Decentralizing DCPS:
An Education Reform Strategy for the District of Columbia

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Introduction & Overview

Though the District of Columbia has changed governance in regards to who will control and manage the school system, there still has not been a public discussion to establish a change in how the schools will be managed. Though we expect and are confident that the basic bureaucratic functions of DCPS will markedly improve under the management of Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee, we also understand that a change in basic management alone will not be enough to guarantee the improved student achievement that the District needs and expects. Given the additional understanding that a change in education policy alone will not guarantee improved student achievement, we do believe, and have data to support, that a site-based management system consisting of a decentralized central office that oversees, serves, and supports a system of DCPS schools that can apply to operate with varying levels of charter school-like autonomy is a reform strategy that provides the best opportunity for the students, schools, and the Chancellor to succeed.

This report will present the vision, explain the policy, and propose a process by which Chancellor Rhee can radically reinvent DCPS by reforming the relationship between the central office and the schools. Through local school autonomy, (where DCPS schools can apply for partial or full decision-making control over their budgets, staffing, facilities, instructional program and governance), the central office can restructure itself to focus on teaching, learning and professional development, and shift to supporting and serving the schools, not micromanaging them, while still holding them accountable for academic achievement. It also provides restructuring for NCLB compliance.

Though the concepts of school based management and decentralization are not new to the education sector nor to the District of Columbia, what would be new is for a major urban district to adopt autonomy and decentralization as a systemic reform strategy. Many American school districts, including DC, have studied and consider the Edmonton Canada public school system as the world-class ideal of a decentralized system of autonomous schools, however none have implemented an Edmonton-like model. Though US local school autonomy exists in the form of charter schools, and systems such as those in NY and Boston have incorporated autonomy as a part of their public school reform efforts, none have attempted to reform their systems through central office decentralization.

Some people might say that the state of education in DC is fragile, therefore such a radical reform strategy might break the system, but others would say that DC education is in a state of crisis and therefore this is an opportunity to make major changes because major improvement is what is needed. Reasons for supporting such an autonomy/decentralization strategy follow:
1. The District of Columbia has a new Mayor, a new school Chancellor, and a public and political willingness to think outside of the box in regards to school reforms that can lead to improved student achievement.

2. The Washington Teachers Union is also reform minded and has already taken a step towards autonomy with the DC pilot schools grant program.

3. An autonomy/decentralization reform strategy provides an approach for implementing key strategies and actions called for in the DCPS Master Education Plan, particularly those in Section VII related to developing a strong system of accountability.

4. The Edmonton Canada model with a decentralized, service oriented central office that focuses on teaching, learning and professional development is the standard that autonomy advocates universally look towards, and is the model best suited to Chancellor Rhee’s strengths and managerial experience.

5. DC has over 10 years of autonomy experience through our model charter law administered through our nationally recognized authorizer, the DC Public Charter School Board.

6. Decentralization of the central office bureaucracy and local decision-making/control at the school level (autonomy) are innovations that liberal and conservative education advocates have long sought and spoke of, but have yet to see implemented in a systemic way and on a district-wide level.

7. DC has a group of collaborative-minded people and organizations from the traditional and charter school sides and systems that are willing to work together to help DCPS move to autonomy and decentralization.

8. DCPS has already moved in the direction of traditional/charter school compatibility and cooperation in the areas of facilities co-location legislation, voluntary waivers of union work rules, and per-pupil and weighted student formulas.

9. A decentralized central office that delivers quality services upon demand and manages traditional/charter facilities co-locations can further serve the charter school market, thereby keeping more public education money in DCPS and the District of Columbia.

10. There is data, research, and experience that support national trends towards autonomy reform strategies in districts such as New York City, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Chula Vista, CA, and New Orleans.
Therefore, this report of the DC School Autonomy Study Group recommends that the Chancellor, the Mayor, the DC Council, and DC State Board of Education consider and adopt varying levels of local school autonomy with a decentralized central office as an education reform strategy for the District of Columbia Public Schools. Though not a full and proper policy paper, this report is a policy proposal that references actual autonomous schools policy rulemaking and decentralization reports as guides for how to implement the strategy, namely and respectively “Proposed Rulemaking for Autonomous DCPS Schools” by the DC Education Advocates and “Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools” by the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. We propose that the Chancellor implement a DCPS autonomy/decentralization policy starting in January 2008.

The **DC School Autonomy Study Group** is a collaborative of leadership from the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights, 21st Century School Fund, the DC Public Charter School Board, and the DC Association of Chartered Public Schools, with assistance from DC residents, and the Cross City Campaign For Urban School Reform. The intention is to assist our elected and appointed officials as they govern and reform our school system, by providing them with educational experience and research-based innovations that move the District in the direction of the world class school system that our children deserve and that we all share a responsibility to provide. It is in this spirit, and in the interest of all our students, that traditional and charter school advocates are working together in support of a reinvented DCPS system that can serve all students in all schools and is rooted in choice.

Allowing schools within the DCPS system to have the option to apply for autonomous status, where the schools are locally governed and managed on site by the principal and a governing board including parents and teachers, similar to charter schools, is a choice DCPS principals, parents, teachers, and students should have. Schools that have shown significant improvement and progress tend be those that are managed locally at the school level and not by the central office, whether they are independent by law such as charters, or by tradition wherein high performing traditional schools are informally left alone by the central office. In both cases, the schools’ autonomy is based on that school being held accountable for delivering results in student achievement. When a school bargains to increase autonomy in exchange for increased accountability for results, the benefits include a focus on mission, creation of ownership, flexibility to tailor the school, and the ability to change on a dime. Autonomy for accountability is the classic local school governance formulation, and we are recommending that this in-system autonomy option be formalized into the reformed and rebuilt DCPS school system, whether by DCPS policy or by District law. A summary overview of the autonomy initiative components follows:
DCPS Autonomy Initiative Overview

Points in “Proposed Rulemaking for Autonomous DCPS Schools”:

- The Chancellor shall grant full or partial autonomy on the basis of applications submitted, whose proposals may include governance, budget and operations, instructional program and accountability, personnel and facilities.

- A school applying for autonomy shall provide a copy of the proposal to parents and teachers, and those applying for full autonomy must have the approval and signatures of 2/3 of the parents and full-time employees.

- The governing board of autonomous schools will have a formal role in the principal evaluation process, and fully autonomous schools shall interview and select their principal.

- Autonomous schools shall account for funds using generally accepted accounting procedures, and their financial operations shall be included in the annual audit of DCPS.

- The Chancellor shall monitor DCPS Autonomous Schools, and may revoke autonomous status for fiscal mismanagement, lack of economic viability, failure to meet goals of the autonomy contract, or violation of applicable laws.

Points for DCPS Autonomous Schools Pilot Program (08-09 school year):

- The pilot would establish the roles and responsibilities of both the local school and the decentralized central office, and would be modeled on the application, review, and oversight processes and policy of the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) who would advise and assist DCPS in their administration of the pilot program.

- The DCPS application and review process will parallel the PCSB process in 2008, with DCPS’ process staggered to start two-weeks behind that of the PCSB. The 2008 general calendar would be:

  January- Release Application guidelines, public meetings  
  April- Applications deadline, review process  
  May- Applicant interviews, public hearing  
  June- Decisions announced publicly
Key Functional Points of a Decentralized Central Office whose core business is to support, serve and oversee schools, and to focus on teaching, learning, and professional development to raise student performance:

**Budget.** Schools, rather than the central office, have primary accountability for their spending, receiving 100 percent of their operating funds, while being charged (10-20%) to support remaining systemic functions, and paying to purchase services from central office departments or outside vendors.

**Personnel.** Local School Councils of fully autonomous schools select their principal, with the principal having authority over staffing decisions, and with the central office offering a pool of quality teachers and principals and a range of professional development services.

**Competitive Services.** Service departments—such as transportation, food services and payroll—are organized and available based on sufficient school demand for their competitive prices, and quality and efficiency of service.

In summary, though site-based management (autonomy) alone is not a sole solution to raising achievement results, it is a key component of meaningful school reform, along with improvements in curriculum and instruction. With the strong Master Education Plan and curriculum standards adopted under past-Superintendent Janey, and with the strength and expertise in teaching and instruction of current Chancellor Rhee, autonomy forms the third pillar on which the DCPS reform strategy and effort can stand and which our world-class system of schools can be built. Site-based management provides for collaborative leadership from principals, teachers, and parents, and it enables partnerships with families and communities to ensure that instruction programs meet student needs. It utilizes research-based instructional programs, the use of data, and professional development, all with a focus on student achievement.

With the Chancellor having good relations with the teachers union, with DCPS schools having 10 years of experience with advisory Local School Restructuring Teams, and with the charter schools having 10 years of experience in local school autonomy along with a willingness to share that experience in collaboration with traditional DCPS schools, the District is primed to successfully initiate an autonomy and decentralization school reform strategy. Autonomy has been talked about in DC for some time, and with hope, expectations and public good will for the Mayor and Chancellor, and with a willingness to collaborate between sides used to competing, the time and opportunity to implement true change is right now. The question is will DC make time to make the change?
Traditional & Charter Schools: A Time to Collaborate?

“That was the big promise of charter schools 10 years ago. They were going to reform DCPS, not crush it and destroy it which is actually what’s happened. They’ve had 10 years to do that . . . Where’s the feedback loop? Where are you going to tell us what’s working in charters?”

Gina Arlotto - Save Our Schools

“I don’t care if we use the word charter right now. The point is if we get to a future where we have every school that has a clear mission, accountability for results, parent choice, teacher choice to be there, it’s funded equitably, and it’s held accountable for results, that’s the way to run public education.”

Nelson Smith - President, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Quotes from “Are Charter Schools Making the Grade?” McNeil Lehrer News Report 6/11/07 on PBS.

Though the Study Group feels that the autonomy and central office decentralization as proposed meets the interests and addresses the concerns of advocates on both sides of the traditional and charter school divide, we do think it is thoughtful to consider and address the interests of those who still might argue against collaboration and cooperation between charter and traditional schools.

Traditional Advocate Argument: If traditional schools apply for autonomy, doesn’t that make that school a charter?

No, a charter school is one that operates independently from DCPS as a Local Education Agency authorized and monitored by the Public Charter School Board. A traditional school that operates autonomously within the DCPS simply means that the school is managed locally on-site rather than by the central office. If a school does not want to operate autonomously it does not have to apply.

Charter Advocate Argument: If a DCPS school wants autonomy, it should convert to a charter school.

In the whole history of DC charter schools, only one school has converted from traditional to charter under the DC public charter school law, and that was 10 years ago. Just because a traditional school does not want to convert to a charter does not mean that they don’t want autonomy. If the initial purpose of the charter school movement was to introduce reform to the public school system
through competition provided by choice, the adoption of autonomy within a reforming traditional school system should be welcomed and encouraged within the charter movement.

**Charter Advocate Argument:** Charters are supposed to compete with traditional schools, not collaborate or cooperate.

Charter schools were supposed to compete with traditional schools with the purpose of improving public education through the introduction of choice. 15 years later, and with the introduction of No Child Left Behind, the charter movement has made significant gains in innovating US public education. However, traditional and charters aren’t outperforming each other and on average perform the same. There are better and lesser performing traditional and charter schools, so both sides need to work on improving quality to make progress in student achievement. Therefore, the best way to make systemic reforms that can benefit both traditional and charter schools, and public education as a whole, is for charter and traditional advocates to collaborate and cooperate in the interest of student achievement for all students, and not just the ones in their own schools.

**Traditional Advocate Argument:** Charter schools drain resources away from public schools.

Charter schools are public schools, and yes, they take resources away from the school district in the form of per pupil funding that follows students out of the traditional system and into the charter system. However, this shift of funding is the result of choices made by parents to send their children to charter schools. We believe that for the competition between traditional and charter schools to be fair, traditional schools must have the opportunity to operate with the same freedoms as charters, which is what this Study Group Report recommends.

If the central office decentralizes, more resources of charters will be spent within the system if the district can provide quality services and resources that charters want to buy. With its potential advantages in scale and economy, a reinvented service oriented central office should be able to compete for the education dollars of both autonomous traditional and charter schools.

**Traditional Advocate Argument:** Charter school co-location into DCPS facilities is another give away of traditional schools resources.

As the DCPS student population has reduced from 150,000 students (1967) to 50,000 currently, the number or need of maintaining the system of school facilities didn’t reduce comparably. Charter schools co-locating into underused
DCPS facilities fulfills a need and interest of both traditional and charter schools, thereby sharing the expense of facilities and keeping more charter facilities dollars in the DC system. It is a win-win for charters and traditional schools because charters need space and traditional schools that are on track for consolidation or closing have space to lease.

The current burden of new or expanding charters leasing or building schools in neighborhood commercial districts would be relieved if they moved into underused neighborhood school facilities, thereby also reducing public sentiment against charters for moving children into unsafe commercial districts in lieu of the neighborhood serving commercial development residents want and need.

**Charter Advocate Argument:** The charter movement believes in and is working towards a true charter district, not a traditional school district, and it supports free market education management organizations rather than central offices.

Even a conceptual charter district includes its version of a new decentralized central office and heavily depends on education management organizations, but the reality is there is no example of an independent charter district. There might be charter districts within districts, such as NY’s New Vision Schools, but across the nation, most charter schools operate with some level of dependency on service provided by the traditional school district’s central office.

Our autonomy proposal does not envision a traditional central office, but rather we are advocating for a decentralized central office that can serve on demand a system of autonomous traditional schools, as well as charters. Rather than the charter movement viewing this new central office as competition against the EMOs for charter school dollars, autonomously operated traditional schools can be a potential new market for charter EMOs, with the EMOs having a competitive advantage of 15 years of local school autonomy experience.

**Charter Advocate Argument:** The traditional system is on the verge of tipping in favor of charters so why collaborate?

What is the threshold and definition of tipping and what happens once a school district tips? In theory a tipped district might be a district where the majority of schools operate as charters such as New Orleans, but the charter movement has no model of how to manage a district that has tipped. Another definition could be when charter schools have reached a point where a traditional district adopts charter-like policy and practices, such as DCPS has done with it’s co-location policy, it’s KIPP managed school, and it’s union supported pilot grant program.

The most extreme vision of tipping would be the privatization of all the public schools, in which the school district would contract with an EMO to manage its
schools. However ideal this might seem to the more extreme charter advocate, the reality is that it would be impossible because the charter school movement does not have an EMO model that operates only on the per pupil funding provided by the state. All the highly regarded charter models such as KIPP and Edison heavily supplement their schools’ budgets with money from foundations. If one took what these high performing charter schools actually spends per child and try to replicate it across a school system, it could not be done with current public education dollars. Additionally, if charters took over a whole district, the charter movement also has not solved the problems with special education services that affect the traditional and charter systems alike.

Therefore, given that the majority of people within the charter movement got involved on the premise that the purpose was to improve the public education system, not crush it or do a hostile takeover, collaboration is the logical and honorable approach for the charter movement to make. In retrospect, it seems that the whole national choice movement’s support of charter schools and changes in school governance away from school boards is as result of frustrations with the monopoly power of school bureaucracies and teachers unions. Given that DC has the 2nd highest percentage of charter schools, has a reform minded Chancellor who is managing the school bureaucracy and has good relations with the reform minded teachers union, DC is the ideal district in the country for a charter / traditional collaboration to improve student achievement for all students.

Traditional & Charter Advocates: Education is a Civil Rights Issue.

Both sides claim the importance of improving public education and cite it as the Civil Rights Issue of today. Neither the traditional nor the charter side would argue against that statement, but there most likely would be some debate about what that statement means and what should be done about it in policy and practice. Some people consider it an issue of equity, and the lack thereof, as the main concern, while others might consider the de-facto segregation by race in public schools as the defining feature.

How we move ahead in addressing education as a Civil Rights concern says much about us, and the sincerity of our concern. If we take competition to a free market conclusion, with either the charter side tipping over/taking over the public school system, or the traditional side fighting against the existence of charter school by state legislation and budget controls, for one side to win, the other side has to lose. Therefore the students in the other side’s schools must perform poorly for one side to win. Should we sacrifice a child’s education at the altar of education ideology? What type of civil rights principle is that? True civil rights principles include collaboration and justice, not just for us or our side. We are supposed to love our neighbor, not hope for their downfall. We need to be united in support of improved public education.
Background Points within the History of School Autonomy in DC

- [In the 1960’s] “the civil rights revolution, school desegregation, and the struggle for home rule became the dominant sources of conflict within the school governance system. The appointed Board of Education and the Superintendent came under attack increasingly, and the elected Board replaced it in 1969. At the same time, other changes in the school governance system were made in order to improve student achievement, most notably community control and decentralization.”

- In the early 1990’s Superintendent Franklin Smith introduced the Local School Restructuring Teams (LSRT) to encourage staff and parent participation in local school management. With the introduction and implementation of the Weighted Student Formula (WSF) in 1999 by Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, the role of principals and the LSRT increased to encompass school budgets and staffing structure.

- “1995: Congress passes and President signs law creating Presidentially-appointed District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Board (“Control Board”) and a mayor-appointed Chief Financial Officer. Congress establishes DC Public Charter School Board as part of DC School Reform Act of 1995 to grant charters authority to establish charter schools independent of the public school system. Like public schools, they receive funds based percentage of enrollment”.

- 1996- The DC Public Charter School Board authorizes the first round of charter schools, including the conversion of DCPS’ Paul JHS to charter status. 10 years later, Paul JHS is the only conversion charter school, and the PCSB has oversight of 57 charter schools, including 18 formerly under the now defunct DC Board of Education.

- 2006- In response to Wilson SHS’ seeking to convert to a charter school in order to get more autonomy, DCPS agrees to work to give Wilson more autonomy, though the proposal is never implemented. With the encouragement of the Board of Education, including current Deputy Mayor for Education Victor Reinoso, a group of education advocates begin to draft Proposed Rulemaking for Autonomous DCPS Schools.

- 2007- Mayor Fenty successfully makes the case to manage the District of Columbia Public Schools, including in his academic plan a goal to develop a strong system of accountability balanced with school level autonomy, with a strategy to shift resources and decision-making to the schools, and away from central administration.
About the “Proposed Rulemaking for Autonomous DCPS Schools” 4

In response to Mayor Fenty’s proposed takeover of the DC Public School System, the work of drafting the Autonomy rulemaking was revisited for the purpose of advocating it’s consideration as part of the school reform plan being developed for the District. Through deliberation and debate, the group decided that the best approach for DCPS autonomy is to model the policy on DC’s well-regarded charter school law, and to the match the practices and processes to that of the much-respected DC Public Charter School Board. Besides compatibility, that approach has several advantages, including that DCPS does not have to reinvent the wheel, but can simply model its autonomy effort and oversight on the experience and research of the DC charter school board and movement. The document “Proposed Rulemaking for Autonomous DCPS Schools” is summarized below:

**Autonomy.** The Chancellor shall grant local schools full or partial autonomy on the basis of proposals submitted, providing increased responsibility and authority to create a healthy, safe and nurturing environment in which students can achieve at high levels. Schools can apply for full autonomous school or partial autonomous school status in the areas of:

1. Governance
2. Budget and Operations
3. Instructional Program and Accountability
4. Personnel
5. Facilities

The Chancellor’s rigorous application, review, and oversight processes will be modeled on that of the DC Public Charter School Board.

**Applying for Autonomy.** A school applying for full autonomous school status shall provide a copy of the application to the parents and employees of the school and each Advisory Neighborhood Commission that represents an area within the school’s neighborhood attendance area. The school shall file the application with the Chancellor for approval after the application is signed by 2/3 of the parents and endorsed by 2/3 of full time employees. A school requesting partial autonomy shall provide a copy of the application to parents and employees of the school, and the school shall file the application with the Chancellor after approval by a 2/3 vote of the LSRT.

**Governance.** The Local School Council, following the LSRT format with a non-voting principal, becomes the governing body of the autonomous school. The Council is not to exceed 15 members, 2/3 of whom shall be residents of the District of Columbia, with issues decided by a simple majority. Fully autonomous
Local School Councils have authority to select and terminate a principal’s employment, while partially autonomous Local School Councils shall have a formal role in the annual evaluation process and recommend continued service or termination. The principal of an autonomous school shall interview and select all staff abiding by DCPS certification requirements, and within staff contract provisions. School functions include compliance with all federal and applicable Special Education laws.

Monitoring. The Chancellor shall monitor DCPS autonomous schools and shall conduct semi-annual site visits for the purpose of executing his or her oversight responsibilities. The Chancellor may revoke a school’s autonomous status if he or she determines that the school has a pattern of fiscal mismanagement; is no longer economically viable; fails to meet goals and expectations set forth in the autonomy agreement; or has committed a violation of applicable laws. In cases where the autonomous school has committed a violation of the standards or procedures set forth in the autonomy agreement, but not a violation of applicable law, the school will be served notice of a probationary period not to exceed ninety (90) days in which to come into compliance.

Finances. Autonomous schools shall receive increased funding to carry out their additional responsibilities. They shall receive the dollar amount provided by the DC government through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) weighted in accordance with its student population less the cost of services to be provided by the DCPS central management. Autonomous schools shall continue to receive federal funds to which they are entitled. The annual audit of DCPS shall include audits of each autonomous school’s fiscal operations.

Facilities. Local schools may apply to acquire responsibility for facilities operation, maintenance and repairs including control over operations and maintenance planning, staffing, budget, procurement for supplies, materials and contracts less than $500,000, and realty responsibility. Operations include the functional responsibilities associated with cleaning and operating the school. Maintenance includes the functional responsibilities associated with keeping the building and grounds in good condition and repair. Realty responsibility includes authority to enter into and manage long and short term use agreement and joint occupancy leases.
How a Decentralized Central Office Works

Overview & How –To: Following the DCPS Master Education Plan, p. 11.


Summary of “Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools”, p. 18.
  ▪ Central office services lists, p. 21.
Overview & How –To: Following the DCPS Master Education Plan

The best way to approach the specifics of the autonomy/decentralization proposal is as a means to implement key strategies within sections of the DCPS Master Education Plan (MEP), most specifically Section VII: Develop a Strong System of Accountability and Key Strategy 28- Implement a Strong and Transparent Central Office Strategy for School Improvement, as follows:

“Key Actions:

- **Select or develop comprehensive school restructuring models for each school level.** Therefore, DCPS needs models it can implement primarily using school and central office staff. Weight will be given to models that are already being successfully deployed in DCPS and similar cities. These may include models provided by an external organization, where the organization agrees to “teach the model” as opposed to staffing the school with its own personnel or developing a “homegrown” model that draws from best practices.

- **Develop a protocol to support flexibility and autonomy for higher-performing schools.** The protocol will guide central administration, local schools and Local School Restructuring Teams as decisions are made about creating greater autonomy and flexibility for schools over issues such as budget, professional development, personnel, facility management, governance and management. The protocol will generally allow for more flexibility and autonomy in exchange for greater accountability and performance.

And additionally, “**Key Strategy 29 - Encourage Schools to Continue Implementing Local and Aligned School Improvement Strategies.**”

**Key Actions:**

- Continue to invite schools to develop holistic and integrated local school improvement plans.

- Invite schools to participate in school-initiated restructuring.”

*Quotes from “All Students Succeeding- A Master Education Plan for a System of Great City Schools,” DCPS, February 2006, p. 91-93.*

By matching DCPS autonomy to the District standards in the authorization of DC charter schools, **MEP Strategy 31- Develop a Research and Evaluation Partnership and Protocol To Increase the Understanding of “What Works”** is implemented, given its rationale:
“It is hard to improve schools when you are not completely sure what works and what does not. While the level of understanding about successful techniques, strategies and programs has grown at a national level, that broad understanding does not substitute for more in-depth analysis of our local efforts, in part because models vetted at the national level are always adapted as they are implemented locally.”

The Study Group proposal to grant autonomy to schools that apply and are approved for it, based on the District’s own charter law and authorizer is a means to meet several strategies and actions found within the MEP. Regarding Key Strategy 28, it serves as a means to support autonomy for higher-performing schools, as well as a means to restructure poorer performing schools in response to NCLB. Though schools operating autonomously for restructuring purposes would require more central office support for capacity building, autonomy is a tool for improving lower performing schools that is being utilized in Boston and is a principle supported in the NYC school district (see section- About Autonomy Initiatives in other US School Districts).

Allowing DCPS schools to apply for charter-like autonomy meets Key Strategy 29 which encourages schools to develop and implement local school improvement plans and initiate restructuring.

Regarding Key Strategy 31, we have the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB) as a collaborative partner. Beyond benefiting from their research and evaluation of what works and what does not, DCPS will benefit from their experience, advice, and assistance in establishing DCPS systems to approve and monitor autonomously operated schools. We benefit from locally developed capacity that is a nationally recognized model. Additionally, since we do not have to reinvent how to do local school autonomy in DC, we can focus our creative attention on how to adapt a national/international model for local implementation in regards to the DCPS central office.

The other clear benefit of matching DCPS local school autonomy to charter school autonomy is that as we try to adapt the Edmonton model to DC, it provides the way to transition DCPS into autonomy gradually rather than all at once. Since a school has to choose autonomy (which is more work than the traditional model), and has to apply for autonomy through a rigorous application and review process, the transition will go at a rate based on readiness, willingness, and capacity. It might end up that 25 percent of DCPS autonomous schools are fully autonomous with 75 percent having partial autonomy. Nevertheless, it still provides a means for the central office to re-orient and reinvent itself to a service-oriented model, whether serving schools that it manages or ones that it only monitors.

In relation to considering the following sections about the Edmonton model and reinventing the central office, it might seem that DC would be starting from
scratch, given that it took 15 years of established site-based management experience within their decentralized system before Edmonton undertook their focus on student achievement. DC is not starting from scratch. DC charter schools have 10 years of autonomous school operations and oversight experience, and DCPS has as many years experience with school-based management through the LSRTs, which under the proposed Autonomy Rulemaking would move from advisory to governing status for schools which are granted autonomy. Therefore, the challenge to DC is that we have to simultaneously implement a decentralization process along with reforming a central office to focus on teaching and learning for improving results in student achievement. The Study Group believes the District of Columbia is ready, willing, and able to meet that challenge.
About The Edmonton Model:

“Schools in this northern prairie city have operated under perhaps the most radically decentralized system in North America for the past 15 years.

Although curriculum in Canada is set by the province, Edmonton Public Schools has devolved virtually all authority over instruction, staffing levels, budget and maintenance to principals in the system’s 207 schools. The thinly staffed central office operates as a “service center” to support principals. Dictates from downtown are rare indeed.

In 1979 the Edmonton central office began transferring budgetary control to schools. By 1995, Edmonton principals had control over 92 cents of every dollar allocated to their schools.

This means that decision on how to spend money on everything from building maintenance to professional development is left up to the principal. A principal can buy building maintenance services, professional development or education consulting from the central office (known here as the “Centre for Education”) or from any outside vendor.

But it wasn’t until a new superintendent Emery Dosdall arrived on the scene in 1995 that the district made a concerted effort to use its decentralized model to boost stagnant student achievement. Since that time, Edmonton achievement has climbed steadily. Even as the city became markedly poorer during the 1990s – the city’s monthly child welfare caseload doubled, to about 4,000 between 1994 and 1999 – student achievement has climbed steadily in terms of the percentage of students scoring proficient or better on provincial exams.

Why? District officials give a one word answer: focus.

This year, all Edmonton schools are being required by the central office to identify a specific instructional focus. What that should be is left up to each school. But the central office will monitor and hold principals accountable for identifying and implementing a focus.

One innovation Dosdall brought to Edmonton was a focus on “value added” achievement gains as opposed to looking only at absolute scores. In other words, the key measure became how much growth a student showed year to year rather than the student’s absolute test score.

Looking at data in this new light showed that some of the district’s higher-performing schools significantly under-performed lower-achieving schools in terms of growth in test scores.
Since Dosdall took the reins at the beginning of 1995, student achievement in Edmonton has risen steadily, as measured by both provincial exams and by district-designed assessments.

District officials and principals credit Dosdall with bringing to Edmonton a focus on student achievement. But they also said that translating that focus first into action and then results was made possible by the groundwork laid over the preceding 15 years of decentralization.\(^3\)

From “Instructional Focus is Key in Decentralized Edmonton Schools,” by Alan Gottlieb, The Term Paper, Piton Foundation, Volume 1, Number 1, January 2002, p. 3.

“They just keep coming. Education leaders from Chicago, Colorado, Hawaii, Los Angeles, Minnesota, Oakland, Calif., and the District of Columbia have all flocked to the Edmonton public schools. Among the visitors have been district superintendents, state schools chiefs, organization heads, and a governor.

And that’s only in the past 12 months. For more than two decades, U.S. officials have come here to import ideas from what many regard as the most innovative school system in North America. So many, in fact, that Edmonton officials, in the Canadian province of Alberta, are giving serious thought to charging fees as a way to compensate for the time the visits take away from their work.

For the most part, these pilgrims come to learn about site-based management. Here, schools control 80 percent of the district’s total budget. They pick their own reading programs and their own staff training. They decide how many people to employ, and in what jobs. If they don’t like services the district’s central office is offering, they can take their money elsewhere.

“This really is not the ‘flavor of the month’ for them,” says Christina Warden, a program director at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, located in Chicago, who estimates that she’s made at least 10 trips to Edmonton since the early 1990s.

“They really do work very hard, in very practical ways, to make these things happen.”

Angus McBeath, who became the superintendent of the 81,000-student Canadian district in 2001, is conflicted about all the attention. He’s flattered that the system is still seen as a pioneer. But he fears that many visitors come looking for a silver bullet, when the reality is more complex. If anything, he says, Edmonton has found that site-based management, by itself, doesn’t ensure success.
“There is no pill, or bullet, or quick fix for school systems,” says McBeath. “There are some sensible things that districts can do, and I think site-based has a lot of power. But I think even its authors would tell you it’s not a solution to raising achievement results.”

Indeed, in the past four years, the district has taken a different tack. After long focusing on ways to decentralize its governance, Edmonton has embarked on a decidedly district-led push to raise student performance. All schools now follow a common approach in managing instructional improvement. And all building leaders get heavy doses of professional development.

But rather than abandon site-based decisionmaking—as some U.S. school systems have done—Edmonton has tried to channel the process more toward the core business of teaching and learning. School leaders are under orders to analyze data, collaborate with their staffs, and use research-based instructional techniques. But each site still decides how that plays out.

The strategy has its challenges. Already shouldering more budget and operational responsibilities than their peers in other districts, school-level leaders in Edmonton now must also devote more time to planning for instructional improvement. But ask them if they’d rather have district officials make all the calls, and their answer is emphatic.

“I think we would have a huge problem if they tried to make decisions differently,” says Karen Beaton, a principal and the president of Edmonton Public Teachers, a union that includes teachers and administrators. “It is so much a part of our culture and the way we think and act.”

Tellingly, the central office is called Central Services. More than half the people who work there are in departments that live or die based on the demand by schools for their expertise. If a site needs help on an instructional or administrative matter, it contracts with the office to provide the assistance, often charged on an hourly basis.

At the heart of these arrangements is the premise that organizations run best when decisions are made closest to the customer. Edmonton first put that idea into practice in the 1970s, when it began to give schools control over their budgets under Superintendent Michael A. Strembitsky, who has since risen to legendary status and continues to advise policymakers in the United States.

McBeath, a 29-year veteran of the school system and only the third person to hold its superintendency since 1972, is a true believer in the site-based approach. He makes an analogy to an apartment complex where the renters are asked to conserve electricity: If each unit doesn’t pay its own bill, chances are that few will heed the call.
“When you give people the money and the authority, they behave like owners, and boy, do they do that in our system,” McBeath says. “And that is really powerful. Our principals really believe the buck stops with them.”

From the “An Edmonton Journey,” by Jeff Archer in Education Week, 2006.

“A pilot program begins

That fall [2000], the district selected 26 schools for a pilot program to create and implement the seven areas of focus. They looked at the data from student scores in English and math proficiency tests, which showed that results had been slowly declining over several years. Each school selected its focus and many made great gains in the first year.

Based on the pilot schools’ success, the initiative was expanded and all 200 schools were invited to participate. This renewed focus on superb results from all students helped the Edmonton schools:

- Target a professional development plan for all principals and teachers around research-based teaching strategies in English and math.
- Re-orient central office support around issues of teaching and learning.
- Use coaching, both on-site and off-site, to support developing principals’ capacity as instructional leaders.

Instead of a hodgepodge of buffet-oriented professional development training, the district re-designed its training around the instructional focus – improving student learning in the core areas – and nothing else.”

From Focus On Results, http://focusonresults.net/results/ourresults_edmonton.html
Summary from “Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools”.^{12}

**Introduction**- This report recommends a fundamental revision of urban public school systems, one that shifts virtually all funds and most authority to the schools and dismantles centralized, bureaucratic structures. The recommendations are grounded in research and actual practice. While no one school district embodies all recommendations, examples of all recommended practices are in place in districts around the country.

There are few guides to what a decentralized system would look like despite the common call for decentralization. What power and functions would be retained at the central office? What functions would be shifted to the schools? What would be the implications for staffing, allocating funds, teacher preparation and development, and purchasing services? This report poses answers to such questions and in the process provides a road map for real decentralization of urban schools. *(p.3)*

**A new role for the central office**- Although considerably pared down, the central office remains the site for important specific functions:

**Budget.** A budget or treasury department collects taxes, extends levies, develops system-wide and school budget allocations and information, provides reliable computerized budget information and provides schools with their lump-sum operating funds. *(p.7)*

In our vision, money — and the authority it permits — moves to the schools from control by the central office. Schools receive 100 percent of the district’s operating funds. Operating funds include all funds from all sources except capital or debt reduction. The school council and staff develop the overall school budget based on their school’s development plan. Then the school council formally approves the budget.

Schools are taxed to support the few remaining and reformed central office functions that allow the system to ensure equity, intervene in failing schools, and respond to fluctuating and unpredictable needs. If schools want to purchase services beyond the minimum provided by the central office, they would pay more.

Schools take responsibility for many of the services formerly administered by the central office, such as transportation, supplies, equipment, repairs and food services. In turn, the central office exists primarily to serve the schools. Schools are free to contract for services with vendors including other schools or a central office department. A department’s size would depend on its share of the marketplace. *(p.8)*
In our model, each school receives its own funding, banks it and makes its own budget spending decisions. Schools are able to use funds across budget categories and across years. They keep unspent funds, interest earned on accounts, and fees from groups renting the building and parking lots. Deficits are carried over and deducted from the next year’s allocation. The district intervenes and imposes sanctions if overspending is more than marginal.

When there is a citywide shortfall, local school councils – with ample notice and considerable discretion – determine their own budget cuts rather than the central office. (p.31)

**Personnel.** A small personnel office carries out background checks and recruits for shortages. (p.7)

The principal and local councils work together to develop school-based selection criteria for teachers and other personnel. In each city, a central recruiting office creates a district-wide pool of new teachers. Schools select from those pools or seek out other individuals who will make a strong addition to their teaching staff.

In all cases, personnel decisions follow the law and established procedures that ensure open competition and diversity. The central office has the responsibility of doing background checks of potential teaching candidates. It also has a special responsibility to ensure that adequate numbers of teachers of color, and bilingual and special education teachers are on staff and available for openings.

To improve practice, teachers need time, resources and professional development in the context of their schools. Teachers at the school level must have the overall responsibility for professional growth and development, with appropriate forms of accountability to ensure effectiveness. They need time as a full faculty to work on questions of teaching and learning. (p.17)

**Competitive Services.** Service departments—such as transportation, food services and payroll—are available if there is sufficient school demand for their competitive prices, and quality and efficiency of service. (p.7)

In our model, the school’s policy, mission and programs determine how facilities and services are designed and managed. Decisions about facilities and services shift to the school. At the school council’s discretion, school buildings are used in a variety of innovative and community-oriented ways. Under-used buildings, for instance, share space and resources with community and city-services. Councils may rent a portion of the building to a community group. School buildings are community centers open from early morning until late at night, sometimes 24 hours a day.
In purchasing services, such as staff development consultants, maintenance and repairs, the central office no longer holds a monopoly. Principals have the authority to choose those services and determine who provides them. The central office competes for school contracts. (p.19)

Goals and standards. The school board and administrators establish broad goals, high standards, learning objectives and curricular frameworks for equity and accountability, consistent with state guidelines.

Equity. A small, central equity-assurance unit ensures that students with disabilities, with limited English proficiency, and from low-income families are well served and succeeding.

Assistance. A small intervention unit provides assistance, or if necessary, closes schools that are failing their students.

Information. A management information system connects schools to the central office mainframe computer, to each other, and to schools all over the world. A data collection/analysis center – perhaps contracted out to a private research consortium of universities and other research groups – collects a variety of student and school data and provides this information to the schools and to the public.

Emergency funds. An emergency funding pool is maintained for unpredictable events, such as major emergency repairs, extraordinary and unexpected energy costs, or substitutes for teachers with extended illnesses.

Legal assistance. A legal / labor unit handles district-wide litigation and centralized union negotiations.

From “Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools,” by the Cross City Campaign For Urban School Reform, 1995.

Comments on the application of “Reinventing Central Office” to DCPS

From the areas summarized above, budget, personnel, and competitive services are the ones that we believe would be most affected by decentralization. The comments below are reflective of that perspective.

DCPS Budget- We should use a school-based budgeting process, but whereas the report starts with the school getting 100% of the schools’ operating funds with taxes levied for minimum services, we can base our initial estimates on the Edmonton model with the local schools getting 80%, leaving a 20% charge for
DCPS. Until better formulated, let’s assume an 80/20 local school/DCPS split. Currently, schools receive 50% of their budget.

**DCPS Personnel**- Whereas the report recommends a small personnel office, we should not make personnel small, but rather it should really be reformed and strengthened, particularly since teachers and human resources are the Chancellors’ areas of strength and expertise. However, the other functions in a decentralized system related to local school control over staffing in the report are to be followed, making the major change from the current DCPS system the transfer of decision-making over personnel to the local school, away from the central office.

**DCPS Competitive Services**- This area has the most potential for change and reorganization. We should assume that the current forensic audit will recommend savings through more effective management and purchasing reforms. If we introduce free market competition via autonomy into the equation, it would encourage even better central office innovations in DCPS services because the departments would have to compete rather than be the monopolies they currently are, with all the high costs and service inefficiencies therein. Additionally, DCPS Competitive Services will have the incentive and can be set-up to also serve upon demand the charter school sector.

____________

**Central Office Services:**

**“CURRENT DISTRICT FUNCTIONS**

- Academic Services
- Accounts Payable
- After-School Programs
- AIDS Education
- Athletics
- Attendance
- Benefits
- Bilingual Education
- Capital Planning
- Collective Bargaining
- Conflict Resolution
- Counseling and Guidance
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Discipline
- Dropout Prevention
- Drug Testing
Facilities
Food and Nutrition Services
Employee Verification
Environmental Services
Executive Development
Gifted and Talented Programs
Graphics
Homeless Education
Instructional Media Services
Labor Relations
Legal Support Services
Library Media Services
Mail Delivery
Maintenance Services
Materials Management
Payroll Services
Personnel
Position Control
Placement
Professional Development
PSAT Training
Public/Private Partnerships
Pupil Support Services
Purchasing
School Health Services
School to Careers
Security (School)
Substitute Teachers
Superintendent’s Office
Transportation”


“Central Services: Some Free, Some Not

These are among the central services that schools in Edmonton receive without direct payment:

- Personnel services
- Purchasing and contract services
- Curriculum, programs and planning
- Archives and museum
- Student information, student assessment, and surveys and information analysis
- General counsel (legal services)
- Transportation services

These are the central services for which schools are required to pay directly:

- Leadership services (assistance to principals, crisis consultation, support with suspension and expulsions, placement of special-needs students and conflict resolution)
- Consulting services (curriculum and special education consultants, reading specialists, psychologists, social workers, multilingual consultants and teacher and staff professional development services and emergency response team services)
- Bennett Environment Education Centre (special class addressing teaching of social studies, science and physical education)
- Maintenance services (trades work)
- Building and testing inspection service
- Technical and operational consultation (architectural, energy management, mechanical, electrical, telephone, sound system, planning and technical specifications services)
- Security, custodial consultation and carpet cleaning services
- Print services
- Distribution services (trucking, receiving and processing customs broker orders)
- Teachers' Book Depository (a children’s bookstore and teacher materials)
- Mail delivery
- Information technology services (technical consultation and design support, help desk support, microcomputer and local area network support, e-mail services, student e-mail, fees management system)
- Communications/marketing services (consulting and graphic design work)
- Resource development services (hard copy learning resources, Web-accessed services, CD-ROMs, learning software)
- Catering services
- Metro Community College (training services, conference and event services, advertising and marketing support services)"14

About Autonomy Initiatives in other US School Districts

**Boston, Chicago & NY- “Easing Rules Over Schools Gains Favor”:**

“Massachusetts’ recent decision to offer charterlike freedom to four of its lowest-performing schools has renewed debate about the role autonomy plays in school improvement: Should it be earned through good performance, or given as a vital tool for improvement? Is it risky to extend it to struggling schools?

Interest in the issue is keen. The New York City and Chicago school districts are engaged in high-profile experiments with giving schools autonomy. Both the governor of Nevada and a coalition of groups in Connecticut are proposing legislation to give principals more authority to decide the pathways to better student achievement.

Experience has shown that state takeovers don’t often help ailing schools, policy experts say, and that cutting a beleaguered school loose to “do its own thing” doesn’t often deliver good results either. So, school leaders are experimenting with combinations of regulation and independence based on a school’s performance, approaches some refer to as “differentiated autonomy.”

The move by Massachusetts illustrates a growing recognition in the field that neither autonomy nor intervention, by itself, is a cure. The state is freeing the four schools from many operating restrictions, but it also plans to support and closely monitor them, and hold them to specific performance goals, in a bid to ensure that they gain ground.

**Roots in Boston**

“We are not affording them the option to perpetuate the low level of performance that got us to this place to begin with,” said Christopher R. Anderson, the new president of the Massachusetts state school board, who led last November’s effort to let the four schools shape their own turnarounds rather than be labeled “chronically underperforming” and have the state do it.

For the schools, the state panel created a new category called “commonwealth pilots,” patterned after the pilot schools created by the Boston district and its teachers’ union in 1995 as a response to the charter school movement. Boston’s 19 pilot schools secured that status with the approval of two-thirds of their faculty members. Their leaders can decide curriculum, staffing, budget, and other significant matters.

“It’s pretty clear to everybody that simply granting autonomy isn’t going to be enough,” he said. “What will make or break this experiment is the support,
guidance, direction, additional capacity-building the state is able to give these schools.”

Up Front or Afterward?

Chicago is an example of a district that believes schools must earn autonomy.

Its Autonomous Management Performance Schools, or AMPS, program, begun in 2005, was designed to reward with additional freedom schools that met rigorous standards of achievement and managerial competence. Low-performing schools are subject to tighter controls.

The nation’s largest school district, the 1.1 million-student New York City system, is undertaking a massive initiative in autonomy for principals. The theory in that district is that school autonomy must be given up front, to drive improvement, not in recognition of doing well.

In 2004, 29 schools opted to join what was then called an “autonomy zone,” which freed them from many of the district’s rules on staffing, budgeting, and curriculum in exchange for their promise to meet specific performance goals.

The effort has changed name and scope: There are now 332 “empowerment schools,” and Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein outlined plans in January to offer similar freedoms—with several new sets of support structures—to all of the city’s 1,400 principals.

“It’s easy for folks to understand autonomy as a reward. On the other hand, we view it as a prerequisite,” said Eric Nadelstern, who heads the initiative. “When we put people into the lowest-performing schools to lead them, we don’t want to take away the tools they need to be effective.”

Four-year performance agreements ensure that principals will deliver results with the freedoms they have, Mr. Nadelstern said. School leaders choose where to get their support and services for all their basic operations, such as budgeting and professional development. They can receive such help from newly designed teams within the district, from networks of empowerment schools, or from outside partners who provide such services under contract.”

New Orleans, LA:

“Since Hurricane Katrina, a new model for public education has emerged. The 58 public schools in New Orleans are now governed by two boards. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), the local governing entity for all schools before the storm, has retained control of 17 schools: 5 managed by the district and 12 charter schools – public schools that are given increased autonomy in exchange for more accountability for student performance. The state-run Recovery School District (RSD) operates 39 schools: 22 district run and 17 charters. New Orleans has 57 percent of its students in charter schools – the largest percentage of any district across the country.

For many schools, the increased school-level autonomy – the ability to make budgeting, staffing, and curriculum decisions at the school level – granted in exchange for greater accountability appears to have sharpened the focus on improving student achievement. In addition, the vast majority of public school operators have shown an initial commitment to developing the knowledge and skills of both principals and teachers, which ultimately should translate into improved classroom instruction.”  


Chula Vista, CA:

Historically in Chula Vista, resource allocation and decisionmaking had been based in the central office. Upon Dr. Gil’s arrival, she and the board began to craft a new way of working in Chula Vista – one in which schools and their staff had more control over resources and decisionmaking. Yet Chula Vista’s story of decentralization was about not only the levers of authority given to schools, but also the influence retained by the district office. District leaders facilitated coherence across schools in several ways, including building and promoting a set of districtwide principles of success, designing an accountability system, holding schools responsible for results, and hiring and supporting a strong cadre of principals.

As reform efforts progressed, the district began to see changes in student achievement. By 2002, for example, more than 50 percent of 2nd grade Hispanic students rated at or above the 50th percentile on the state sanctioned Stanford 9 math test, a significant increase from earlier years. Similar gains were made by African American students; in 2002, at least 50 percent of those in second, fifth, and sixth grades scored at or above the 50th percentile on the Stanford 9 reading test. 17

Where Do We Go From Here? The DCPS Autonomy Pilot Program 08-09

Next Steps:

1. The DC School Autonomy Study Group presents and recommends to the Chancellor, the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, DC Council, and DC State Board of Education an education reform proposal of varying levels of local school autonomy within DCPS through a decentralized central office that serves and focuses on teaching, learning and professional development.

2. Present the autonomy proposal to build public support and understanding, and get agreement from DC officials to adopt an autonomy and decentralization school reform strategy.

3. Incorporate autonomy options into DCPS financial and operational studies.


DCPS Autonomy Pilot Program

A Partnership between DCPS and the PCSB

The pilot would consider the roles and responsibilities of both the local school and the central office, and would be modeled on the application, review and oversight processes and policies of the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) who would advise and assist DCPS in their administration of the pilot program. The Study Group recommends a pilot of 8 schools (2 high schools, 2 middle schools and 4 elementary schools). Approved schools start in the 08-09 school year with transition and planning, with full implementation by the 09-10 school year.

The DCPS autonomy application and review process will be administered parallel to the PCSB process in 2008, with DCPS’ process staggered to start two-weeks behind the PCSB process. Following the PCSB 2007 timetable, a 2008 general calendar could be:

January- Release Application guidelines, public information meetings
April- Applications deadline, review process
May- Applicant interviews, public hearing
June- Decisions
Attachments

1. Appendixes from “Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools,” by the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.

2. The Term Paper report “School Autonomy Alone is Not Enough,” by the Piton Foundation.
APPENDIX A

DECENTRALIZED SCHOOL AUTHORITY

Schools are governed by democratically selected councils with authority over instructional programs, personnel, budget, and facilities and services. The council hires the principal (or lead teacher) who manages the school. Decentralized schools are the primary site for accountability. Central office functions are supported by a small tax on local schools’ operating funds. The following is a list of school functions:

**Governance**
- Makes major policy decisions
- Determines school day, week
- Creates parent, community engagement programs

**Budget**
- Receives and manages 100 percent of district funds minus taxed services
- Receives school funding based on student weighting
- Contracts out services to central office or other vendors
- Reports to community on annual audit, other spending reports

**Instructional Program**
- Creates outcome standards
- Determines instructional program, curriculum, assessments and staff development
- Selects supplies/textbooks
- Provides staff development
- Contracts with vendors
- Carries our rigorous assessment of student achievement
- Meets district, state standards
- Reports progress to community

**Personnel**
- Recruits/selects and evaluates principal, terminates or retains principal
- Principal (or head teacher) recruits, selects, directs all staff
- Has flexibility over certain school working conditions

**Facilities**
- Determines use of school building
- Collects rent from outside usage
- Selects vendors for maintenance, repair

**Accountability**
- Reports on student outcomes, use of resources
- Ensures equitable learning experiences
- Develops local standards consistent with district, state
APPENDIX B

DECENTRALIZED CENTRAL OFFICE SERVICES

Most of the responsibilities of a reinvented central office include important categories such as assuring equity, intervening in failing schools, and taking responsibility for significant or fluctuating costs so risk is spread among all schools. Schools are allocated 100 percent of their operating funds (excluding capital and debt) and are taxed to support certain central office functions. The following is a list of these functions.

| Superintendent and School Board | Establishes broad goals, high standards, and learning objectives consistent with state guidelines. |
| Equity Assurance Office | Ensures that students with disabilities, those who are limited English proficient, children from low-income homes, and children of color are well served and succeeding. |
| Budget/Treasury Department | Extends levies, collects taxes, provides on-line budget information to schools, and provides schools with the operating funds. |
| Information Services | Connects schools to mainframe computer containing student and school information, reference data, lists of catalogues and vendors. |
| Legal/Insurance/Labor Unit | Handles litigation, insurance and centralized union contracts. |
| Personnel Office | Carries out background checks and recruits for shortages. |
| Data Collection and Analysis | Collects a variety of student/school data and provides information to schools and public (Could be contracted out). |
| Service Departments such as Payroll, Transportation and Food Services | Serves schools as long as service is satisfactory and competitive. Schools may want to contract out for these services and, therefore, would not be taxed for them. |
| Emergency Funds | Supports unpredictable events (extended illnesses, extraordinary energy costs, large non-capital repairs) and other costs not equally shared (recruitment for bilingual teachers). |
## Appendix C

### Reinventing Central Office

#### Executive Summary

**Governance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Responsibility</th>
<th>District Responsibility</th>
<th>External Organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Democratically elected local school councils — comprised of parents, staff, community members, high school students and the principal — govern the schools.</td>
<td>- The district sets goals and standards.</td>
<td>- Parents, community organizations, universities, businesses, churches, social service agencies, and cultural organizations work with the schools, making them an active part of the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School staff and site councils develop the annual improvement plan and school budget, reflecting local school council policy decisions.</td>
<td>- The district oversees equitable school funding.</td>
<td>- School staff participate in community activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School councils approve annual plans and budgets.</td>
<td>- The district ensures that special need students are well served.</td>
<td>- Community and civic organizations provide training and support to local school councils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- School councils hire, evaluate and make retention decisions about the principal.</td>
<td>- The district intervenes in failing schools and supports the ongoing work of schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- School councils monitor the implementation of the school improvement plan.</td>
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<td>- School councils provide public reports on school progress, how funds are spent, and on school policies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Parents and community members participate at all levels in the school, including governance.</td>
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### BUDGET

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<th>EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Schools receive and control 100% of operating funds (excluding capital, debt) minus</td>
<td>• The district deposits school funds into school bank accounts.</td>
<td>• Outside companies may enter into contracts with schools to provide services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“taxes” paid to district for mandated services and special grants. Almost all school</td>
<td>• The district allocates resources equitably to all schools. All budget information is</td>
<td>• Community and civic organizations provide training and support to local school councils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allocations are based on student weighting.</td>
<td>on-line and understandable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools must pay for annual audits of their own bank accounts.</td>
<td>• The budget office alerts schools when they are overspending and has the authority to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools that do not spend all of their budget may roll those funds over to next year</td>
<td>intervene in serious cases.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools that overspend must deduct that amount from next year’s budget.</td>
<td>• The district handles district-wide budget reports, audits, tax levies and collections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools can pool categorical funds; they are accountable for serving all students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Local school councils furnish parents and the community with annual audits and other</td>
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<td>spending reports.</td>
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### CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• School staff make decisions about curriculum, materials, instructional strategies, assessment, and professional development.</td>
<td>• The district Office of Equity Assurance intervenes in schools not complying with consent decrees and equity requirements.</td>
<td>• Clusters of schools and external networks — including universities, non-profits, community-based organizations and private sector providers — provide support to individual schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools have the primary responsibility for student improvement by providing high quality and equitable learning experiences.</td>
<td>• A district Intervention Office works with failing schools. Principals, staff, and/or councils are replaced if support and comprehensive intervention fail.</td>
<td>• An independent organization could contract with the district to collect and analyze information, then provide it to the schools and to the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School staff and local school councils help determine indicators of student and school progress.</td>
<td>• The district collects student and school data, or contracts out for this service.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School staff report regularly on student and school progress to parents and school community.</td>
<td>• Central office personnel and the research community help determine indicators of student and school progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools budget time for staff to collaborate and plan.</td>
<td>• The district provides disaggregated data on student and school progress to schools via computer, ensuring that all information can be easily accessed and manipulated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools purchase curricular and professional development support from outside organizations or the central office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• School staff and local school councils in large schools have the option of forming smaller schools-within-schools.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools do not label or track students.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Personnel

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Responsibility</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local school councils select principals and hire them under four-year performance contracts.</td>
<td>The district negotiates union contracts centrally with flexibility for individual school working conditions.</td>
<td>Outside organizations could enter into contracts to provide any of these district services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals and councils develop their own process for school-based staff selection and evaluation.</td>
<td>The district provides background and credential checks and salary/benefit determination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school recruits new staff or pays the district for recruiting services. Schools must adhere to district diversity policies.</td>
<td>The central office may contract with substitutes for subject areas and for schools that have difficulty finding substitutes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools obtain substitutes directly or use central office services for a fee.</td>
<td>Based on individual schools’ requests, the central office may recruit and/or interview all candidates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools provide extensive, on-site preparation for student teachers.</td>
<td>Central office personnel staff recruit for scarce positions, such as bilingual, special education teachers, and for teachers of color.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The central office handles payroll, workers compensation and insurance for a fee, or contracts out for these services.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The size of the central office staff depends on the market for their services among the schools.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Facilities and Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Responsibility</th>
<th>District Responsibility</th>
<th>External Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Schools determine their own hours and custodial schedules.</td>
<td>• The district brokers with major companies to obtain discounts for bulk purchasing.</td>
<td>• Outside organizations could contract with schools to provide services such as maintenance, repairs, security, transportation and food services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools house multiple student and community services, as space permits.</td>
<td>• The district maintains an emergency pool of money for extraordinary and unexpected expenses, such as fire, flood damage or roof repairs.</td>
<td>• City health, recreation, library, police departments, and other city and community organizations and agencies work with the schools by providing direct services and sometimes by sharing school buildings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• School programs are not necessarily in traditional school buildings.</td>
<td>• The district service staff competes with outside vendors for maintenance contracts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools are available 24 hours a day for community use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools purchase goods and services directly from vendors and are encouraged to use local businesses. Schools also are free to contract with central office departments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools may cluster together to purchase materials and personnel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Schools must meet affirmative action requirements. Local school council members must disclose ties to vendors and fill out conflict of interest statements annually.</td>
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</table>
# ACCOUNTABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY</th>
<th>DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITY</th>
<th>THE STATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Schools create school-based standards through discussions with the broader school community. These standards are consistent with district and state achievement standards.</td>
<td>• The district sets district-wide goals and standards.</td>
<td>• The state sets broad achievement and performance standards for all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools equitably distribute resources, providing all students with high quality and equitable learning experiences.</td>
<td>• The district intervenes in failing schools and ensures equity standards.</td>
<td>• The state provides ample resources to that goals and standards may be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schools assess student progress and report on student improvement, use of resources, and progress toward school, district and state standards.</td>
<td>• The district reports to schools and the public on school spending and student improvement on a variety of indicators. The district also disaggregates the data by race, socio-economic class, gender, special education and bilingual status.</td>
<td>• The state ensures finance equity among districts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The district gives mandated standardized tests.</td>
<td>• The state conducts random and minimal standardized tests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The district provides regular reports to the public on a wide range of district-wide indicators.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
School Autonomy Alone Is Not Enough

In an article by Alan Gerstein, School Reform Isn’t Enough, the author discusses the importance of school autonomy in educational reform. Gerstein argues that while school autonomy is crucial, it alone is not enough to ensure educational success. He cites numerous studies that highlight the importance of autonomy, but cautions that it must be coupled with other critical factors such as teacher quality, school culture, and community support.

Gerstein emphasizes that schools need more than just autonomy to succeed. They require a comprehensive approach that includes strong leadership, effective instructional strategies, and a culture that values student engagement and achievement. He suggests that schools that have achieved success have done so by combining autonomy with these other elements.

Gerstein concludes by calling for a balanced approach to educational reform. He believes that schools need freedom to innovate and make decisions that are best for their communities, but this autonomy must be accompanied by the support and resources necessary to ensure educational excellence.

Gerstein’s article challenges the common assumption that school autonomy is the sole solution to educational problems. It highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses the complex issues facing education today.
Despite Changes, Chicago Parents Still Wield Power

By Alan Gottlieb

Chicago—From 1999 through the mid-1990s, the city was regarded by many as the basket case of the nation’s urban school reform.

Schools were closed or converted to charter schools, creating a culture of fear and uncertainty for students, parents, principals, and teachers.

In schools whose parents had the power to act, decisions such as not building new schools or closing ones were made quickly, with little notice or input.

The Chicago school system was one of the few in the country to experiment with decentralized decision-making, allowing parents to have a say in their child’s education. This approach has been replicated in other cities as well.

Chicago’s approach has been lauded for its success in improving student outcomes, with many school districts around the country adopting similar models.

Despite the challenges, Chicago’s decentralized system has shown that education can be improved by involving parents and community members in the decision-making process. This is a lesson that can be applied to other cities and school districts as they work to improve their educational outcomes.

The success of Chicago’s decentralized system has inspired other cities to adopt similar models, with the goal of improving student outcomes and increasing parental involvement in education.

Chicago Elementary School

Chicago’s first community-controlled school has been a model for other cities looking to improve their educational outcomes. The school has shown that involving parents and community members in the decision-making process can lead to improved student outcomes.

In addition to school leadership, which includes the principal, Local School Council and strong teacher leaders, the school also has a strong community focus. The school has a strong partnership with the local community, which includes businesses, community organizations, and local residents.

The school’s success has been attributed to the strong partnerships it has built with the community, as well as the involvement of parents and students in the decision-making process.

The school has shown that decentralized decision-making can lead to improved student outcomes, and other cities are looking to replicate its success.

The school has been awarded numerous accolades for its success, including the National Blue Ribbon School award.

In conclusion, Chicago’s decentralized system has shown that involving parents and community members in the decision-making process can lead to improved student outcomes. Other cities are looking to replicate this success, and the future of education looks bright as these models continue to spread.
Instructional Focus Is Key in Decentralized Edmonton Schools

BY ALAN GUTSTEIN
TORONTO — Schools in this northern prairie city have operated under the most radically decentralized system in North America for some 14 years.

“Although decentralization initiatives in Canada are set by the province, Edmonton Public Schools has developed virtually all authority over instruction, staffing levels, budget and management to principal positions in its central office but retains control over overall education policy and decision-making,” writes Marjorie L. Bandy, director of educational research for the Edmonton Public School Board.

Bandy explains that local schools use the program's guidelines to establish their own budgets and to allocate resources. The school boards are responsible for ensuring that all schools within the board meet the established guidelines.

Bandy says that the program has been successful in providing students with a more personalized learning experience.

“Instructional Focus Is Key in Decentralized Edmonton Schools” is a feature article from the December 2002 issue of The Forum, a magazine devoted to educational issues. The article is available for purchase from the magazine's website.

The article is followed by a letter from the editor, expressing his or her thoughts on the importance of decentralization in education.
Denver's CDMs at a Crossroads

By Brian Brown

In 1999, a two-year mandate from the Colorado legislature forced a transition from a district management system on Denver Public Schools.

A study called “Decentralizing DCPS: A Strategic Plan for Denver Public Schools” was published in September 2007. The study concluded that, in order to achieve the goals of decentralization, Denver Public Schools needed to make significant changes to the district’s management structure.

The study recommended that the district should establish a new management model that would give schools more autonomy and flexibility. It also recommended that the district should develop a new set of governance structures and procedures to support the new model.

Confusion reigns at CDMs

In the aftermath of the study’s release, confusion and uncertainty prevailed at Denver Public Schools. Several CDMs were forced to make difficult decisions about how to implement the new management model.

One CDM, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the district’s lack of clear guidance and support had caused confusion among the schools. “We’re not sure what’s expected of us,” the CDM said. “We’re just trying to figure it out as we go.”

The District Response

In response to the confusion, Denver Public Schools announced a new set of guidelines for CDMs. The district also created a new website and provided training sessions to help CDMs understand their new roles.

Despite these efforts, many CDMs continued to express concerns about their ability to implement the new model. “We’re not sure what we’re supposed to do,” one CDM said. “We’re just winging it.”

The Future of CDMs

As the school year drew to a close, many CDMs expressed uncertainty about the future of the district’s management model. Some were hopeful that the district would provide clearer guidance and support, while others were skeptical that the model could be implemented successfully.

“I’m not sure what’s going to happen,” one CDM said. “We’re just waiting to see what happens next.”

Despite the challenges, many CDMs remained committed to the new model. “We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished so far,” one CDM said. “We’re just trying to do the best we can.”

The Term Paper

April 2002

Centralizing DCPS: September 2007

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Superintendent Wartg: “Downtown” Will Be More of a Resource to CDMs

In a Q&A meeting with the DC Council, Terry Wartg, DCPS superintendent, stressed the importance of closing the achievement gap, which he sees as the central challenge facing the district.

The following excerpts are from Wartg's comments:

"There needs to be more guidance from the district in the areas of curriculum and instruction. I think there is a need for direct and indirect support, but principals feel overwhelmed by the amount of work they have to do. We can't do it on our own. We need to work with the schools. We can't do it on our own." (Statement at the Q&A meeting)

"I want to recruit nationally. It’s a priority for me." (Statement in a press release)

"We need to have a more collaborative approach to decision making in the district. We need to work more closely with principals and teachers to ensure that our education programs are effective." (Statement in a press release)

"I have heard that there is a lot of frustration among teachers and principals with the current system of evaluation and support. We need to work on improving this system." (Statement in a press release)

"I believe that we need to focus more on the needs of our students and less on the administrative burden." (Statement in a press release)

"We need to ensure that our schools have the resources they need to succeed. This includes funding for technology, teacher training, and equipment." (Statement in a press release)
Decentralizing DCPS - September 2007

Leadership

Having a strong principal in place is an absolute prerequisite for success. A principal who is able to rally and maintain high levels of enthusiasm and motivation among teachers and parents is essential. This is why in recent years, many schools have made a conscious effort to hire principals who not only have a vision for the school, but also possess strong leadership skills.

The principal's role is crucial in fostering a positive learning environment. They are responsible for setting the tone and expectations for the school, and for creating a culture of excellence.

In recent years, there has been a trend towards decentralization in education. This means giving more decision-making power to the schools themselves, rather than leaving it in the hands of central administration.

Autonomous Schools may have the freedom to design their own curriculum, hire their own teachers, and make decisions about budgeting and resource allocation. This can result in a more personalized learning experience for students, as well as increased flexibility and creativity in the classroom.

In the past, schools were often seen as isolated islands, with little latitude to make decisions that could improve the learning experience for students. However, with the rise of autonomous schools, this is changing.

One of the key benefits of autonomous schools is the ability to tailor the curriculum to the specific needs of the students. This can lead to a more engaging and relevant learning experience, as teachers are able to incorporate real-world examples and project-based learning into their lessons.

Another advantage of autonomous schools is the ability to hire and retain the best teachers. With more control over the hiring process, schools can attract high-quality educators who are passionate about teaching and committed to student success.

In summary, autonomous schools represent a significant departure from traditional education models. They offer greater flexibility and autonomy to school leaders, allowing them to make decisions that are in the best interest of their students.

For further information on this topic, please visit:

- www.nacrec.org - North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Research organization on educational issues
- www.newschoolcz.org - New American Schools - whole school design organization. Web site contains links to many research publications.
- www.education.ucla.edu - U.S. Education Dept. Index to research papers
- www.unc.edu/education/cougan/ - University of Southern California Center on Educational Governance. Includes links to research by Trisha Willingham
- www.apa.org/education/ - Education Public Schools web site
- www.autoshipper.com/ - Data site for Chicago Public Schools
- www.crosseyed.org/ - Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

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6 January 2002


6  District of Columbia Public Schools, p. 91.
7 District of Columbia Public Schools, p. 93.
8 District of Columbia Public Schools, p. 95.


11 Focus On Results, <http://focusonresults.net/results/ourresults_edmonton.html>


