

Elected or Appointed School Board?

Options for Governance for the Chicago Board of Education

A Study Guide



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The League of Women Voters of Chicago presents this study guide to all who care about the City of Chicago and its public schools, and specifically about governance by the Chicago Board of Education.

Why this study is timely: In February 2015, voters in advisory referenda in 37 Chicago wards voted overwhelmingly for an elected school board, 83% to 93% in favor¹. The significant disappointment with the mayorally-appointed Board of Education that was expressed in those votes was connected to the closing of 50 schools in May 2013 with the stated reasons of low enrollment and to save money. At that time, school communities noted the absence of community engagement that showed a lack of respect for the significant anchoring role these schools played in their communities, and the board's process for decisions about closings was one from which parents felt excluded.² Even more recently, the Board of Education has been seen as acting counter to the wishes of an entire community in approving a new charter school despite the fact that the community demonstrated very strong opposition.³ The role of traditional neighborhood schools to provide community cohesiveness by serving all its children, including those who perform well, has been perceived by these communities as ignored by the board in favor of choice for individual parents.⁴ Voices from the media have noticed that the mayorally-appointed members of the Board of Education seem to have little incentive to ask the difficult questions that provide necessary oversight.⁵ This is especially true when the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools is also selected by the Mayor.

It is timely to address the question of an elected board of education, currently supported by a number of state legislators who are advancing legislation to that effect, as well as all the related issues of governance. It is clear that Chicago's communities and the people who live in them want to know they have a voice in the directions taken by their school system – a voice they believe is now lacking.

The League of Women Voters of Chicago has researched and studied various models of public school governance that exist throughout the United States. Several conclusions became clear:

- There is more to governance than the choice of an appointed or elected school board.
- No method of governance is perfect; each has its pros and cons.
- No peer-reviewed study or comparative analysis has found that student performance depends on the method of selection of board members.
- The method of selection of board members may be important for other reasons, such as opportunities for community engagement or for oversight over the administration.

The League of Women Voters of Chicago wishes to assist the broader community in thinking through the pros and cons of fully-elected, appointed, and partially-elected boards of education. Moreover, it is the League's intention to explore with this community other options that can provide connecting structures between the board and its communities, structures that can build trust, irrespective of the method of selecting the board of education. There are practices that can act as incentives for boards to provide oversight and a check and balance on the administration. To do this, the study guide asks questions and provides background information and sources to add to the conversation about governance that is ongoing.

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Part I Methods of Governance for Chicago Board of Education

There are three options for governing the Chicago Public Schools: an elected board of education; an appointed board as we now have; and a hybrid board of education, with some members elected and the others appointed by the Mayor.

For each type of board there are options to be considered for how the members are selected. The reader may find it is possible to support more than one method of governance depending on qualifying factors.

1. Should the Chicago Public Schools be governed by an elected Board of Education?

Background information (For comparison, Chicago has 397,000 students.)

In the U.S. ninety-five percent of school board members are elected.¹ In Illinois, Chicago has the only appointed school board. Moreover, Chicago has always had an appointed school board, never an elected one (See the Appendix for a history of the Chicago Board of Education).

The five largest school districts, more than 200,000 students, that elect their boards of education are found in Los Angeles (plus 31 smaller municipalities), 655,000; Dade County/Miami, 354,000; Clark County-Las Vegas, 311,000; Broward County-Fort Lauderdale, 260,000; and Houston, 203,000. The board of education in each case selects and appoints the superintendent who administers the school district.

In Los Angeles, the superintendent will have to manage a political struggle over the future course of the nation's second-largest school system, along with ongoing budget pressures and declining enrollment and the added challenge of an outside plan to greatly expand the number of independently-operated charter schools, whose growth, according to a recent analysis by an expert panel, could make it difficult for the district to sustain academic programs and services.² Washington D.C. (76,000) has recently moved from an appointed board to an elected board, but the mayor chooses the chancellor, has made it a cabinet-level appointment, and is in charge of administering the schools. Recent Chicago history includes a strong push by community organizations and the Chicago Teachers Union for an elected school board.

Sources

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| Elected School Board | |
|--|---|
| Pros | Cons |
| Authentic community engagement can occur. Elected boards can be more responsive to community preferences. (5) | School board elections have historically attracted low voter turnout, thereby allowing special-interest groups to dominate the board. (1) |
| Elected school board members could provide oversight of the administration and finances with sufficient access to information. For example, they can ask difficult questions of the administration. (2) | Big money can determine elections. |
| Elected school boards are more democratic and can prompt the community to take a greater interest in their schools. (1)(3) | With too many agendas, the board may lack focus or vision. (6) |
| Elected school boards can be more responsive to the public will (2) and can provide an opportunity to emphasize the primacy of community over particular political ideologies of education, e.g. privatization and market-based systems. (5) | Accountability is diffused for the voting public in comparison to a vote for or against a mayor who has control of the board. (6) |
| Elected school boards may have greater independence and freedom to act in the best interests of the district. | Board members could micromanage administration and not understand complex budgets |
| Elected school boards can be more diverse when elected from districts. | Qualified individuals can be reluctant to subject themselves to the difficulties and expense of an election campaign. (1) |
| Elected boards can be more transparent. (5) | Elections may not result in a diverse and highly skilled school board. (1) |
| Elected boards can make equitable educational opportunities a priority if they are lacking. (5) | Elected boards can develop factions that make the board dysfunctional. |

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2. If the board is elected:

a. Should all members represent geographical districts?

b. Should some members be elected at-large?

c. Should all members be elected at-large?

d. If some members are elected at-large, should the majority of members be elected from geographical districts?

Background information

Most school board members are elected from single-member geographic districts; however, some school board members are elected at large. It has been argued that single-member districts tend to create a more parochial school board member; however, districts with only at-large elections can generate legal challenges in states covered by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Several lawsuits alleging minority dilution in the establishment of single-member or at-large elected board districts have been decided (*Reno v. Bossier Parish School Board* (1997), *Perez v. Pasadena Independent School District* (5th Cir. 1999), and *Valdespino v. Alamo Heights Independent School District* (5th Cir. 1999)).¹ Small, relatively homogeneous districts nearly always have at-large elections. Larger, more complex districts prefer geographic districts to represent identifiable areas or populations within the district, or a combination of elections of single members from geographic districts and at-large elections. Single-member, geographic districts help to ensure diversity among board members. Theoretically, the at-large member is free to take into account the needs of the entire school district.

Los Angeles elects seven members from seven geographical districts. Houston elects nine trustees from geographical districts. Broward County-Fort Lauderdale has nine board members, two of whom are elected at-large and seven from geographical districts. Among mid-size urban school districts, San Francisco has seven members elected at-large, Portland has seven members from seven districts, Denver has a seven-member board with five from districts and two at-large, and Minneapolis has a nine-member board with six from districts and three at-large.

Source

“School Boards – Selection and Education of Members,” *Education Encyclopedia*
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3. Should the Chicago Public Schools continue to be governed by a Board of Education appointed by the Mayor of Chicago?

Background information

Nationally there are not a large number of appointed boards of education. Nevertheless, appointed boards can be found in both large and small urban areas in which the school district is under mayoral control. Examples are found in the list below. They are also found in complex, county-wide districts and in cities in which the state has assumed control of the school district for financial reasons and/or to address low test scores.^{1,2} This section is primarily concerned with appointed boards under mayoral control.

People on both sides of the elected or appointed board discussion are concerned about politics. The elected board was long viewed as a way to insulate the school district from the politics of the city.³ More recently, the appointed board was seen as a way to insulate it from special interest groups that might dominate elections, such as the teachers union.⁴ Now that some appointed boards with mayoral control are described as following a business model with integrated governance, it may also be that a new form of politics has entered the education scene in the form of political ideology that wants to replace some portion of the neighborhood schools with market-based, partially-privatized choices for parents.⁵ It should be noted that the same political ideology can be found in districts with elected boards.

Two important characteristics related to an appointed board are whether the mayor shares his power to appoint board members or has complete control of the appointments and whether the mayor also has undivided power to appoint the CEO/superintendent. An examination of boards currently appointed shows that Chicago is the **only** major city where the mayor has undivided power to appoint the board and the CEO. In the following examples drawn from research by LWVChicago, primarily from the websites for each district, many of the boards of education have other official names although they function as boards of education:

- Chicago: The mayor appoints seven board members and the CEO.
- New York City: The mayor appoints eight board members, and the five borough presidents appoint one member each. The mayor chooses the Chancellor, who serves on the board, ex officio.
- Boston: The mayor appoints seven board members from a list of recommended candidates proposed by a 13-member nominating commission. The board of education selects the superintendent.
- Cleveland Metro: The mayor appoints a nine-member board from slates recommended by a nominating panel. The board, with the concurrence of the mayor, selects the superintendent.
- Providence, R. I.: The mayor appoints the eight-member board, and the board selects the superintendent.
- Yonkers, New York: The mayor appoints the nine-member board, and the board selects the superintendent.

- Baltimore City: Under a city-state partnership, the seven-member board was most recently appointed jointly by the mayor and the governor. The board selects the superintendent.
- Philadelphia: A School Reform Commission replaced the board of education because of financial problems. Three members are appointed by the governor and two by the mayor, who has no direct control. The Commission selects the CEO.

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| Appointed School Board | |
|---|---|
| Pros | Cons |
| Appointed school boards may have clearer accountability at election time. (3) (6) | There may be too much centralized power if the mayor also appoints the CEO and the Chief Education Officer. |
| The mayor can provide a vision and focus for the schools and a board that supports it (e.g. universal preschool; community schools; principal training).(6) | If the mayor appoints everyone on the board, there may be little or no oversight over policies or finances. It is difficult for them to ask the important questions. |
| The mayor can coordinate services to schools from other city departments. | There may be less chance of authentic community engagement and responsiveness to community preferences. (3) |
| There may be opportunity for greater selectivity in choosing qualified board members. (2) | An appointed board, by its selection, may reflect the mayor's priority for selective enrollment schools or for certain neighborhoods. (5) |
| Appointment can encourage a positive, harmonious working relationship between the school board and the mayor. (2) | The school board members may not express their own opinions, but may only echo the mayor; thereby eliminating any give and take discussion. (1) |
| Appointed members have not had to mount a public campaign and therefore may generate less controversy in the community. (2) | Mayoral appointees may be less responsive to the public will. (4) They may reflect a particular political ideology about education, e.g. privatization and a market-based system that replaces community. (5) |
| | The community does not have a direct voice in the selection of the school district's governing body. (4) |
| | Appointed board members have less independence and freedom to act in the best interests of the school district. (2) |

Sources used are the same as for the Elected School Board chart on page 5.

4. If any members of the board are appointed, should Chicago return to the practice of a district-wide nominating commission for their selection?

Background information

Nominating commissions or panels are sometimes added to the selection process for appointed boards in order to reflect community voices as well as the breadth of voices that are interested in the public schools.

Chicago's nominating commission was established by state legislation in 1988 and removed in 1995 when the mayor was given total control. It was composed of 23 local school council members and five mayoral appointees to supply the mayor with at least three nominees for each seat. From these, the mayor had to choose the 15 members of the board. The 23 local school council members were elected by the local school councils to serve on the district councils, from which the commission members were elected. The process proved to be a lengthy one, and did not work smoothly between the commission and the mayor, as the mayor could choose to reject some or all of the nominees.^{1,2}

Cleveland's board of education has an eleven-member nominating panel. The panel, established by state law, is required to nominate a slate of candidates for each board vacancy. It is composed of three parents appointed by the District PTA/PTO, three appointed by the mayor, and one each from the following: the president of the city council, teachers' union, principals' organization, business community, and a local institution of higher learning.

Boston's nominating process provides community engagement through a thirteen-member nominating commission, composed of four members appointed by the mayor and nine members representing parents, teachers, principals, business, and higher education.

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2. "History of Chicago Public Schools," 2015, *Catalyst Chicago* <http://catalyst-chicago.org/cps-history/>

5. Should the Chicago Public Schools be governed by a hybrid school board, with some members elected and some appointed by the Mayor?

6. If the board is a hybrid board:

- a. Should the majority of members of a hybrid school board be elected?**
- b. Should the majority of members of a hybrid school board be appointed by the mayor?**
- c. Should the elected members of a hybrid school board be elected from geographical districts?**
- d. Should the elected members of a hybrid school board be elected at large?**

Background information

Hybrid boards of education are a recent phenomenon. For those school districts that have adopted a hybrid form of governance, it was hoped that the new system would avoid the worst problems connected to both elected and appointed boards of education, while successfully balancing the positives of each. There is little research-based evidence of district success with this method of governance; however, there is anecdotal evidence of both possibilities and problems. Paul Vallas, former CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, recently spoke in favor of a hybrid school board for Chicago rather than an all-elected one because, “Like it or not, the mayor needs to have skin in the game.” He also stated that the district needs elected members to provide transparency.¹

- Hartford, CT: In Hartford’s hybrid board system, established in 2002, the mayor appoints five of the nine board members (and the former mayors can and did appoint themselves), and four members are elected at large by residents. According to the local newspaper, this system has had a tumultuous history, including tensions between the board and the superintendent and controversy over the mayor holding a seat. The mayor has used his appointment power to determine the direction of the district. These appointments must be confirmed by the city council.^{2,3} Prior to 2002, the state took over the district in order to stabilize it.
- New Haven, CT: A 2013 city charter revision required the board of education to become a hybrid body with four mayoral appointees: the mayor, two members elected by the public from districts and two non-voting student members. Until then all of its members had been appointed by the mayor. Keeping the mayor on the board of education was controversial, but in the end, he maintained the power to keep his seat. The first election was held in 2015.⁴

- Baltimore County, MD: This board is in transition. Currently the eleven-member board is appointed by the Governor from recommendations made by the County Executive; four serve at-large and seven from districts. In 2018, it will become a hybrid board with seven elected and four appointed by the Governor. The County Executive was opposed to the change but will be out of office when it takes place⁵.

Note: Two other county boards in Maryland transitioned to hybrid boards in 2010 and 2011.

- Washington D.C.: Washington has frequently been cited as an example of both an appointed board and a hybrid board, and has been both, but is currently neither. There are nine members of a new “State Board of Education,” replacing the former local school board. Eight are elected from eight districts and one additional member is elected at large. There are also 60 regional “school districts,” each with an elected board and a superintendent. The mayor has responsibility for the administration of the schools and has made the school system a cabinet-level agency. When the board was a hybrid board, the mayor did not appoint the majority of members.

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| Hybrid School Board | |
|--|---|
| Pros | Cons |
| Having some members elected can provide authentic community engagement. (4) | The elected and appointed members could develop into factions that could make the board dysfunctional. |
| The elected members would be free to ask difficult questions, thus providing oversight over the finances and the administration. (2) | School board elections have historically attracted low voter turnout, allowing special interests or big money to dominate. (1) |
| Having some members elected provides a measure of democracy and could serve as an incentive for the public to take greater interest in the schools. (1) | Accountability is diffused in comparison to an all-appointed board. (6) |
| Having some members elected provides an avenue to express the will of the community, especially when it might differ from that of the Mayor. (1) (2) (4) | The board would not have as clear a focus as if it were all appointed. (6) |
| Having some members elected may provide more opportunity for open discussion of policies. (3) | There are only a few examples of hybrid school boards, and most of those are recent, providing little evidence for positive or negative outcomes. (7) |
| Having some appointed members makes certain that the Mayor is engaged in the governance of the public schools. (3) | |
| Having some appointed members provides the opportunity for the schools to collaborate with other city departments to provide services to students and their families. | |
| Having some appointed members provides the opportunity for the Mayor to appoint people with specific skills and/or increase the diversity of the Board when the elected members do not represent these outcomes. (1) (2) | |
| Having both appointed and elected members provides an opportunity for a consensus of the board to be reached when hiring a CEO/Superintendent, thus avoiding too much power in the hands of the Mayor. | |
| The mayor continues to have a stake in the board, but not all members on the board are beholden to one individual. (5) | |
| It increases transparency (5) | |

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Part II Board of Education Oversight of the Chicago Public Schools Administration

Note: The following questions apply for any method of governance:

1. Should the Chicago Board of Education have the primary role in selecting a Chief Executive Officer/Superintendent?

2. Should the CEO/Superintendent be appointed jointly by the Chicago Board of Education and the Mayor?

Background information

Observers of the Chicago Board of Education find a remarkable lack of discussion of policies or contracts to be adopted and rare votes that are not unanimous.^{1,2} The previous CEO, under indictment and having pled guilty to one count of felony wire fraud, a charge based on steering a no-bid contract to a former employer for the promise of over \$2 million in kickbacks, was able to convince the board to approve it without the board engaging in its expected oversight role.³ As noted on page seven of this guide, when we look at currently appointed urban boards of education, we find that Chicago is the only major city where the mayor has undivided power to appoint the board as well as the CEO. In Boston, Cleveland, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, all with appointed boards of education, the board has the primary role in selecting a CEO/Superintendent. In Cleveland, the board selects the CEO but needs the concurrence of the mayor.

An effective board does its homework and asks key questions.⁴ Where is the incentive for the board to ask difficult questions of a superintendent if all parties owe their appointment and perhaps their allegiance as well to the same person? Boards that choose their superintendent know that decision is arguably one of the most important responsibilities among many. The wise superintendent, chosen by the board, is careful to supply his or her employer, the board, with sufficient information to make judicious decisions. Thus s/he develops a decision-making routine that allows the board to focus on policy and strategic issues.⁵

A mayor who appoints the board and who considers himself the employer of the CEO, and who therefore currently has undivided power, may not easily be persuaded to give up any of it. It is possible, but not proven, that a joint appointment of the CEO by the board and the mayor may empower the appointed board in its oversight role while at the same time allowing the mayor with responsibility for the school administration to assist in the selection of the person who will be carrying out the vision for the schools and students of the city.

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3. Should there be a search committee to locate candidates for the position of CEO/Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools?

4. Should there be an independent audit committee that reports to the Chicago Board of Education?

Background information

The Chicago Board of Education in March 2015 updated its Code of Ethics that includes requirements for economic interest disclosure and conflict of interest provisions. It applies to board members, local school council members, employees, and board contractors. In addition, the Chicago Board of Education has an Ethics Advisor, appointed by the CEO with the approval of the board, and an Ethics Committee that meets weekly and is comprised of the Ethics Advisor, one representative from the Law Department's School Law Unit, and one representative from the Law Department's Labor Relations Unit. (The Ethics Committee page on the district website was last modified March 2015.) And finally, the Chicago Board of Education appoints an independent Inspector General to uproot fraud, waste, and financial mismanagement in the system.

Note: None of these entities was able to prevent the corruption at the top in 2015, i.e., the criminal activity of the CEO and her former employer, SUPES. The no-bid contract at the heart of this activity was first reported by a reporter for Catalyst Chicago. Subsequently, the Inspector General was deeply involved in working with the FBI to uncover and investigate these breaches of the law and of ethics.¹

Are there ways to prevent corruption at the top? Having a CEO with integrity might be a start. Changes in the way CEOs are selected may well be needed to restore confidence in governance of the Chicago Public Schools. One of the best ways may be for the Mayor and/or the Chicago Board of Education to perform a thorough search for outstanding candidates in the first place, using a reputable search firm that will exercise due diligence in investigating their skills as educators, their past performance, and reputation for integrity.²

If another procedural check is desired, it might be worthwhile to investigate an independent audit or ethics committee that would report to the board of education. The Better Government Association investigated six other school districts caught up in the SUPES/Barbara Byrd Bennett scandal, where no-bid contracts with SUPES, or insider information for another contractor, were prevalent and preceded by or followed by a lucrative consulting contract for the Superintendent/CEO -- or a future position with SUPES. Most superintendents defended their no-bid contracts as allowed through an exception for consulting in the requirements for competitive bidding.

Following the initial news reports about Byrd-Bennett and SUPES, the Baltimore County Schools' Ethics Commission investigated and determined that the superintendent had violated district policy by not getting permission from his school board before accepting the consulting work — which involved training CPS principals. The superintendent resigned from the consulting contract after news of the CPS scandal appeared.³ This Ethics Commission consists of five members appointed by the county executive (equivalent to a mayor). Of the five members, two must be members of a political party to which the county executive does not belong and two must be lawyers licensed to practice law in this state.

Does having an appointed board of education make it easier for a contractor to obtain a no-bid contract? Apparently not: The League of Women Voters of Chicago investigated these six districts with no-bid, irregularly-bid, and/or consulting awards for the superintendent/CEO and found three boards that were appointed and three elected.

In a different example, the Houston Board of Education has an independent audit committee that provides additional oversight. For example, it recently discovered contracts of the administration that avoided the contracting cap by submitting several work orders.⁴ The audit committee recommends an auditor to the board and works closely with the auditor and the board's attorney on financial, legal, and personnel matters. The committee is composed of three board of education members who are elected by the entire board plus an appointed executive director.

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Part III Community Engagement by the Board of Education

- 1. Should there be participation external to the board of education in the search process for a new CEO/superintendent of education?**
- 2. If there is external participation, should it be advisory as to the desired qualifications for a new CEO/superintendent?**
- 3. If there is external participation, should it be involved in the interviewing of the final candidates?**
- 4. If external participation is established by the board of education, which of the following should be included?**
 - a. Chicago Board of Education**
 - b. Mayor of Chicago**
 - c. Community groups**
 - d. Parent groups**
 - e. Principals Association**
 - f. Chicago Teachers Union**
 - g. Universities in the Chicago area**
 - h. Chicago City Council**

Background information

It should be noted that a board of education that is elected by the community and a hybrid board that has some elected board members authentically engage the community, by definition. The nominating commission that puts forward a slate of nominees to fill vacancies on the board of education, can also involve the community, as described on page ten. Some boards of education, irrespective of their method of selection, have included community representatives in the search for a new CEO/Superintendent.

Search committees that assist in the selection of a CEO/Superintendent vary widely as to their function, power, and composition. Some do not involve anyone other than the board of education. Some include outside community members and are involved in interviewing the final candidates or are charged with presenting several candidates to the appointing authority for its decision. Some are advisory only as to the type of CEO/superintendent desired by a committee composed of various segments of the community.

Recommendations from the Council of Great City Schools (intended to apply primarily to elected boards of education): “Most Great City School systems use a search firm to conduct their superintendent searches because the process is time-consuming and complicated. However, some cities choose not to do so... the choice does have implications for the board’s workload and for public perceptions about the objectivity of the search.”¹

The search firm, among many other responsibilities, is hired to help the board of education in the following ways:

- Assist the board in developing preliminary and final selection criteria.
- Assist the board in establishing and supporting an external advisory committee (if one is used) and defining its composition, roles, and tasks.
- Assist in conducting confidential inquiries and preliminary screenings of the candidate pool.
- Arrange interviews with the candidates by the board of education.
- Provide assistance to the board and the advisory committee if candidates are asked to come to the district for community forums and interviews.
- Vet candidates and conduct background and criminal checks.

“If your district does decide to use {an advisory} committee, the board should understand that it cannot abdicate its responsibilities for picking a leader to the committee. The board also will need to be clear about the composition, timelines, roles, and powers of the committee and each member’s responsibilities on it. If the board agrees that having an Advisory Committee would be beneficial, the board should appoint the members, ensuring that broad-based representation is achieved.”¹

A different view: Superintendent Searches Public or Confidential? The Case for an Open Search Process: “The author has borne witness to dozens of superintendents finding a comfortable match with a new school district when the appointment process has been open to the public -- a condition she views as essential. It is important {for the superintendent} to know how one might fit within the prevailing conditions and key stakeholders before the board makes the most important personnel appointment under its control. She adds that having the community, parents, school district employees and students involved in the superintendent search process provides support for the board of education, leads to more favorable public participation, and builds public trust.”²

Examples of school districts with various types of community involvement in searching for a new CEO/Superintendent:

The CEO of the Prince George’s County, MD, Public Schools (with an appointed board of education) is appointed by the County Executive from three finalists provided by the PGCPSC CEO Search Committee. The search committee is appointed by the governor and the state superintendent, and is composed of county residents, presidents of the state board of education and the local community college, and two from the local business community.

The Board of Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District recently went through the selection process for a new superintendent with the assistance of a search firm. The elected board of education welcomed extensive community input at the beginning of the process with 14 community forums on the kind of superintendent the public wants to see hired. Separately, a group of 37 organizations led by United Way of Greater Los Angeles issued an open letter to the LAUSD school board outlining characteristics it wants in a new superintendent. The group also recommended a committee of civil rights and community leaders be allowed to screen candidates and interview the top three. The board of education voted shortly thereafter against appointing an independent, outside committee to guide its search. This left the selection process firmly in the hands of the school board.³

Many boards of education in Massachusetts use community involvement committees or processes during their search for a superintendent, including interviews with the finalists. It is obvious that these communities are small compared to major cities, making it significantly easier to include meaningful community input. Here are two. Brookline's elected board of education offers a number of ways for school and community stakeholders to provide input, including: community forums, an online survey, focus groups with partner organizations of the public schools, meetings with staff and students, and participation in reviewing the finalist candidates. Worcester's mayor announces the search and community involvement committees. Input from the public is gathered in public hearings that are broadcast on cable television. The applications for the finalists for the position are posted on the district website. The finalists appear at "meet and greet" events at various public schools after which the board selects the superintendent.

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5. Should there be a district-wide advisory council to advise the board on facilities utilization and school closings?

Background information and example

There is most likely no board of education decision more fraught with emotional content and community upheaval than the closing of a school. New York City's appointed board of education works with 32 regional Community Education Councils and one Citywide Education Council, established by state law. Each regional council has an appointed superintendent and 11 members, of whom nine are parents. Duties include public hearings on the district's capacity plans and holding joint hearings with the Chancellor on proposed school closings or changes in utilization.

6. Should the Board of Education determine community preference for the type of schools to be located within a community, for example: neighborhood, open enrollment, selective enrollment, magnet, charter, military?

Background information

In August 2015, the Chicago Public Schools issued a press release announcing several scheduled meetings of Neighborhood Advisory Councils (NACs) as part of the process to gain community feedback on proposed charter schools.¹

In late December 2015, CPS announced it had scrapped the Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) process it had used in recent years to get community feedback on charter school proposals. CPS said the process was too expensive. However, some community activists contend the NAC process was flawed because the district sometimes ignored NAC recommendations; others have charged that the NACs have been captive by one side. At the same time, the Chicago Board of Education announced it would require new or expanded charter schools to present evidence of community support to the Board of Education; it essentially was leaving the neighborhood schools and proposed charter schools, where there was a perceived disagreement over the effect of a new school, to "fight it out." CPS says the new approach will be more "impartial."²

Sources

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Brief History of the Chicago Board of Education

In 1851 the Illinois State Legislature gave the city council responsibility for the Chicago Public Schools. The council hired the city's first school superintendent in 1854. In 1872 the Illinois State Legislature established a Board of Education, with members appointed by the mayor, to oversee all aspects of public education in Chicago. In 1980, after CPS lost its investment grade bond rating due to its severe financial condition, the state mandated the Chicago School Finance Authority to exercise financial control over CPS, taking away some of the authority of the board.

In 1988 under the leadership of Mayor Harold Washington, a coalition of community groups, business leaders, and reformers helped to draft a series of proposals to transform the schools. Passed by the state legislature, the Chicago School Reform Act created a Local School Council for each of the system's schools. Consisting of parents, community members, and educators, these LSC's had the authority to: select and evaluate the principal; approve an annual school improvement plan; and, help develop and approve a school budget, with major control over an average of \$500,000 per year in flexible funds from the state.

The 1988 law also abolished the existing 11-member Board of Education. It expanded the Board of Education to 15 members and created a School Board Nominating Commission, composed of 23 parent and community representatives from LSC's across the city and five members appointed by the mayor. The commission screened candidates and gave the mayor a slate of three candidates for each vacant position. The mayor had 30 days to choose the 15 board members from the list. If the mayor rejected all three slated candidates for a particular slot, the commission had to come up with 3 more. The mayor's choices had to be approved by the city council.

In 1995 with the support of Mayor Richard Daley, the business community, and the governor of Illinois, the legislature passed the Chicago School Reform Amendatory Act. This act reversed the decentralized, local government trend of the 1988 law. It concentrated power in the office of the mayor, giving the office sole authority over the CPS. Local school councils were retained, but the Board of Education was reconstituted and the superintendent was replaced by a chief executive officer. The School Finance Authority and the School Board Nominating Commission were abolished. The mayor appointed board members and top administrators and chose the board president.

The 1995 law gave the mayor sole authority to appoint a five-member School Reform Board of Trustees to serve through 1999. Thereafter and continuing today, the mayor appoints a seven-member board with staggered, four year terms.

Sources

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