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Summary

The School District of Philadelphia is obviously in the midst of a crisis. Students are not performing up to expectations, the District is facing an unprecedented budget deficit, and relations between the School District and Harrisburg are worse than they have been in a long time. In response to these problems, a number of different organizations and individuals have convened task forces and drafted plans for reform, including City Council President John Street, State Representative Dwight Evans, State Senator Vincent Fumo, and State Representative John Perzel.

The Committee of Seventy, long an expert on school governance, continues to advocate for the kinds of reform we presented in our 1981 publication, *No School Today*. We still believe that revamping the governance structure of the District will facilitate significant scholastic improvements. Governance matters because it defines the rules by which change can be implemented. It is the School District governance constraints, in fact, which have severely limited Philadelphia's ability to improve its schools. Elected officials, primarily the Mayor, must be responsible for the performance of the School Board, the

Superintendent, and the schools. Currently, Philadelphia parents and voters looking to hold someone responsible for the failures of the schools find only various elected and appointed officials pointing their fingers at everyone else. No one person can be held directly accountable to the parents and voters for the performance of the School District. Consequently, our fifteen-year old recommendations are just as relevant today as when we first made them.

Governance matters because it defines the rules by which school reform can or cannot be implemented.

We strongly recommend that the Mayor be authorized and required to appoint a School Board and a Superintendent to terms concurrent with the Mayor's term; that the School District budget be prepared in conjunction with the budgets of other City departments that a separate fund within the

budget be established to protect education funds; and that the Mayor approve all collective bargaining agreements with the labor unions affiliated with the School District.

Some things *have* changed since the early 1980's. When we proposed our reform measures back then we couldn't really know how they would play out. Now we do. In 1995 the Illinois Legislature granted the Mayor of Chicago the same exact powers that we recommended, and they are working. The Mayor was authorized to appoint his own School Board and take sweeping control of the School District, and since then the changes have been dramatic. Test scores are up for students in math and reading, tough standards for graduation and grade promotion are being imposed, a huge budget deficit has almost been eliminated, and the worst performing schools have seen their teachers and principals fired and their administrative teams restructured. All in only two years.

Chicago's success demonstrates that a centralized system with a strong Mayor can improve an urban school district. The Committee of Seventy, therefore,

recommends that Philadelphia adopt Chicago's legislative measures almost word-for-word. Our sole reservation involves Chicago's elected local school councils, where petty politics and personal agendas often interfere with the management of the schools. Although we agree that involving parents and teachers is certainly important, electing them to do so may cause unnecessary problems. In fact, Philadelphia Superintendent of Schools David Hornbeck's pedagogical model *Children Achieving* specifically calls for voluntary parent and teacher groups to lead their schools in each school cluster. Since these groups are already in place and succeeding, it makes more sense to continue promoting the existing parent-teacher organizations, rather than risking the potential pitfalls of the elected councils. The experiences of additional cities bears this out, from Chicago to Boston to New York.

The City of Philadelphia can learn from the lessons of other urban districts and adopt school reforms that have proven successful. Conversely, the City should *not* consider measures that have failed, including governance models that have already been tested in Philadelphia. For instance, school boards previously had been elect-

ed in Philadelphia, but years of corruption and political interference lead to the creation of an appointed Board. Some interest has also recently been expressed in dividing the Philadelphia School District into smaller units to promote neighborhood involvement. This was tried in Philadelphia in the 19th century and failed miserably. With districts coinciding with election wards, schools were largely influenced by politicians, teachers had to pay "voluntary" contributions to campaigns, and education took a back seat to political ambitions. Ward-by-ward districts have not and will not work for Philadelphia.

**The Mayor must
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Since we now have a better sense of what reforms work best in urban school districts, Philadelphia needs to seize the moment and adopt the measures outlined above. We should require our elected officials to take responsibility for ensuring the future success of our public schools and to make someone ultimately accountable when they fail. Our children cannot wait, and neither will we.

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Where The Committee Of Seventy Stands

The School District of Philadelphia, by all accounts, is in crisis. Parents, teachers and legislators are all unsatisfied with students' accomplishments, with the District budget, and with the resources available at the classroom level across the City. In response to this plethora of problems, many groups have convened task forces and written reform initiatives. For example, the Philadelphia Education Summit was convened earlier this year by City Council President John Street, Mayor Ed Rendell, and Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition Director Ernest Jones, and it is expected to result in a master plan for change by the spring of 1998.

Superintendent David Hornbeck and his administrators have worked long and hard for three years to instill his *Children Achieving* pedagogical reform agenda, often against formidable odds and to some demonstrated success.

State Representative Dwight Evans has introduced legislation, expected to be heard by the Pennsylvania General Assembly this fall, that would radically affect

both pedagogy and governance in the District. State Representative John Perzel has created an urban education commission, headed by Temple University President Peter J. Liacouras, and University of Pittsburg Chancellor Mark Nordenberg, also scheduled to begin hearings in the fall.

Since his 1994 election, Governor Ridge has proposed several education initiatives that would impact the Philadelphia School District, including two failed school voucher programs and the recently enacted charter school legislation. Now, for the first time, parents, community activists, and others can establish a publicly funded school that may exclude many of the mandates governing the traditional public schools. State Senator Vincent Fumo has expressed interest in dividing the Philadelphia School District into smaller, multiple boards. An amendment he attached to the charter school bill regarding charter schools would have done just that, but was dropped at the eleventh hour.

None of the School District's problems are new. In fact, in the early 1980's when the

Committee of Seventy first studied school governance and drafted legislation to restructure the District, the problems we identified were the same as they are today. Fifteen years ago, Seventy argued that to improve the performance of students, teachers, and schools, a



line of accountability must be established according to which voters can hold elected officials responsible for the success or failure of the public schools.

In 1982 our ideas were incorporated in House Bill 2097, which proposed that the School District budget be prepared in conjunction with the budgets of other city departments, so that the City

Council could balance both school and city operating budgets; that a separate fund within the budget be established to protect education funds; that the Mayor approve collective bargaining agreements with the involved unions; that the Mayor appoint a Board of Education to terms concurrent with his or her own; and that the Mayor select a Superintendent to a term concurrent with his or her own.

Seventy's bill failed in the General Assembly by only one vote in 1982. Consequently, Philadelphia still has a system in which the Mayor comes to office with the Board of Education already filled by the Mayor's predecessors. Moreover, since the Board selects a Superintendent, this key player in the District may have little or no rapport with the Mayor. Finally, the Board of Education prepares the District budget, which is subject to the approval of the City Council, even though Council has no authority to amend it. Thus, every time a controversy arises regarding Philadelphia's public schools, each player involved can make an

almost legitimate claim that it was not his or her responsibility.

The Philadelphia Home Rule Charter and its 1965 Education Supplement structured the governance of the School District in this way in an attempt to "keep politics out" of education.

The School District has not been removed from politics. Instead, the public schools have been removed from the public.

This was a laudable goal, but it has backfired: under the current system it is primarily the voters who are kept out of education, since they have no means of making sure their opinions are heard regarding the schools, the Board, the

Superintendent, or the School District budget. If the School District fails, Philadelphia's voters have no elected officials to hold responsible.

Given the current situation of the Philadelphia School District, the Committee of Seventy again recommends governance changes similar to those we proposed in 1981. The reforms we currently advocate do not conflict with and are not intended to disrupt ongoing pedagogical reforms such as Philadelphia Superintendent David Hornbeck's *Children Achieving*. On the contrary, we support these initiatives. Unfortunately, we believe that no significant scholastic improvements will be possible now, or over the long haul, until the governance structure of the District is revamped. The people who make decisions and administer the District must be held responsible to the voters: from the School Board to the Superintendent, to City Council, to the Mayor. A clear line of accountability will mean that finger-pointing and passing-the-blame can end, and more scholastic reforms can finally take place.



How Did We Get Here?

Public education in the City of Philadelphia has had a long and controversial history, and almost all of the difficulties currently facing the School District were experienced in previous centuries. In fact, many developments in the early years of public education are remarkably similar to proposed reforms currently generating interest. The issues now being debated, like vouchers, state funding, elected local boards, and charter schools, all have arisen repeatedly in the 200 years of Philadelphia public schooling. If its history teaches anything, it is that the governance of the School District has a profound impact upon the quality of the education received by its students.

The original Pennsylvania Constitution of 1790 created a model for educating the children of the Commonwealth. Act VII of this document reads: "The legislature shall, as soon as conveniently may be, provide by law for the establishment throughout the state, in such manner that the poor may be taught gratis." Given today's fierce debates over financial responsibility for public education, it may come as no surprise that the Pennsylvania Legislature did not find it "convenient" to provide free education for some time. They encountered strong opposition from many religious groups who operated schools without the benefit of public dollars and from wealthy citi-

zens who were already paying for their children to attend private academies.

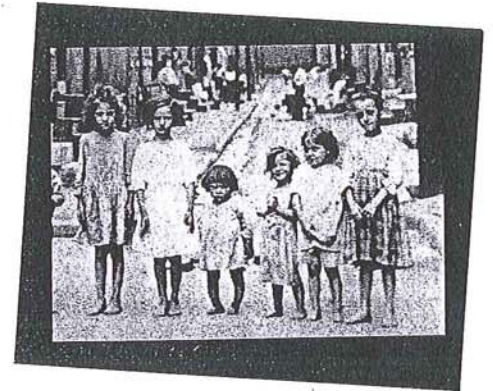
The 19th Century

In 1802, however, the Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted legislation for the City and County of Philadelphia that allowed poor children to attend private schools at the County's expense; essentially the currently controversial idea of school vouchers. Unfortunately, this provision required parents to legally declare themselves "paupers" in order for their children to be eligible. Few parents chose to accept this stigma and thus very few impoverished children actually received an education as a result of this Act.

In 1818, the Legislature passed another statute that established the first public school system in Pennsylvania. The "First School District" in Philadelphia was governed by a group called the Controllers of Public Schools, who were selected by local political leaders; the legislation provided for and funded the construction of schools and the appointment of teachers. Unlike earlier attempts, the First School District achieved relative success, educating over 4,000 students in its first two years.

A state-wide system of public schools to be funded by tax dollars and open to all children was

finally established in 1834 with the passage of the Free School Law. School districts were designated in every ward, township, and borough of the Commonwealth. In Philadelphia, each of the City's ten wards constituted an autonomous school district, and each was to be administered by an elected, twelve-member Board of Directors. In turn, each Board appointed one member of its group to serve on



the city-wide Board of Controllers for a one year term. Since election to the Board of Directors or appointment to the Board of Controllers resulted from political connections, many of their actions were not necessarily in the best interests of the students.

Under the Free School Law, public education exploded. In 1840, for instance, Philadelphia had 258,037 residents and 23,192 children enrolled in public school. The annual budget for public schools was \$125,740, so

approximately \$5.40 was spent on each student per year. By 1850, the population had swelled to 408,762; the number of students had more than doubled to 48,056, and the annual school budget was \$366,361, or \$7.60 per pupil. These dollar amounts per student are equivalent to \$86 and \$146, respectively, in 1997 dollars; they effectively doubled in only ten years.

In 1857, the State Department of Education was created and a State Superintendent appointed. In 1867, in an apparent effort to limit political involvement and corruption, it was decided that a panel of Judges from the Court of Common Pleas, instead of the elected Board of Directors, should appoint members to the Board of Controllers on a ward-by-ward basis. The Boards of Directors in each City ward were still elected locally, however, and still controlled budget and personnel matters in their schools, much like the local school councils discussed today.

During the second half of the 19th century, school districts were often at odds with the State regarding funding for public education. The State had been allocating money based on the number of taxpayers in each district. In theory, the districts expected to receive approximately \$1 per tax payer. In reality, however, state appropria-

tions amounted to 32 cents per taxpayer in 1865 and 62 cents in 1872. Many complained that this funding schedule favored schools in wealthy districts, where additional taxes could easily be levied, and dealt a significant blow to those in poor districts, where money was scarce. In 1874, in reaction to the belief that local taxes were not sufficient to provide quality public education, the State Constitution was amended to read in Article III, Section 13, that "the General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education," and appropriations from the State did increase slightly.

By the turn of the century, financial support for public education still seems to have been insufficient, even compared with other cities. For instance, a study comparing Philadelphia and Chicago found that Chicago, while only a third larger than Philadelphia in population, had school property valued two and one-half times greater. Further, Chicago's annual school budget was 70% larger than Philadelphia's (\$8.2 million versus \$5.8 million).

The 20th Century

The structural reforms of 1867 did not go far enough to end the serious mismanagement of the City schools. The Board of

Directors, for example, continued to regularly demand a "voluntary" political contribution from the teachers and principals they hired. The schools, moreover, were in terrible shape: overcrowded, falling down, and poorly equipped. Teachers even had to supply their own textbooks. It was not until 1905, when the Public School Reorganization Act was passed, that public school governance was radically changed. By this time, the number of school districts within the City had grown to forty-two, as had the number of members of the Board of Controllers. Because these elected neighborhood boards had failed so miserably, however, they were replaced by a new, city-wide Board of Public Education. The new Board consisted of twenty-one members appointed by the judiciary to three-year terms.

A few years later, in 1911, still more changes were enacted in the form of the School Code, which reduced all of the school laws of the State into one bill. The Board of Education was reduced further to fifteen members, still appointed by the judiciary, but for longer six-year terms. The Board was newly authorized to collect taxes at a rate to be determined by the General Assembly. This taxing authority resulted in a dramatic rise in Board expenditures, specifically from

\$7,230,000 in 1911 to \$12,207,000 in 1915.

The Board began to raise and spend increasing sums of tax dollars, particularly after 1929, when the ceiling on real estate taxes was abolished. Construction boomed; during this period nearly half the buildings currently used by the School District were built. In 1937, however, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, in Wilson v. Philadelphia School District (328 Pa. 225, 195 A.2d 90), determined that since the Board was an appointed body, it did not legally possess the power to levy taxes.

Consequently, from then until the 1960's, the school budget was funded by real estate taxes set by the General Assembly, and neither the Mayor nor City Council had any input into school funding. The educational philosophy in Philadelphia became suddenly very money conscious: education costs were kept very low in an effort to avoid tax increases. Not surprisingly, the quality of Philadelphia's public schools suffered. Classrooms were bursting at the seams, maintenance schedules were hopelessly backlogged, few teachers could be recruited, and the budget was in chaos.

In 1963 the General Assembly enacted the First Class City Public Education Home Rule Act. This legislation gave to Philadelphians, for the first time, a limited amount of decision-making authority over the manner in which

their public schools would be run. However, it imposed important restrictions specifically preventing the City from regulating or administering the School District, and it required Philadelphia's citizens to adopt any structural changes by referendum as amendments to Philadelphia's Home Rule Charter.

History teaches us that governance has a profound impact upon the quality of education.

In response, the City passed the Education Supplement to Philadelphia's Home Rule Charter in 1965. The Supplement established a new entity, the "School District of Philadelphia," to be governed by a nine-member Board of Education. This Board would no longer be appointed by judges, as it had been for the last hundred years. Instead, the Mayor would appoint the Board members based on the recommendations of a nominating panel to six-year terms, staggered to even further prevent political influence. The Board would be responsible for hiring a Superintendent. In keeping with Wilson, the School Board would submit a lump sum statement to the Mayor and City Council requesting authority to levy the taxes necessary for each year's

budget, but the Mayor and City Council intentionally still had no authority over the way the District would allocate those funds.

Shortly after the Supplement was enacted, several important changes went into effect that produced immediate, if insufficient, improvements. Teachers' salaries went up, for one thing, and magnet schools were created as a way to fight racial segregation. The construction budget for the District went from \$16 million in 1965 to \$90 million in 1968, while the drop-out rate decreased from 33% to 17% over the same period. By 1969 the annual budget had almost tripled from the previous decade: it was \$102,867,682 in 1960 and \$270,563,963 in 1969.

Important pedagogical changes have been crafted since 1965, primarily through Superintendent Hornbeck's *Children Achieving* which began in 1994. However, the overall structure and governance of the School District has not changed in over thirty years.

Clearly, romanticized notions about the Philadelphia public school system's glorious past are misguided. Our schools have never been a utopia, and most current reform proposals have been tried before in some form at some point in our history. But the public education issues that the City and Commonwealth have been grappling with for the last two centuries are still with us, and they still demand our attention today.



What Kind Of Reforms Work?

Superintendent Hornbeck's *Children Achieving* reform agenda has made some important changes in the policies and priorities of the Philadelphia School District. Unfortunately, the overall governance structure of the District has not changed in over thirty years, and it is currently nearly impossible for any one person or group to make substantive changes. However, many other urban districts have recently restructured their school systems, and Philadelphia can learn a great deal from their experiences.

Chicago

Chicago is the most striking case in point. Chicago's School District is almost twice as large as Philadelphia's; yet it is still able to spend 18% more per student per year (\$7,371 vs. \$6,261). In 1989, the District's governance was overhauled to stress local involvement: local school councils could be elected for each of the District's 553 schools. The elected parents, teachers, and community residents were authorized to approve teaching plans and budgets for discretionary funds.

Unfortunately, Chicago's local school councils have not been particularly effective. Some schools, for instance, have never convened a council because no one was interested in serving. In others, corruption and patronage

have been the norm, with people participating on councils only for their own personal gain. Since the local school councils did not result in any demonstrated scholastic improvements and the District continued to run large deficits, a second round of reforms was initiated in 1995. In May of that year, the Republican-controlled State Legislature proved that school reform can overcome party politics by passing legislation that gave Mayor

Other cities have restructured their school districts with great success.

Richard Daley, a Democrat, almost complete authority over the School District. This new mayoral power includes the ability to control state and local funds, remove restrictions in teachers' contracts and renegotiate previous contracts, and privatize school services to cut costs. The legislation kept in place the local councils but stripped them of any financial authority. The City's elected School Board was disbanded and Daley was authorized to replace it by appointing a new group, the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees. This Board is currently led by Daley's former finance director and his former

chief of staff, neither of whom are educators.

In less than three years, the Trustees have enacted far-reaching reforms and witnessed significant scholastic accomplishments by the City's students. 83% of the elementary schools have seen test scores increase in math, while 57% have had reading scores improve. They have implemented drastic solutions to some serious administration problems, including firing twelve principals and 188 teachers, terminating 1,700 non-teaching jobs, holding back thousands of students who would otherwise have received "social" promotions, requiring a third of all students to attend summer school, and revamping the administrative teams of schools deemed to be failing.

New York

New York City has a huge school system, currently serving more than one million students in over 1,000 schools. In 1968, the New York City School District was divided into thirty-two community school districts, each governed by a district superintendent and a nine-member elected school board. The local boards reported to the City Chancellor and the seven-member New York City Board of Education, appointed by Borough presidents and the Mayor. The New York governance model set

the standard for decentralization in urban school districts across the country, but its results were dismal. The community school boards, in particular, were notorious for corruption, pay-backs, and patronage. By the 1990's, one of the surest signs that New York's local elected boards had failed was the fact that only 5% of voters were participating in school board elections.

Reform, however, was a long time coming. Since taking office, New York Mayor Rudolph Guiliani has wanted to take control of the entire system and lobbied the State Legislature in Albany to make the District a distinct City department. He failed; however, in December 1996, a compromise reform measure was finally passed. Under this legislation, the City Chancellor of Schools hires superintendents for each of the thirty-two districts, a responsibility previously fulfilled by the elected school boards. At this point, community school board members are still wondering what, if anything, they are now authorized to do. Community input is nonetheless a priority, as the 1996 legislation provides for advisory parent councils to work in each district.

Boston

The public school system in Boston, while much smaller than New York's or even Philadelphia's, has also undergone substantial reforms that favor centralization. In 1993, for instance, after years of

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poor student performance under an elected School Board, the Massachusetts Education Reform Act authorized the Mayor of Boston to appoint a seven-member "Boston School Committee." The same bill also made it easier to develop independent charter schools and instituted more stringent requirements for teacher certification. In November 1996, the Reform Act was put to the voters for confirmation. While some officials had predicted that the public would choose to return to an elected School Board, voters overwhelmingly preferred to remain with the appointed system, voting 3 to 1 in its favor.

Modern Trends

Other cities throughout the nation have been restructuring their school districts as well, all apparently with the goal of ensuring greater accountability to the public. In Sacramento, California, the Mayor was able to convince voters to swap the elected School Board for one appointed by the Mayor. In Baltimore, the Mayor agreed to let the state government have more say in the schools in exchange for a dramatic increase in funding. In Cleveland, city officials are also looking to collaborate with the State in a restructuring of the school district. In Washington, D.C. last winter, a congressionally created financial control board stripped the elected School Board of its authority and vested power in a retired general with a mandate for radical reform. In the last few years alone, mayors of at least seven major cities have ousted superintendents and stripped the powers of local school boards.

The recent history of urban school reform points to only one conclusion: the era of decentralization is over. The elected school boards that became popular in the

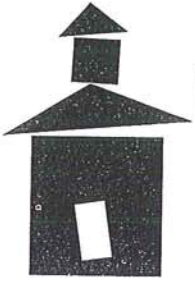
late 1960's have fallen by the wayside. Instead, appointed boards and mayor-centric systems are winning and keeping favor, because they hold elected officials responsible for school performance and treat school districts like other city departments. Of course, what works for urban school districts is much different from the standard in small or rural communities, where elected school boards have been the norm for generations. Philadelphia, by way of example, is the only district in Pennsylvania with an appointed school board. But because of the burdens of size, a large urban district is much more difficult to manage than a small suburban or rural one, where budgets are comparably very small, and voters are more likely to be familiar with the candidates for the boards. In cities similar to Philadelphia, such as Chicago, New York, and Boston, elected boards have proven disastrous. Those same cities are finding solutions to education problems by installing appointed boards, centralizing their systems, and demanding

financial and performance accountability.

Of course, arguments for a strong mayor system imply that the Mayor must be willing to accept responsibility for the School District, something which does not go without saying in a city like Philadelphia where only one of nine residents has a child in the public schools. But the School District's performance must be made accountable to all taxpayers, and only the Mayor is in a position to make sure that this occurs. As Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago said in a National Press Club Luncheon in June, he recognized this need and decided to accept this new responsibility as "the only way to change our society, change our City and move our City forward. It was with only that authority over the schools that I could take action and demand results to improve performance and make our schools accountable. I wanted the responsibility, I wanted the decision-making, and I wanted to be held accountable."

It would appear that changing the structure of a school district can result in scholastic improvements in the schools. After many years of merely providing guidance to the school boards, urban mayors are finally demanding more influence over how funds are spent. And the voters who elect them appear to approve of the mayors taking ultimate responsibility for public education. Now that we have the advantage of knowing what reforms have been tried in other urban school districts, hopefully this will impact Philadelphia's progress as we consider new governance structures to facilitate scholastic reform. Our children deserve nothing less.

**Mayor Daley—
"It was with
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I could take
action and
demand results."**



Where Philadelphia May Be Headed

Although no substantial change in the governance of Philadelphia public schools has been enacted in over thirty years, interest is growing. First District Pennsylvania State Representative Dwight Evans has developed a governance proposal, expected to be debated on the floor of the General Assembly in the fall of 1997. State Senator Vincent Fumo proposed an amendment to Senate Bill 999 on charter schools, which would have restructured school governance on a grand scale. Evans' and Fumo's individual approaches to reform differ radically, but their ultimate visions are remarkably similar: both would like to have the City divided into "urban villages" where families and teachers share neighborhoods and values. The Committee of Seventy welcomes the serious consideration that is being given to school governance, but has strong reservations about many of the features contained in both Representative Evans' and Senator Fumo's proposals.

Representative Evans' plan in many respects replicates the current Chicago system, for better and for worse. Under his bill, the Mayor would appoint a Board of Education to serve a term concurrent with his or her own, and each school in the District would have an

elected local school council, composed of parents, community members, and teachers which would oversee programs, hire principals, and hold them accountable to a performance-based contract. Also like Chicago, the Superintendent would be authorized to use private sector services to cut costs, thereby circumventing expensive union contracts. The governance model of Evans' proposal is therefore simultaneously centralized and decentralized, since the Mayor has ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of the School Board, but day-to-day management occurs at the neighborhood level. The plan would also convene a "Council of Accountability" composed of three gubernatorial and two mayoral appointees, to determine if the School District is adequately educating students and managing its resources.

Some additional measures in Evans' proposal include giving financial incentives to schools who meet their improvement goals and sanctions to those that fail, providing alternative certification for teachers, prioritizing certification in math and reading, eliminating teacher tenure, issuing safety reports for schools, and mandating full-day kindergarten. The most revolutionary aspect of the legislation involves "tuition scholarships,"

which in essence are school vouchers: low-income students enrolled at schools deemed "academically distressed" would be eligible for a tuition waiver to be used at a pre-approved non-public, non-parochial school.

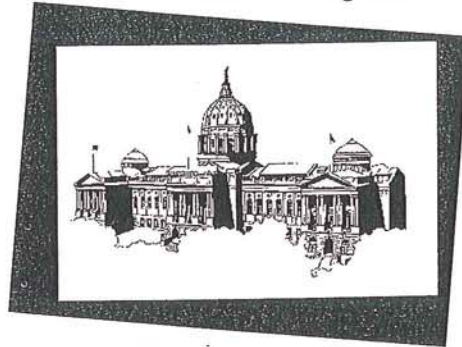


Many of Evans' legislative items address circumstances that already exist in the School District. For example, according to Hornbeck's *Children Achieving*, all of Philadelphia's public schools will be or already are partially-governed by a voluntary parent-teacher task force. The District has finally achieved full-day kindergarten, and privatization of services for maximum cost-effectiveness is already the norm. Therefore, providing an unfunded mandate for these issues does not constitute ground-breaking reform, but simply reaffirms ideas that are already working now. Further, by encoding these reforms into State law, the School District will be bound to the reforms long after they may no longer be beneficial,

and without a source of funding to continue them.

Evans' stance on elected local school councils also has the potential for many foreseeable problems. Elected advisory boards on both school-wide and city-wide levels have been proven ineffective and even corrupt in cities across the country, including Chicago, Boston and New York. After years of fraudulent and negligent behavior, the elected community school boards in New York were stripped of the majority of their duties; legislation passed in Albany in December 1996 transferred most of their responsibilities to the City Chancellor of Education. Moreover, voter turnout for school board elections has always been shamefully low, only 5% in New York the last time around. In 1996 in Boston, voters in a referendum chose to keep an appointed school board; in so doing they definitively rejected the elected model which had been in place from the late 1960's to the early 1990's. In Chicago, elected school councils have failed the schools that need the most help: those with the worse track records have *never* elected a local council, due to a lack of interested candidates. Moreover, it was *because* the local school councils did not succeed in improving the schools that legislation was passed in 1995 giving the Mayor control over the District.

Philadelphia needs to learn from history and not repeat the failures of other urban districts. Parental and community input into schools is important, but electing people to do this task is unproductive and detrimental. An alternative to electing local councils is supporting and promoting the parent advisory councils that are already hard at work in the District's school clusters throughout



the City. The parents and teachers now involved are those who want to be there for the right reasons. Electing people to these positions would make school agendas political, since the candidates would undoubtedly be indebted to the political parties, ward leaders, and other elected officials who assist them in their election. To his credit, Evans includes in his proposal many safeguards to prevent political corruption on the local elected boards, but even if those measures could possibly succeed, the councils would still be preventing systemic reform because no one person could be held account-

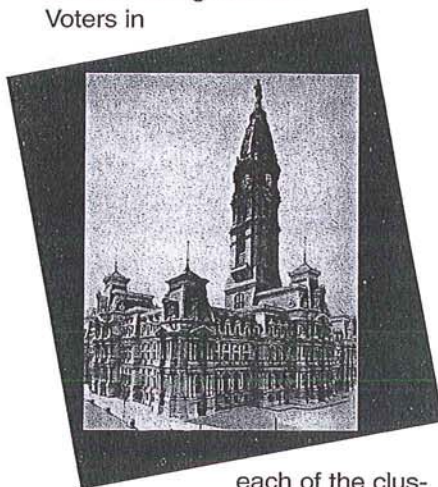
able for the District's performance. Electing either school councils or school boards is not an urban option, as so many cities have already learned the hard way.

Evans' proposed Council of Accountability and tuition scholarships are clearly attempts to win Governor Ridge's support of his proposal. The Council of Accountability gives more control over the School District to the Commonwealth, since three of the five appointments are made by the Governor, which is surely a tactic to curry Harrisburg's interest in providing funds to Philadelphia schools. Accordingly, while the Council may be well-intentioned, it also may be contrary to Philadelphia's constitutional position as a "City of the First Class," under which Philadelphia has autonomous control over its public school system. Tuition scholarships, moreover, will certainly appeal to those who are enthusiastic about vouchers, which are the subject of tempestuous debate in and of themselves, but they make no provisions for the students who are unable to "escape" distressed schools. As it stands, Evans' attempt at vouchers sits on the fence. If his bill endorses vouchers, then vouchers should be made available to all students so that an entire school might be "rescued," rather than a few select students.

On the other hand, Evans' ideas regarding the School Board are right on the mark. It is imperative that Philadelphians have the opportunity to hold an elected official responsible for the performance of our public schools. Under the current system, in which a Mayor comes to office with a School Board already appointed by his or her predecessors, it is impossible to guarantee a cohesive team. Enabling the Mayor to work with a Board of his or her choosing is a relatively simple kind of governance reform, but its potential is the most far-reaching. Consequently, Evans' recommendation to restructure the School Board is the most beneficial and important aspect of his proposal.

The recently enacted charter school legislation may at some point seriously impact the governance structure of the District, as it allows for the public to create publicly-funded schools that bypass many of the District's mandates. Whether this will eventually undermine the District's authority or merely create viable alternatives to the traditional public schools remains to be seen, since the legislation's gradual introduction of charter schools means that it will be at least a decade before a significant presence of charter schools in the District will be felt.

Senator Fumo's plan, which was included with charter school legislation in June 1997, would also legislate education based on a neighborhood-centric model. Although his amendment was removed from the bill during negotiations in the Senate, a similar version may well surface again. Under his proposal, each of the current twenty-two school "clusters" (developed as a component of *Children Achieving*) would be modified to conform to the boundaries of voting districts. Voters in



each of the clusters would decide whether to establish a charter cluster separate from the established school system to be funded with money normally appropriated to the School District. The Superintendent would have to approve any charter proposals. Teachers employed by charter schools would retain their tenure in the School District, even while

working outside of it, and any contracts in force when they began employment at the charter school would be valid until their scheduled expiration. The charter clusters would be governed by a five-member board elected by the voters.

Like Evans, Fumo would institute elected boards on a school-by-school basis. The Committee of Seventy strongly discourages this form of governance, since, as explained above, elected boards have proven ineffective in other urban communities. The idea that neighborhood parents and residents would be involved in their schools is a constructive one, but electing boards to oversee schools is not the best way to achieve this. Furthermore, redrawing cluster boundaries would disrupt those cluster systems that have already accomplished a great deal under *Children Achieving*. In addition, voting districts do not correspond specifically to neighborhoods, so Fumo's boundaries would further disrupt parents and students. And, most important, establishing multiple school districts, both "regular" and "charter," could not possibly be efficient, as it would exponentially increase bureaucracy in the system while duplicating costs.



The Best Path To School Reform

It is essential that the governance of the Philadelphia School District be reformed *now*. Its structure must be changed to guarantee accountability and to streamline decision making, particularly with regard to the District's annual budget. A new governance model is the single most important prerequisite for the ultimate success of scholastic reform like *Children Achieving*, and will certainly help solve the enormous fiscal challenges now facing the entire school system.

The Committee of Seventy stands by the recommendations of 1981. It is still imperative that the School District budget be prepared in conjunction with the budgets of other City departments; that the Mayor approve collective bargaining agreements with unions affiliated with the public schools; and that the Mayor appoint a School Board and a Superintendent to terms concurrent with his or her own.

These steps are necessary to make the Mayor responsible for the success or failure of Philadelphia's public schools and for the quality of our children's education. Our argument for a "strong mayor" model of school governance has not changed in over fifteen years. Something very important has evolved over that same period of time, however: *our model has been proven effective*. Specifically, reforms enacted in the public school system in Chicago are almost identical to those we proposed for Philadelphia. They are working there and can be put to work here as well.

Legislation passed in Illinois in 1995 authorized Mayor Daley to create a new School Board composed of his own appointees; gave him the power to revise administrative and collective bargaining agreements and to ban strikes; and allowed him to intervene in schools that failed to meet standards for improvement.

**The General
Assembly must
act now to
reform the
governance of
the School
District.**

Under the new governance structure, the Chicago Public Schools administration has made impressive improvements in less than three years. For instance, it is on target to eliminate a \$1.3 billion deficit by 1999; it has designated \$806 million for capital improvements; it has signed teachers to a tough four-year contract; it has contracted with private companies for repair and maintenance of school buildings; and it has reorganized the administrative teams of schools in crisis. Most important, the vast majority of school children have shown radical improvement on standardized tests in math and reading.

Imagine if in less than three years, Philadelphia could experience Chicago's brand of

success. It could happen if the General Assembly passed legislation now to end the vicious cycle of blame and neglect now rampant in the governance structure of our public school system. We need our elected officials to adopt Mayor Richard Daley's courage: to take responsibility for the School Board, the School District's labor issues, and its budget. Revamped governance structure means that radical academic reform will finally be possible. If we do nothing, the endless cycle of finger-pointing and passing-the-blame will continue as it always has.

Over the next two years, you will hear a great deal from the mayoral candidates and other politicians about reforming the School District. It is crucial to remember, however, that for any of these other plans to succeed, the governance structure of the District must first be changed. The General Assembly will be debating school reform legislation this fall, and the Committee of Seventy will be lobbying for the governance recommendations in this publication then. But you can help too. Contact your local representatives and let them know your opinions. Call us at Seventy for their names and numbers. Share copies of this publication with your neighbors and school officials. Write the editorial board of your newspaper. Demand to know where candidates stand on the proposed school governance changes. Make your voice heard. We need to do it now. Before it's too late.

Proposal

In order to remedy the problems identified in this report, the Committee of Seventy proposes that legislation which incorporates the following changes be adopted by the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Parts I and III (B) of the proposal are modeled after provisions in the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter which now apply to the City but not to the School District. Similarly, Part IV (C) is modeled after a provision in the Charter which now applies to the City's Managing Director.

I. Preparation and Adoption of Annual Operating Budget and Capital Program

- A. The annual operating budget for the School District shall be prepared and adopted in the same manner and at the same time as is the annual operating budget for the City:
1. The Board of Education shall deliver to the City Director of Finance such relevant financial information as is necessary to prepare an annual operating budget for the School District.
 2. The City Director of Finance shall, in consultation with the Mayor, develop a proposed operating budget for the School District, taking into account all of the needs of the City and its ability to finance them.
 3. The Mayor, after reviewing both the proposed School District operating budget and the proposed City operating budget, shall submit both to City Council simultaneously. The Mayor shall include an estimate of the anticipated revenues of the School District for the ensuing fiscal year, which shall be binding on City Council.
 4. City Council, upon receipt of the proposed operating budgets for the City and School District, shall review them, make such changes in lump sum appropriations as it deems appropriate, and adopt both budgets. Council shall also, not later than the passage of these operating budget ordinances, enact separate revenue measures for the City and School District which will, in the opinion of the Mayor, ensure balanced budgets

for both entities. The annual operating budget ordinances shall not become effective and the City Controller shall not approve any order for any expenditure therein until the Council has balanced both budgets.

- B. The capital program (and budget) for the School District shall be prepared and adopted in the same manner and at the same time as are the capital program and budget for the City:
1. The Board of Education shall deliver to the Director of Finance such financial information as the City Planning Commission needs to prepare a proposed capital program and budget for the School District.
 2. The City Director of Finance shall transmit such information to the City Planning Commission, which shall prepare and submit to the Mayor a recommended capital program and budget for the School District, taking into account the capital needs of the City and its ability to finance them.
 3. The Mayor, after having reviewed the proposed School District capital program and the proposed City capital program, shall submit both to City Council simultaneously.
 4. City Council, upon receipt of the proposed capital programs, shall review them, make such changes as it deems appropriate (after consultation with the City Planning Commission), and then adopt both.

II. Collective Bargaining Agreements with Unions Representing School District Employees

- A. All collective bargaining agreements entered into with unions representing School District employees shall be subject to the approval of the Mayor.

III. Use of School District Funds

- A. There shall be established in the City treasury a school fund, to be under the custody and control of the City Treasurer. The fund shall be administered separate and apart from other funds in the treasury and shall be used

only for School District purposes.

- B. The expenditure of School District funds shall be subject to the same pre-audit requirements as currently apply to City expenditures. No School District funds may be expended until:
1. Both the City Director of Finance and the Auditing Department are satisfied that there are sufficient and available funds for the proposed purpose; and,

2. The Auditing Department has authorized the City Treasurer to disburse such funds.

IV. Office of Superintendent of Schools

- A. The Superintendent shall be selected by the mayor, subject to confirmation by a majority of the Board of Education.
- B. The Superintendent's term of office shall be four years and shall be coterminous with that of the Mayor and City Council. There shall be no limit to the number of terms an individual may serve as Superintendent.
- C. The Mayor may remove the Superintendent so long as the Mayor specifies in writing the reasons for doing so. If, at the Superintendent's request, the Civil Service Commission finds that the Mayor's charges were not cause for dismissal, the Commission may order that the Superintendent be paid for all or part of the remainder of his term.
- D. The Superintendent's salary shall be set by City Council.

V. Board of Education

- A. The Board of Education shall be responsible for policy decisions pertaining to school curriculum.
- B. The term of office of all Board members shall be four years and shall be coterminous with that of the Mayor and City Council.
- C. No individual may serve more than three terms.
- D. In all other respects, Board members shall be selected and removed as provided by existing law.

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Publications Available

A Guide to the Conduct of Polling Places on Election Day
Analysis of Charter Amendments Proposed by the City
Charter Review Advisory Committee
The Charter: A History
Charter Revision: A Review
Economic Development Governance Study
Election Calendar (and Suburban Supplement)
Housing Governance Study
How to Run for Political Office
Judicial Selection Governance Study
Municipal Utilities Governance Study
News You Can Use
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