successful school leadership.<sup>10</sup>

Another Children First initiative targeted the city’s poorly performing high school sector. With support from the Carnegie Corporation, the Open Society Institute, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the city’s public education fund, New Visions for Public Schools, had launched the New Century Schools Initiative in 2000 to create some 70 small high schools of choice. This effort preceded Children First; in the early 1990s, New York City had become the epicenter of the national small schools movement, and almost 100 small high schools had been created in the city between 1993 and 2000.

The Bloomberg-Klein administration embraced this effort to reduce the scale of high schools, to focus more effectively on individual student academic capacity and needs, and to create a portfolio of options to increase the range of

high school choice. Starting new small high schools of choice quickly became a central focus of Children First; from 2002 through 2008, the regime has initiated almost 250 such schools.<sup>11</sup> The administration also launched a Multiple Pathways initiative to identify categories of low achieving high school students, such as those overage for grade or those whose pace of credit accumulation put them at risk for dropping out. This initiative developed new forms of high school organization – transfer high schools and Young Adult Borough Centers – that combine remediation with advancement to help these students progress towards graduation.<sup>12</sup>

This burst of small high school creation was accompanied by an effort to close, restructure and replace several large, poorly performing neighborhood high schools. In the city's highly stratified high school system, large schools serving disadvantaged neighborhoods had become the default options in the high school choice process. These large schools served students who chose not to select any high schools, or chose only their neighborhood high school, or were assigned to their neighborhood high school after being rejected by all the schools they selected. These neighborhood high schools were often far too large, overcrowded, and poorly resourced. Their graduation rates were often abysmally low; Taft High School, for example, a neighborhood school in the Bronx, had a cohort graduation rate of 18% for the class of 2006. Moreover, school climate was frequently problematic in these schools, and several were designated Impact Schools in the mayor's safety initiative. By 2008, Children First had restructured more than twenty of these neighborhood high schools. The Bloomberg-Klein

regime also advocated for and supported the creation of charter schools, and established citywide offices to aid and support the development of both small schools and charter schools.

These centralizing initiatives – a universal reading and math curriculum, coaches in every school, parent coordinators, retention programs in half the grades preceding high school, a safety campaign based on order management, a recruitment and training program to prepare new principals, and an expansion of small high schools of choice – were the key components of Children First. Combined with the systemic restructuring that created 10 new administrative regions and separated instruction from operations, the comprehensiveness and scope of Children First affected teaching and learning in every school, and altered operations and support functions across the system.

#### Reform as Corporate Implementation

Children First was not only a highly centralized reform; it also imposed a highly corporate model of governance and management on the city school system. As the mayor observed: “Companies in the end need direction, not discussion. ... You can’t run governments or companies successfully by polling or asking for suggestions. Someone must have a vision and take the others along, not the reverse.”<sup>13</sup> Or, as Klein indicated, “You can’t do reform by plebiscite; it leads to the paralysis of politics.”<sup>14</sup>

Teachers, students, or parents had little input into the processes through which Children First was implemented. Cabinet members, often aided by cadres of consultants, designed most of the later new initiatives. The school system’s

practitioners, and its parent, student and community constituencies, usually learned about these initiatives through media coverage, press conferences, and web-site releases.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the new regime tended to treat anyone connected to what the mayor and the chancellor constantly characterized as the old, broken system, with indifference, if not contempt. Previous experience, knowledge and expertise were devalued as ineffective modes of operation that had contributed to academic failure; the regime made no effort to differentiate previous effective from ineffective practice. Community school districts that had pioneered choice, for example, or school-based budgeting, or varieties of instructional improvement, were lumped together with ineffective districts as accomplices in dysfunction.

This devaluation of school and system-level experience generated a significant exodus of principals, administrators, mid-level and eventually high-level system leadership. By late in the mayor's second term of office, few members of the chancellor's cabinet could claim any significant school or school system experience. The management layers below the cabinet included lawyers, organizational development and management experts, and lots of MBAs, but relatively few educators.<sup>16</sup>

### The Marginalization of the Teachers' Union

The regime's treatment of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the citywide teachers' union, represents another significant break with the past. Since the UFT's successful struggle against community control, and its key role

in helping forge the decentralization compromise that followed, the teachers' union has wielded major power in school system policy-making. During many schooling regimes, the union has operated as a kind of shadow government, consulted on all major issues and exercising unofficial but decisive veto power over many proposals and appointments. In contrast, the UFT was sidelined during the design phase of Children First, and has been increasingly marginalized throughout its implementation.<sup>17</sup>

Mayor Bloomberg and Randi Weingarten, the president of the UFT, reached agreement on what many observers defined as a generous citywide teachers' contract in October, 2005, just a month before the mayoral election in which Bloomberg handily won his second term. This successful negotiation, which included the nullification of the seniority transfer option for teachers, effectively neutralized the UFT's electoral role.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in the following year, the mayor and the union chief negotiated a settlement even more generous to teachers' wages, 11 months before the contract was set to expire.<sup>19</sup> Yet In spite of these successes, the mayor and the chancellor have tended to challenge, antagonize and dismiss the union far more than they have attempted to collaborate with it. Mayor Bloomberg once characterized the UFT as "exactly the NRA," equating the teachers' union with the National Rifle Association because of the NRA's attacks on the mayor's support for gun control.<sup>20</sup> In a significant break with past practice, the mayor has governed without the UFT as an ally, and has gone a long way towards polarizing the union as a regime enemy.

## The Mayor's Alliances

Using his own funds, Mayor Bloomberg was twice elected as a Republican in an overwhelmingly Democratic city. Because his regime was not beholden to the coalitions of political clubs, public sector unions and community organizations that had supported past Democratic administrations, Bloomberg has been able to maintain an unprecedented span of political independence throughout his mayoralty.<sup>21</sup>

But his regime has not proceeded without allies. Bloomberg built key relationships with sectors of the city's corporate leadership, and particularly with the financial industry, real estate developers, and the city's large insurance and communications technology sectors. The Mayor has increasingly relied on corporate leaders to help evolve his education initiatives. He appointed Richard Parsons, CEO of Time-Warner, as the chairman of the board of the Leadership Academy during his first term. Early in the Mayor's second term, Christopher Cerf, formerly the CEO of the Edison Corporation, joined the chancellor's cabinet as head of External Affairs and Human Capital.<sup>22</sup>

One of Bloomberg's most important linkages was with the New York City Partnership, an organization of corporate elites founded by David Rockefeller in 1979 that merged with the city's Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2002, and became the Partnership for New York City. Although many of the city's national headquarters firms and leading corporations have remained aloof from educational involvement, the Partnership has championed several public school improvement interventions. Kathy Wylde, the Partnership's leader, built a

collaboration with the Bloomberg-Klein regime in which the Partnership provided key supports, as well as a consistent forum through which the regime's educational philosophy and intervention strategies reached a wide audience of influential corporate and business elites.<sup>23</sup>

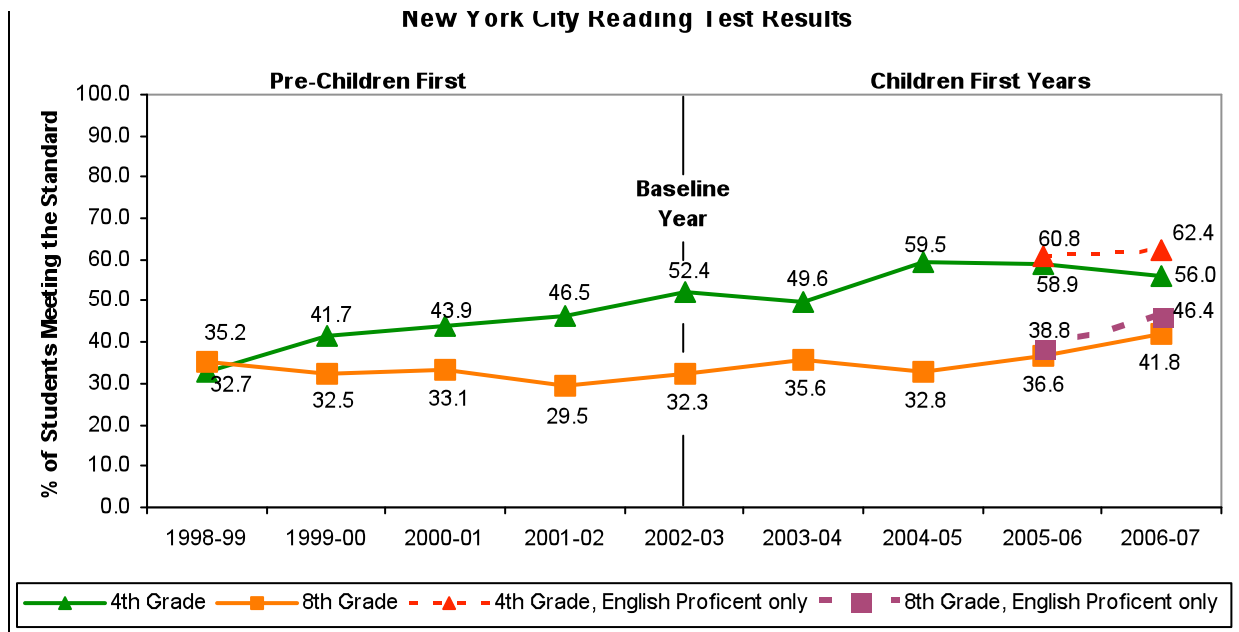
Because, through Mayor Bloomberg's first term, the Children First reforms were relatively uncontested, the mayor was able to implement a major reorganization of the nation's largest school system in a very short time. After most of Bloomberg's second term has been completed, what can be said about the results of the Children First reforms? Has this massive systemic restructuring significantly improved the academic outcomes of the city's public school students?

#### The Outcomes of Children First

From their reform's inception, the mayor and the chancellor have targeted standardized test scores, and high school graduation and dropout rates, as the key indicators on which the progress of their systemic restructuring should be judged. (The Mayor's Management Report has consistently listed these outcomes at the top of its list of critical objectives.) Therefore the following analyses concentrate on those indicators. For test scores, we focus on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math results, because in these grades the city and the state have used the same tests since 1998-99. (The following discussion does not engage the critical question of whether test scores, as well as graduation and dropout rates, are adequate, sufficient, or reliable indicators of the quality of education produced by the Children First reforms. Since the Bloomberg-Klein

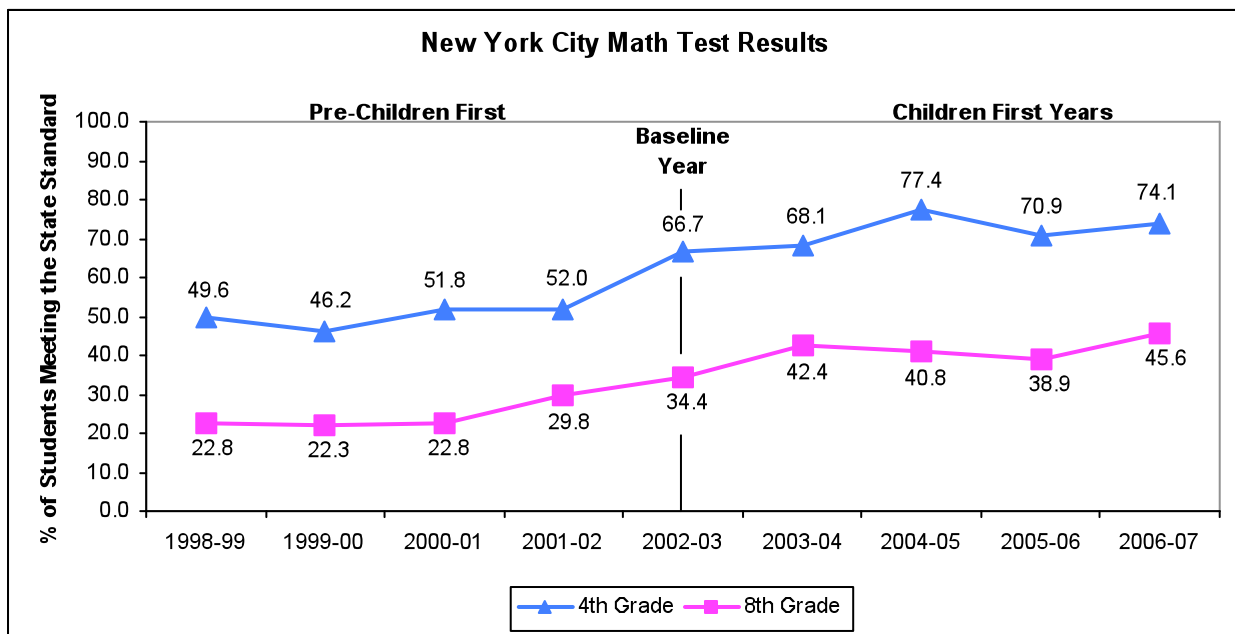
regime has consistently dismissed concerns about the appropriateness of testing as the key measure of student learning, the following analyses focus solely on the indicators the regime has privileged.)

Mayor Bloomberg was elected in 2001, and took office in January 2002. In June of 2002, the New York State legislature voted to confer sole governance authority for the New York City schools on the city's mayor. In the summer of 2002, Bloomberg appointed Joel Klein as Chancellor, and that fall Chancellor Klein initiated the planning phase of Children First. Since that planning process continued through January, 2003, and implementation of Children First's reforms began the following September, 2003, the first academic year that the outcomes of Children First can reasonably be assessed is the 2003-04 school year. Therefore, in the analyses that follow, we use the 2002-03 school year, the year of planning for Children First, as our baseline year, and the 2003-04 year as the first year of Children First's outcomes.



Source: New York City Department of Education, Results of the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 New York State Reading Test.

Note: 2006-2007 test results include English Language Learners who have attended school in the US for more than one year, per the updated New York State Education Department testing policy.



Source: New York City Department of Education, Results of the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 New York State Math Test.

In 2003-04, the first year of Children First's implementation, 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading test outcomes were essentially flat when compared to the baseline year's results. Though the city's 4<sup>th</sup> grade math outcomes showed only minimal

gain, 8<sup>th</sup> grade math registered a substantial increase from the baseline year. Such mixed outcomes are predictable in a period of major structural change. Indeed, many policymakers were relieved because they had feared the sharp indicator drop that often results from the destabilizing effects of systemic reform.

Because the 2004-05 school year registered sharp increases in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math, the mayor and the chancellor trumpeted these outcomes as demonstrating that the Children First reforms were succeeding. But closer analysis indicates more complexity. The 2004-05 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores increased throughout New York State, and at a steeper rate in the state's other urban areas than in New York City. This phenomenon led several experts to suggest that test construction may have played some role in the score increases.<sup>24</sup>

But test scores in 8<sup>th</sup> grade did not increase in either reading or math on the 2004-05 state tests; instead, they actually dropped. The middle grades have been a critical problem area in the city school system for decades, and middle grades' test scores had been flat since the early 1990s. The 2004-05 results did not alter that pattern.

Test scores dropped in 2005-06, except for 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, which showed a small increase. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading scores inched back a bit, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores fell sharply, and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade math scores decreased slightly.

For 2006-07, the results were complicated by a statewide policy change that forced the city to include those students categorized as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the testing results. Since some 30,000 ELLs had previously

not been required to take the reading tests, the chancellor argued that their inclusion had inappropriately lowered the 2006-07 reading scores, and the DOE released the reading test results in two versions -- all students (including ELLs) and English proficient students only.

For 2006-07, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading results for all students dropped slightly when compared to the previous year. When only English proficient students were considered, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading results increased slightly. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading results showed a clear increase when all students were considered, and an even sharper increase for English proficient students only. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math results also showed clear increases.

What do these results suggest about the effectiveness of the Children First reforms? One way to answer that question is to view the results across time, and assess the longer-term pattern of gain or loss. Across the four-year span that starts with the 2002-3 baseline year and then proceeds from 2003-4 (the year of Children First's implementation) to 2006-07, 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading rose from 53% of all students reaching the proficient or advanced levels, to 56% (or 62% when only English proficient students are included), a 3% or 9% increase. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading rose from 32% scoring at proficient and advanced to almost 42% (or 46% when only English proficient students were included) a 10% or 14% increase. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade math scores increased from almost 67% to 74%, a 7% gain, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math scores rose from 34% to 46%, a 12% increase.

Pre-Children First 1998-2002		Children First 2003-2007	
	All Students (% change)	All Students (% change)	English Proficient Only (% change)
<b>Reading</b>			
4th Grade	19.7	3.6	10
8th Grade	-2.9	9.5	14.1
<b>Math</b>			
4th Grade	17.1	7.4	-
8th Grade	11.6	11.2	-

Source: New York City Department of Education, Results of the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 New York State Reading and Math Tests.

These results seem to represent substantial improvements. But if we compare these longitudinal test score results to the results of the four years prior to Children First’s implementation, both reading and math increases from 1998-99 to the baseline year of 2002-03 were mostly higher. The percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in those four years rose 20 percentage points in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, and 17 percentage points in 4<sup>th</sup> grade math. The 1999-2003 scores stayed flat in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading (scores actually decreased by 3%), but rose 12 percentage points in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math. Thus only in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading did the Children First test scores achieve significant gain over the previous four years’ performance.

These patterns suggest that the pre-Children First school system was on a rising outcomes trajectory, probably as a result of the systemic reforms implemented by the regime of Chancellor Rudy Crew. The Children First reforms may simply have continued the improvement trajectory that previous administrations had initiated, rather than produced the dramatic improvement

gains that the mayor and the chancellor have consistently announced and celebrated.

Another way to assess the extent of Children First's test score improvement is to examine comparable data from federal assessments. When the Children First outcomes are examined from the perspective of the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the results provide little support for claims of Children First's success. The TUDA testing shows no gains in New York City's assessment results from 2003 to 2007, the years of Children First's implementation, except for 4<sup>th</sup> grade Math, which rose by almost 12 percentage points. For 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math, New York City registered no gains in the TUDA testing.

Moreover, when New York City's TUDA results are compared to the outcomes of the other participating cities, New York actually lost ground across the Children First years.

New York City's Rank on Fourth-Grade Reading among NAEP Cities, 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 (% at or above basic)

RANK	2002-2003	2006-2007
1	Charlotte	Charlotte
<b>2</b>	<b>New York City</b>	<b>New York City</b>
3	San Diego	San Diego
4	Boston	Boston
5	Houston	Houston
6	Chicago	Atlanta
7	Atlanta	Chicago
8	Cleveland	Cleveland
9	Los Angeles	Washington, DC
10	Washington, DC	Los Angeles

New York City's Rank on Fourth-Grade Math among NAEP Cities, 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 (% at or above basic)

RANK	2002-2003	2006-2007
1	Charlotte	Charlotte
2	Houston	Houston
<b>3</b>	<b>New York City</b>	<b>New York City</b>
4	San Diego	Boston
5	Boston	San Diego
6	Los Angeles	Atlanta
7	Cleveland	Los Angeles
8	Atlanta	Chicago
9	Chicago	Cleveland
10	Washington, DC	Washington, DC

New York City's Rank on Eighth-Grade Reading among NAEP Cities, 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 (% at or above basic)

RANK	2002-2003	2006-2007
1	Charlotte	Charlotte
<b>2</b>	<b>New York City</b>	Boston
3	Boston	Houston
4	San Diego	Chicago
5	Chicago	San Diego
<b>6</b>	Houston	<b>New York City</b>
7	Cleveland	Cleveland
8	Atlanta	Atlanta
9	Washington, DC	Los Angeles
10	Los Angeles	Washington, DC

New York City's Rank on Eighth-Grade Math among NAEP Cities, 2002-2003 to 2006-2007 (% at or above basic)

RANK	2002-2003	2006-2007
1	Charlotte	Charlotte
<b>2</b>	<b>New York City</b>	Boston
3	San Diego	Houston
4	Houston	San Diego
<b>5</b>	Boston	<b>New York City</b>
6	Chicago	Chicago
7	Cleveland	Cleveland
8	Los Angeles	Los Angeles
9	Atlanta	Atlanta
10	Washington, DC	Washington, DC

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The Nation's Report Card: 2007 Trial Urban District Assessments in Reading and Math

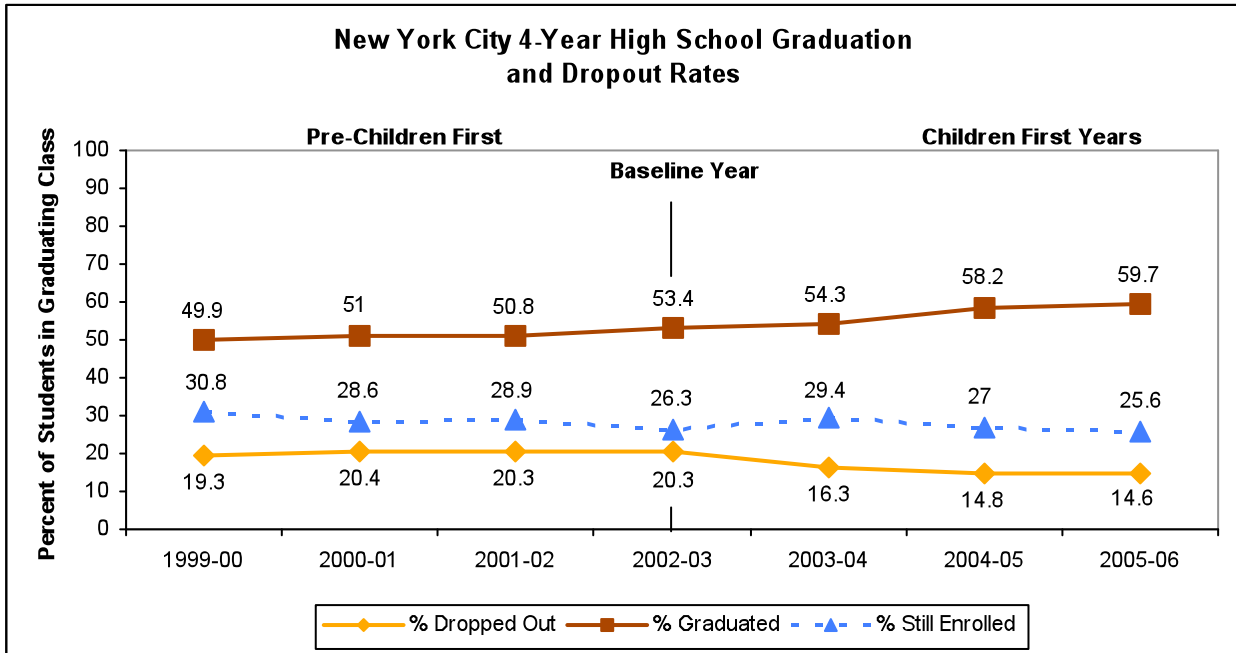
Note: Austin is not represented because it did not participate in the 2002-2003 tests.

New York City's 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math ranks remained the same across the Children First years, but the city's 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math ranks declined substantially.

What overall conclusions can be drawn from this testing evidence? When the outcomes of Children First's state test scores over time are compared with similar longitudinal outcomes in the years before Children.First, it becomes difficult to separate Children First's gains from the gains achieved by the previous regimes. Thus the proclamations of unqualified success, by the mayor, the

chancellor, and their adherents, seem somewhat hollow. When the TUDA outcomes of Children First are examined, both across time and against the outcomes of other cities participating in this NAEP experiment, it becomes even more difficult to substantiate any claims of success for the Children First effort. If test score gains are the critical measure of Children First's effectiveness, the most that can be claimed is that on state testing, the Children First reforms continued the improvement trajectory established by previous reforms. On national testing, the TUDA outcomes do not support claims for the success of the Children First reforms; they show no evidence of performance improvement for New York City except in 8<sup>th</sup> grade Math. <sup>25</sup>

Assessing the graduation rate is more problematic, in part because of the time lag in releasing high school outcomes. The 2004 graduating class, for instance, was the first class to graduate under Children First, yet that class's students experienced only one year of Children First's restructuring. Neither the 2005 nor 2006 graduating classes spent their full four years in high school under Children First; thus their graduation outcomes are probably a result of both Children First and the efforts of previous regimes. (The 2007 graduation outcomes had not been released at this writing.)



Source: New York City Board of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability, *The Class of 2006 Four-Year Longitudinal and 2005-2006 Event Dropout Reports*

Note: Beginning with the Class of 2004, dropout statistics reflect students who dropped out by June 30<sup>th</sup> of their fourth year.

The Board of Regents' graduation requirements, based on cut scores in a series of academic subjects, were also completing their phase-in during this period, complicating the graduation analysis even more. Finally, three components need to be analyzed when considering high school performance: the graduation or four-year cohort rate, the dropout rate, and the rate of students still enrolled beyond the fourth year. (Traditionally in New York City, approximately half those students ultimately graduate.)

As the graph above indicates, the 2004 four-year graduation rate inched up from the previous year, the dropout rate fell, and the stay-in-school rate increased. (In that year the city Department of Education instituted a new policy that required exit interviews with all students intending to leave school before

graduating, and the Department indicated that “the interview process may delay many students” from dropping out.)<sup>26</sup>

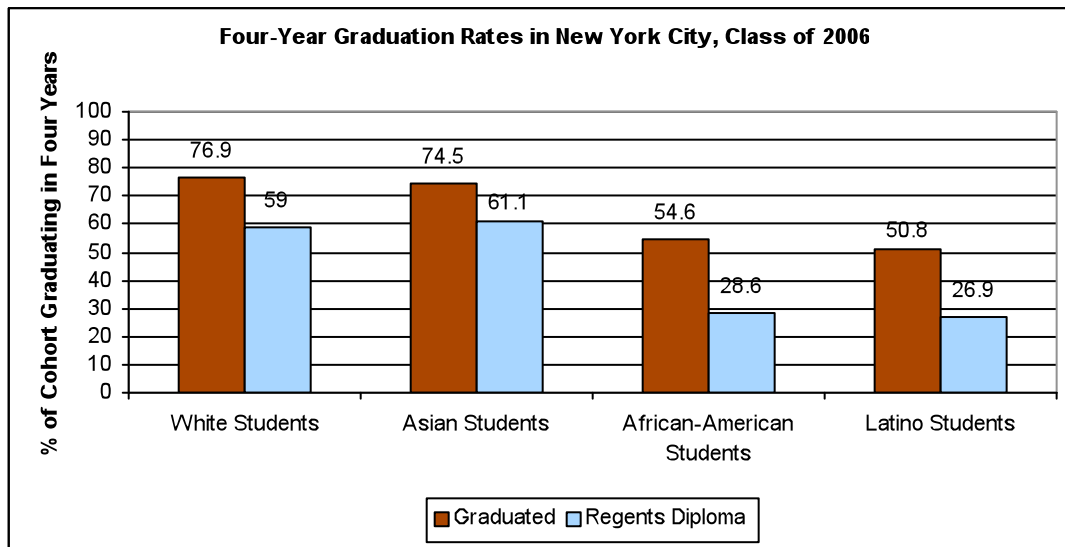
The 2005 graduation rate increased almost 4%, while the dropout rate and the stay-in-school rate fell slightly. In 2006, the graduation rate increased slightly, the dropout rate remained basically flat, and the stay-in-school rate again declined.

Thus, across the three graduating classes since Children First was implemented, the graduation rate rose more than 5%, the dropout rate fell by almost 2%, and the stay-in-school rate fell by almost 4%. These increases represent important gains, and it is likely that the regime’s commitment to small high school creation, as well to as its Multiple Pathways initiative, have contributed to these outcomes.<sup>27</sup>

But an examination of the pattern of achievement from the class of 2000 to the class of 2003, the three classes prior to the implementation of Children First, puts these outcomes in perspective. In that previous time-span, graduation rates rose almost 4%, dropout rates rose 1%, and stay-in-school rates declined by 5%. The difference between the three cohorts of high school outcomes under Children First and the outcomes of the previous three cohorts seems quite minimal.

Recent graduation data disaggregated by race/ethnicity indicate that, while approximately 75% of white and Asian students graduate, only approximately 50% of African-American and Latino students do. Worse, less than

30% of African-American and Latino students graduate with a Regents diploma, the minimal requirement for successful matriculation in higher education.



Source: New York City Department of Education, Summary of New York City Class of 2006 Graduation Rates, May 2007

Thus the high school outcomes for Children First seem, on closer examination, to be far less of an advance over past results than the mayor and the chancellor have consistently proclaimed. Several systemic practices suggest even more complexity. Two citywide advocacy organizations published a study demonstrating that the percentage of English Language Learners was significantly lower in the small high school sector, and argued that city education policy allowed the new small high schools to screen out students whose first language was not English.<sup>28</sup> The pace of small high school creation has outrun the availability of school space, and new schools are often shoehorned into inappropriate existing space.<sup>29</sup> The press of punitive discipline and order management in the high school sector has generated increasing student protest,

and several student walkouts have occurred across recent years in the most severely impacted schools.<sup>30</sup>

When all the factors are considered, it is difficult to distinguish Children First's pattern of student achievement from the outcomes of the years preceding the mayor and the chancellor's unprecedented restructuring effort. Thus it is hard to legitimate the mayor and the chancellor's claims for the success of the Children First reforms.

### The Next Level of Reform

In the summer of 2006, the chancellor announced the creation of a virtual zone of empowerment schools, in which some 330 selected schools would operate outside their regions and be freed from bureaucratic requirements, in exchange for maintaining superior achievement outcomes.<sup>31</sup> Some six months later, the chancellor amplified this shift to decentralization by defining the initial Children First effort as having "built the strong foundation they [our schools] need – and [now we] are prepared to advance our reforms to the next level."<sup>32</sup>

In this next level, the regional structures were eliminated, as were the Regional Operations Centers. School networks and Local Instructional Supervisors were also abolished. In the chancellor's words, "we are creating a competitive market for support, in which schools will be able to make the smart decisions that help students make real academic progress."<sup>33</sup> The chancellor characterized the newest restructuring effort as "fundamentally transforming our school system from one rooted in compliance and top-down decision-making into

one that transforms principals into CEOs – and then holds them accountable for helping all students make progress.”<sup>34</sup>

These next-level reforms took many of the city’s educational practitioners and observers by surprise. Since the mayor and the chancellor’s constant efforts to characterize the Children First reforms as an unparalleled success had for the most part convinced, or at the least silenced, the city’s educational constituencies, the necessity for a new reform initiative seemed unclear. Some critics suggested that the regime had, from its inception, intended to decentralize and ultimately privatize the school system. Others wondered whether the new reforms represented the regime’s attempt to so permanently balkanize and fragment the school system so that whatever new mayoral regime was elected in 2009 would be unable to restore it.

At this writing, it is still unclear why the mayor and the chancellor have essentially undone the structural reforms that Children First initiated, and launched such a radical decentralizing effort.<sup>35</sup> Although the Bloomberg-Klein regime has consistently championed data-driven decision-making, and has utilized both the system’s internal data capacity and external consultants to produce reams of analysis, no data was produced to demonstrate that the Children First reforms had reached their limits, and that a dramatic shift in reform priorities was necessary. Nor were analyses produced that demonstrated the limits of the regional structures, the Local Instructional Supervisors, or their networks of schools. Although the Mayor’s new promotional policies for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>,

7<sup>th</sup> and eventually 8<sup>th</sup> grade were accompanied by a promise to implement a rigorous external evaluation, no evaluation study has ever appeared.

It may be that, in spite of their triumphalist rhetoric, the mayor and the chancellor had become convinced that the Children First reforms were producing only modest improvements. Or the national press for competitive, market-driven reforms such as choice, autonomy and empowerment may have influenced the mayor and the chancellor to decide that the nation's largest school system was an appropriate demonstration site. Given the once-incessant rumors of Bloomberg's interest in running for president, his advisors may have decided that a tilt toward conservative school reform policies would play well in the national electoral arena. Whatever the reasons, in January, 2007, five years after Bloomberg first took office, the mayor and the chancellor announced a dramatic reform shift that terminated the Children First reforms and radically decentralized the school system. Principals would now be the key reform actors, and schools would be supported by public and private organizations, rather than by the central administration.

Each school was provided three options to secure the supports necessary to produce significant academic progress. Schools could join the new Empowerment Zone. Schools could link with an external Partner Support Organization, primarily non-profit intermediaries, who would advise and counsel the principal and provide or broker whatever services the school needed. Or schools could join one of the four internal, system-structured Learning Support Organizations, which would provide services and supports to individual member

schools. Each of the four Learning Support Organizations was directed by a former Regional Superintendent.<sup>36</sup>

The chancellor also announced a new accountability system. Schools would be graded from A-F, based on a series of outcome measures, primarily test scores. Both absolute scores (annual results) and longitudinal gain scores, a value-added measure, would be used, and all scores would be disaggregated by race and poverty. Parent, teacher, and student surveys would be administered, and the results would be integrated into the schools' grading as well. Bonuses would be distributed to the principals of successful and improving schools, the principals of poorly performing schools would face dismissal, and chronically failing schools would face sanctions, and ultimately, closure.

The chancellor also announced a more rigorous process for awarding tenure to teachers, and a weighted student funding formula that would allocate money to schools based on a fixed per-student amount, with additional weightings for poverty, ELL or special education status.

#### Opposition to the Second Phase of Children First

Schooling constituencies had been roiled during the first semester of the 2006-07 year, initially because of a system-wide ban on students carrying cell-phones in schools. Then a consolidation of bus routes, instituted as a cost-saving measure by a prominent national consulting firm hired by the chancellor without competitive bidding, resulted in thousands of children being left at bus-pickup stops, spending far more time than usual on new bus routes, or being forced to take public transportation.<sup>37</sup> Coming on the heels of these problematic

interventions, the chancellor's new reform plan generated a citywide outcry. Even some of the city's key media, normally supportive of the chancellor, questioned the need for yet another restructuring. *The New York Times* editorialized that "reforms that affect the lives of more than a million schoolchildren should not be made in haste or on the basis of consultants' hunches," and asked city and state elected officials to scrutinize and modify the reforms "where necessary."<sup>38</sup> Eventually, sufficient opposition emerged to force the chancellor and the mayor to modify, but not abandon, their new restructuring plans.

Before the decentralizing phase of the regime's restructuring had completed its first year, the mayor introduced a citywide budget cut to reduce expenditures to help the city absorb the tax revenue losses caused by the national collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market. All the city's public schools were assessed a 1.75% cut in funding in February, 2008, at the start of the second semester. Days later principals found that their school budgets had been cut during the middle of the night. Another storm of protest arose in response, particularly to the difficulty of trying to absorb cuts inflicted in the middle of the school year. The UFT and the CSA, the citywide administrators' union, scheduled a citywide protest, and parent and student groups throughout the city signaled their readiness to join the protest actions.

The budget cuts, imposed without any form of consultation, indicate something of both the absolute span of mayoral control and the limits of the decentralizing reforms that comprise the second round of regime reforms. Clearly, when it comes to budget cuts, not only teachers, students and parents,

but the 1,500 principals-as-CEOs, are equally helpless. But both the budget cuts and the newest reforms are being inserted into an unsettled political terrain. The decentralizing reforms were implemented in September 2007, the beginning of the final two years of the current regime. Because the next mayoral election takes place in November 2009, and because Bloomberg is term-limited, a new mayor, and presumably a new chancellor, will lead the city and the school system beginning in 2010, and could jettison many of the reform's efforts.

Moreover, the state law granting the mayor sole governance of the city school system sunsets in spring, 2009, and the state legislature must then decide to renew, revise, or terminate mayoral control. There will be limited opportunity to implement the latest round of decentralizing reforms before the mayoral electoral campaign begins, and even less opportunity to generate the student achievement outcomes that might tell us something about the effectiveness of this new round of restructuring.

### What the New Reforms Represent

The new reforms represent a reversal of the centralizing thrust of the initial Children First initiative. They eliminate almost all the central administrative structure, as well as the 10 regions. They make principals and schools dependent on a mix of decentralized public and private provision of critical support services. Accountability remains the only centralized function; the mayor and the chancellor have moved to create the "competitive market for support" they may always have intended. Whether these reforms are intended as preparation for more extensive privatization, or as an effort to permanently

fragment the school system, is currently unclear. What is clear is that the Bloomberg regime has transformed the city's public education system from an ineffective blend of centralization and decentralization to a radically decentered system in which individual school principals, supported by a mix of public and private provision, are anointed as the key drivers of all academic improvement efforts.

Because the regime has successfully defined test scores and graduation outcomes as the only relevant metrics, citywide discussion of Children First's accomplishments has been very narrowly framed. Little attention has been paid to the reduction in curriculum, particularly in science, social studies, the arts, even physical education, that has resulted from the expansion of diagnostic testing and test preparation in elementary and middle schools. The traditional concentration of experienced teachers in advantaged schools, which leaves low-performing schools serving poor students of color vulnerable to a constant churning of inexperienced teaching staffs, has not been changed by the mayor's reforms. Too little consideration has focused on the instructional and support needs of the school system's English Language Learners and students with disabilities, who comprise significant sectors of the city's students.

Finally, the Bloomberg-Klein regime's eclipse of student, parent and citizen participation has terminated any public role in what is arguably the city's most important public sector service, which prepares succeeding generations for career success, individual fulfillment and effective participation in the citizenship processes that shape the city and the nation. In pursuit of radical change, the

Bloomberg regime has replaced a partial and ineffective form of democratic governance of schooling with a corporate management effort that transforms students, parents and community residents into clients and consumers. The final years of the Bloomberg regime will generate a citywide dialogue about whether the results of this effort justify that reduction, and will ultimately determine whether mayoral control is extended, modified or terminated.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Specify this once Nancy Lederman's paper defines role of PEP and its relationship to some concept of a central board.
- <sup>2</sup> Perez-Pena, "Albany Backs Mayoral Rule over Schools."
- <sup>3</sup> Abby Goodnough, "Fixing the Schools," *The New York Times*, 4 October 2002, p. B3.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in John Heilemann, "The Chancellor's Midterm Exam", *New York Magazine*, 29 October 2005.
- <sup>5</sup> *First, Do No Harm: A Response to the Proposed New York City Third Grade Retention Policy*, New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy and the Fordham University National Center for Schools and Communities, March 2004.
- <sup>6</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, "Bloomberg Wins in School Tests after Firing Foes," *The New York Times*, 16 March 2004, p. B1.
- <sup>7</sup> Abby Goodnough, "Vision for the Schools: Mayor Sets Plan for Tight Control over City Schools," *The New York Times*, 16 January 2003, p. B1.
- <sup>8</sup> Press Office, New York City Department of Education, "Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein Announces New, Coherent System-Wide Instructional Approach for Reading, Writing and Mathematics," 21 January 2003; David M. Herszenhorn, "For U.S. Aid, City Switches Reading Plan in 49 Schools," *The New York Times*, 7 January 2004, p. B1.
- <sup>9</sup> Randal C. Archibold, "Schools in Deal to Let Police Run Security," *The New York Times*, 29 August 1998, p. B1.
- <sup>10</sup> Abby Goodnough, "Plan to Lure Top Principals to Bad Schools," *The New York Times*, 12 December 2002, p. B1.
- <sup>11</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, "Gates Charity Gives \$51 Million to City to Start 67 New Schools," *The New York Times*, 18 September 2003, p. B1.
- <sup>12</sup> NYC Department of Education, "New York City DOE Multiple Pathways Strategy: Summary Findings," Presentation to the New York State Regents and Commissioner, State Education Department, 23 October 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> Michael Bloomberg, *Bloomberg by Bloomberg* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997).
- <sup>14</sup> Heileman, "The Chancellor's Midterm Exam"; "We should not have 'shared decision-making,'" Chancellor Klein was quoted in an article by LynNell Hancock, "School's Out," *The Nation*, 9 July 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> Sol Stringer, Manhattan Borough President, *Parents Dismissed: An Analysis of Manhattan's Community Education Councils and the New York City Department of Education's Role in Engaging Parent Leaders*, Office of the Manhattan Borough President, June, 2006.
- <sup>16</sup> Abby Goodnough, "Senior Officials Sent Packing in Overhaul of City's Schools," *The New York Times*, 29 January 2003, p B1.
- <sup>17</sup> Abby Goodnough, "Schools' Plan Loses an Ally," *The New York Times*, 15 May 2003, p. B1

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<sup>18</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, "City Reaches Tentative Deal with Teachers," *The New York Times*, 4 October 2005, p. A1.

<sup>19</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, "City Reaches Early Tentative Deal with Teachers' Union on Contract," *The New York Times*, 7 November 2006, p. B1.

<sup>20</sup> Nick Frayn, "Bloomberg's 'Disinterested' Agenda," [www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/respond/3440/](http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/respond/3440/), retrieved 5 June 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes*.

<sup>22</sup> Goodnough, "Plan to Lure Top Principals to Bad Schools."

<sup>23</sup> Kim Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present* (New York, The New Press, 2007) 198.

<sup>24</sup> Subsequently both *The New York Daily News* and the United Federation of Teachers conducted studies that purportedly demonstrated that the 2005 reading and math tests were less difficult than the preceding years' tests. See Erin Einhoen, "Daily News Report Spurs Joel Klein Action on Test Scores," *The New York Daily News*, 6 September 2007, p.2; Elizabeth Green, "State Guts Its Test of Reading," *The New York Sun*, 7 September 2007, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> **ADD TUDA FOOTNOTE.**

<sup>26</sup> New York City Department of Education, *Summary of New York City Class of 2006 Graduation Rates*, May 2007. The full text of the caution reads: "Beginning with the Class of 2004, dropout statistics reflect students who dropped out by June 30<sup>th</sup> of their fourth year. The reduction in dropout rates is, in part, due to a recent DOE policy requiring planning interviews for students above compulsory school age before schools are permitted to discharge them to dropout status. The interview process may delay many students from dropping out until their fifth, sixth, or seventh years, and those students will be captured when the DOE calculates final seven-year statistics for the class of 2006. However, many students may remain in high school and graduate. As with prior classes, the final determination of the Class of 2006 dropout and graduation rates will not be known for an additional three years."

<sup>27</sup> Julie Bosman, "Small Schools Are Ahead in Graduation," *The New York Times*, 30 June 2007, p B1. Several critics have charged that the student composition of the new, small high schools is significantly different from the large comprehensive high schools these new schools have replaced. For an example, see Leo Casey, "Tales of Two Schools, Large and Small," retrieved from <http://edwize.org/tales-of-two-schools-large-and-small>, 30 May 2007.

<sup>28</sup> The New York Immigration Coalition and Advocates for Children of New York, *So Many Schools, So Few Options: How Mayor Bloomberg's Small High School Reforms Deny Full Access to English Language Learners*, November 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Citywide Council on High Schools, New York City Department of Education, *Annual Report, 2005-2006*, November 2006.

<sup>30</sup> NESRI (National Economic and Social Rights Initiative), *Deprived of Dignity: Degrading Treatment and Abusive Discipline in New York City & Los Angeles Public Schools*, March 2007; the New York Civil Liberties Union and the American Civil Liberties Union, *Criminalizing the Classroom: The Over-Policing of New York City Schools*, March 2007.

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<sup>31</sup> Elissa Gootman, "Mayor to Give More Control to 331 Schools," *The New York Times*, 13 June 2006, p. B1.

<sup>32</sup> The New York City Department of Education website, "A Message from Chancellor Klein," May 2007. Retrieved 1 June 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Chancellor Joel Klein to New York City School Principals, 14 March 2007. Copy in author's possession.

<sup>35</sup> Professor Charles Kerchner, co-editor of this volume, provided excerpts from an interview with UCLA Professor William Ouchi that may provide some insight into the impetus for the 2007 restructuring initiative. According to Ouchi, who met with both the Mayor and the Chancellor in 2002, "when they first come into office and they inherit a floundering school [system], they try to grab all the handles of power so that they have control. ... [But] make no mistake, they are [now] going district-wide with true local school empowerment, control over budget, curriculum, staffing and schedule." Charles Kerchner interview with William Ouchi, August 31, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, "Restructuring of Schools Is Detailed By Chancellor," *The New York Times*, 17 April 2007, p. B6.

<sup>37</sup> Elissa Gootman, "School Bus Changes Sow Confusion," *The New York Times*, 30 January 2007, p B1; Elissa Gootman and David Herszenhorn, "Consultants Draw Fire in Bus Woes," *The New York Times*, 3 February 2007, p. B1.

<sup>38</sup> Editorial, *New York Times*, 29 January 2007, p. A19.