

***Continued Mayoral Control?
Continued High Dropout / Push-Out Rates?
Lack of African, Latino, Asian, and Native American Histories and
Cultures in the Curricula?
Police in the Schools?***

**The Center for Law and Social Justice at Medger Evers College
Joins ICOPE in Calling for a Reorganized Public School System
Structured on Applied Human Rights**

In 2009 when the current legislation sunsets, the New York State Legislature must once again tackle the issue of “fixing” the New York City Public Schools. Many good government groups are focusing their advocacy around the governance issue: Should we maintain total mayoral control, or (re-)create a system with some checks and balances that allows for teacher, student, parental, and community input?

ICOPE, the **Independent Commission on Public Education**, however, views the 2009 deadline for legislative action as an opportunity to reinvent the entire NYC public school system. Over the past three years, ICOPE has been engaged with public school parents, students, community activists, and progressive educational leaders on completely restructuring the pedagogy, curricula, and governance in alignment with existing human rights laws and principles. Parents and activists have been meeting, borough by borough, to give input into designing such a system. Progressive educational leaders were formed into Task Force 2009, a research and policy brain trust, on the issues. Students designed and implemented a survey of their peers in a participatory action research project, the Youth Research for a New Education System, (YRNES). These processes produced ICOPE’s recommendation for a human rights-based system of education for a new New York City Public School System. Don’t just fix it. Start anew!

What does a Human Rights based Public Education System look like?

1 **It’s purpose driven and focused on education** -- the full development of each student’s academic and social potential in recognition of the human right to education regardless of the student’s race, wealth, gender, language, national origin, immigration status, neighborhood, or disability. Full development of each student reaches far beyond his or her score on high stakes tests. It includes her/his learning a well-rounded curriculum that includes full subjects on mathematics, reading and writing English and another language, music, art, science, cultural studies, social studies, health and nutrition, physical education and community service.

#2 **It’s democracy in action** --The development and implementation of each school’s major goals are made at the school level by the school community in recognition of civil society’s democratic rights. The major goals *will* include all human rights goals through curricula, pedagogical, budget and administrative decisions. The school community, comprised of students, parents, principals, educators, staff, and community partners, *will* make all important decisions through collaborative processes, including hiring the principal and setting of school policy. *Building skills, knowledge, and*

understanding through extensive capacity-building initiatives for parents, community members and students will be an important part of this effort.

#3 School governance democratically structured from the ground up -- Elected School Councils and Neighborhood School Councils will work directly with one of the 59 District Educational Councils, District Superintendents, and district staff and the legally required and *selected* citywide Board of Education. Educational Districts will be coterminous with existing Community Planning Districts to facilitate provision of city health, social, cultural and recreational services to public school students.

#4 It includes a system of external checks -- Independently funded Student and Parent Unions will organize, develop, and advocate for their constituents' positions and needs on educational and administrative issues. *These unions will determine the capacity-building work for parents and students to level the playing field with other school personnel who already have strong unions.* This work will include developing skills for working collaboratively. An Educational Ombudsperson will monitor the entire system, mediate conflicts, and provide timely remedies when rights are violated. City Council members will be empowered to monitor the schools within their districts. *The NYC and NYS Controllers will audit and have oversight over financial transactions. Transparency and anti-patronage policies, including jobs and contracts, and conflict of interests, will be monitored at every level to avoid corruption.*

This new model actually captures the best practices of successful school systems here and abroad. Why settle for a "fix it." Let's spend our tax dollars on providing a 21st century education for the humans beings called the children of New York City. Children learn by what they see. Let's show them the best we have to offer, human rights in action: **A Public School.**

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