

Mayoral Control Hearing
March 4, 2022

Testimony of Lucas Liu

Thank you Senators and Assembly Members for giving me this opportunity to provide testimony on the governance of NYC public schools and mayoral control and accountability. My name is Lucas Liu, as a parent leader, I am co-president of PLACE NYC a volunteer parent led education advocacy organization formed in 2019 in response to the decline in quality NYC public school education, I am also the President of CEC 3 and a member of the DOE CEC elections working group.

The NYC public schools are here to serve the students and families of NYC, not any one individual or group of individuals' personal ideology of what school or public school education should be. Under Mayor DeBlasio and Chancellor Carranza we learned how important it was for there to be a way to hold both the Chancellor and Mayor accountable and responsible, because none existed.

Once Mayor deBlasio was given 3 yrs of mayoral control by Albany, there was no way to hold the Chancellor or ultimately the Mayor accountable to all the public school families of NYC. There was no governance, no oversight, and certainly no improvement in the quality of education our students were receiving.

For the last 3 years of Mayoral control, academics took a back seat to ideology and certain groups of students and parents (specifically Asian students and parents) were targeted by policies to deny them access to an education that would meet their needs. In fact, the DOE was caught collaborating with certain parent groups and instructing them to "get louder" in order to block out and silence other parent groups including PLACE NYC because their views and the families they represented did not align with the DOE, and that is only what we are aware of. We do know that certain groups had direct access to DOE leadership while others did not. Racial divisions exploded under the previous mayor and chancellors, and currently remain elevated. Under covid, parents were ignored even further in areas such as grading and admissions policies, while statistics and graduation requirements were manipulated to show improvements where there were none.

Under the changes put into effect when Mayoral Control was given to Mayor DeBlasio for 3 years, Mayoral accountability and Chancellor accountability to parents all but disappeared. It is now time to fix that.

To have true accountability there needs to be true independent oversight and accountability, not a 15 person PEP where the mayor appoints the majority of the members and not a single member was truly elected by the parents of NYC. PEP is widely known as a rubber stamp, and not as a Panel looking out for the interests of public school students and families. Although one member is appointed by parent leaders, it was clearly demonstrated numerous times that the one individual did not represent all parents, only those who he agreed with.

Parents have time and time again demonstrated their unquestionable interest in the education of their children. In recent years that interest has surged, not only in NYC but across the country, and parents have taken action to take control. High profile examples include Fairfax

County where parents led successful efforts to replace 3 BOE members. In San Francisco parents successfully rallied and organized a recall election to replace 4 board members, and lets not forget here in NYC where in the last CEC elections in 2021, more new parents ran and were voted in (aka voted out existing members) in record numbers.

Mayoral Control (accountability) is appropriate in that there needs to be one person who is held accountable, but it cannot be without any meaningful oversight like what currently exists today. Regardless if you are in agreement with whoever happens to be the current mayor and chancellor...FYI PLACE NYC and I personally supported and voted for Mayor Adams, and so far have a favorable impression of Chancellor Banks,,,there needs to be true independent oversight. PEP is not independent, it is under the control of the Mayor who also hires the Chancellor. Give the Mayor 1 or maybe 2 appointees to PEP, but give the parents the rest, let them vote for the remaining 13-14 Panel members. PEP seats should not be political patronage opportunities. Why is everyone afraid of giving parents who are the largest and most important stakeholder (and are taxpayers) the power and authority to be represented and have some level of oversight?

Let each borough elect 2 PEP members and have an additional 3-4 be at large members. The infrastructure to hold these types of elections already exist. We already vote for borough presidents and city wide officials, why not PEP members? There are many parents who would step up and run, while many who have historically been appointed would most likely not. That should tell us all who are truly interested in representing our students and families. Let those parents who put in the effort to be actively involved in our schools and get voted in be the ones who represent the students and parents, that is how democracy works.