



**Independent Commission on
Public Education (ICOPE)**

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**iCOPE
Seeks Candidates to Serve on
Independent Borough Education Commissions
and Help Build a Human Rights –Based School System**

Introduction

Twelve to fifteen committed individuals from each borough of NYC are sought to participate in redesigning the NYC public school system. Individuals will sit on Independent Borough Education Commissions to facilitate community dialogue with the Task Force 2009 to design a new system. Parents, grandparents, students, educators, community leaders, education and human rights advocates and all others with a passionate commitment to public education are encouraged to apply.

Background

In June 2002 the New York State legislature voted to give the New York City mayor control of the city's public education system. There were no public hearings at any stage of the process. One year later the legislature voted to replace community school boards elected by their communities with councils of parents selected by a handful of parent association leaders. The rationale behind these changes was to improve the schools by making the mayor accountable at the ballot box.

Four years later it is clear that no substantive educational improvement has resulted from the substitution of mayoral control. The drop-out rate has remained the same; the achievement gap remains as wide as ever; initiatives like new small high schools and charter schools have increased the segregation of English Language

Learners and special education students from their peers; Regents requirements in history, science, the arts, and physical education are routinely ignored in favor of mandated curricula in literacy, math and preparation for standardized tests; middle schools, the weakest link in the educational chain, have seen no improvements.

Yet confidence in the accountability of the system to the public has been undermined by a host of issues ranging from the integrity of standardized tests to a lack of transparency in the mayor controlled education budget.

Moreover, the connection between public education and the infrastructure of a working democracy has become increasingly tenuous. Regulations and practices regarding school and community level decision-making from educational planning and principal hiring have been changed to favor top-down decision-making by the mayor. Ballot box accountability for the school system competes with other issues for voter attention and offers no recourse for individual complaints during the school year.

The legislation for mayoral control sunsets in 2009. However, without a committed, imaginative effort to design something new, in all likelihood the legislature will re-authorize mayoral control of the current system for lack of an alternative.

Campaign for a New System

An increasing number of parents, teachers, students, and advocates recognize that New York City's century old public school system is beyond reform and that no sustainable alternative can be devised without informed civic participation in a fundamental redesign. In April 2005 representatives met at an Education Action Summit organized by the Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE) and subsequently produced a unity platform calling for a fundamental and thorough redesign of New York City's public education system based on Human Rights standards. The platform calls for the formation of a Taskforce for 2009 to design a blueprint for that new system. This platform has been endorsed by a coalition of over 20 education and human rights groups. (See www.icope.org for the Unity Platform and its endorsers.)

The Human Rights framework provides a coherent language for education as part of the development of individuals and societies. Human Rights are "indivisible and interdependent", meaning that certain rights, like the right to an education, can not be fulfilled if the government curtails other rights, like the rights to participation and oversight.

The mechanism for envisioning an alternative, human rights-based system of public education is an on-going dialogue between the Taskforce for 2009 and Independent Borough Education Commissions with strong links to their neighborhoods. The National Center for Schools and Communities at Fordham University has agreed to convene and co-ordinate the Taskforce whose two-year project will begin March 2006. iCOPE is in charge of convening and co-ordinating the work of the Independent Borough Education Commissions (IBECs) which will give feedback and ideas to the Taskforce.

Independent Borough Education Commissioners

ICOPE is seeking individuals to serve on Independent Borough Education Commissions in each of the five boroughs for a two-year commitment. The responsibilities of these individuals are:

- ❑ Attend an orientation and a semi-annual retreat to develop a working knowledge of human rights in relation to public education issues; attend occasional trainings and briefings as needed.
- ❑ Build or re-enforce an ongoing relationship with five to ten community or school based groups to engage them in the process;
- ❑ Review quarterly reports of the Taskforce to 2009;
- ❑ Hold public forums and/or focus groups to elicit community reactions to and input about work of the Taskforce;
- ❑ Work with fellow Independent Borough Commissions to develop a mobilization plan for the borough in support of a public education system designed on human rights standards.

The qualifications of individuals serving on IBECs are:

- ❑ Passionate commitment to public education
- ❑ Commitment to the principles and goals of the Unity Platform (see www.icope.org)
- ❑ Commitment of 6 hours per month for two years;
- ❑ A track record as a community leader or a willingness to learn;
- ❑ An openness to new ideas and the ability to think outside of the box;
- ❑ Good communications skills;
- ❑ Ability to work collaboratively with others;
- ❑ Good public speaking skills or willingness to learn;
- ❑ Capacity in a second language is useful;
- ❑ Internet skills are useful;
- ❑ Willingness to permit video or audio recording of meetings for use by the Taskforce

The composition of each IBEC will reflect the racial and national characteristics of the students in their respective boroughs.

Compensation for the individual members of the IBECs will be a \$200 honorarium per year in addition to excellent training and participation in an historic struggle.

To Apply

Applications to join an IBEC will be considered by our Core Committee.

Applicants will be called for an interview. Call our office at 718-499-3756 for more information or for an application form to be mailed, faxed, or emailed to you.

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TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.