

*LETTER FROM BETSY GOTBAUM, NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE*

In 2002 New York state law eliminated elected school boards and gave control of the New York City schools to the mayor. This law expires in June 2009. If the state legislature allows the law to sunset, the school system will revert back to the former structure. Anticipating the need for legislative action, Catherine Nolan, Chair of the Education Committee of the State Assembly, asked me, as public advocate for the city of New York, to appoint a panel that would study the issue of mayoral control and make recommendations to the state legislature.

My professional interest in education policy began when I served as an assistant to Mayor John Lindsay. Earlier, upon graduating from college, I taught school in Brazil and subsequently received a graduate degree from Teachers College, Columbia University. Since becoming public advocate in 2002, I have focused on the issue of education, and my office has prepared many reports on the school system and its policies. Often these reports have been critical.

As defined by the New York City charter, the public advocate is “the watchdog” over the delivery of city services and the policies of the administration. In this sense, my office is uniquely positioned to evaluate school governance in New York City, but the political realities of this city demanded something independent and objective. To meet this need, I convened a commission comprising individuals who are truly independent, well respected, and well versed in the world of education.

I was delighted when Steve Aiello agreed to serve as chair of the commission. Steve, currently of Hill & Knowlton, is one of the leading public relations executives in New York. Before putting together an impressive resume of public service, he started out as a New York City public school teacher. Immediately before leaving New York in 1979 to work in the White House as a special assistant to President Jimmy Carter, he served as President of the New York City Board of Education and has been deeply involved in education and public policy issues ever since.

Steve’s leadership has been bolstered by two distinguished cochairs on the commission. Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, a cultural anthropologist by training, has spent most of her career in public service. Before becoming president and chief executive officer of Safe Space NYC, Lilliam headed up a wide array of agencies and organizations in New York in the areas of employment, personnel, housing, health, and social services and chaired the Education Policy Committee of the New York City Partnership. David Jones has been president and chief executive officer of the Community Service Society of New York since 1986. Before that, he served as executive director to the Youth Services Bureau in New York City, as a special adviser to Mayor Edward Koch, and as chairman of the board of the Carver Federal Savings Bank.

The other members of the commission bring a diversity of perspectives. Journalist Clara Hemphill, also a contributor to this volume, is the principal author of three books that the *New York Times* has called the “most definitive guides” to public schools in New York

City. Joan McKeever-Thomas has spent most of her career as an advocate for parents and teachers and is a former member of the citywide Panel for Educational Policy. Bert Pogrebin, an attorney with Littler Mendelson, spent fifteen years as the chief labor negotiator for the New York City Board of Education. Jeany Persaud is former chair of the Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council. Kim Sweet, former associate general counsel of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, is executive director of Advocates for Children. Jacqueline Wayans is an education writer, journalist, and parent advocate.

The executive director of the commission, Joe Viteritti, was one of the first people I engaged when the idea of this commission occurred. It was his idea to solicit the fine papers that have been edited for inclusion in this volume. It was his job to accumulate all the evidence collected by the Commission, present it to the members, and work with them to prepare a report. The report speaks for itself. It can be found on the website of the Public Advocate for the City of New York (<http://pubadvocate.nyc.gov/documents/CSGFINALREPORT9-4-08.pdf>).

For nearly a year, the commissioners put in long hours toward this effort, and I am proud of the work they have done. I am confident that the commission's findings and recommendations will aid the state legislature in its deliberations to create an improved school governance structure for New York City.