



Strong Schools, Strong Communities
A New Approach to Supporting New York City's Public Schools and All of Our Students

Prepared by:

The New York City Department of Education

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Introduction

Under the leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Carmen Fariña, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) is fundamentally changing the way in which it partners with and provides support to schools, and holds everyone in the system accountable for results.

This administration’s focus on creating a more equitable city includes ensuring that every neighborhood has high-quality schools and that every child has the opportunity to succeed. This approach required us to rethink how we support and improve struggling schools, and how to ensure that all school leaders can learn from the good practices used by schools across our system.

The status quo is simply unacceptable. We are failing far too many of our kids, with dire consequences that ripple out far beyond individual families. As we focus on making every school a great school, we need to partner with families, teachers, principals and communities in a new way. We must shift from the practice of “quick fixes” and the assumption that there is one problem or, even worse, that all problems can be solved by one solution. We will partner with schools to take an honest look at what’s happening in our classrooms and school buildings across the city and implement the specific solutions to each school's specific challenges.

To deliver on this promise, the DOE has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the current support structure. Through this process, we have engaged nearly 2,000 stakeholders including:

- Students, parents and parent leadership organizations
- Teachers, principals and superintendents
- Field and central staff of the Department of Education
- Non-profits and community-based organizations
- Academics and researchers

In addition to these conversations, we conducted qualitative and quantitative analysis of the current and past support models and reviewed other urban districts nationally to inform our efforts. We sought to incorporate the best ideas from our city and around the world in arriving at the best way forward.

The result of this analysis is the DOE’s Strong Schools, Strong Communities plan, which consists of three key components:

1. The Framework for Great Schools - A roadmap to school improvement for school leaders
2. Improved school report cards that give schools and families more and better information about school performance
3. A streamlined system to deliver customized support to schools

Framework for Great Schools - A Roadmap for School Improvement:

The transition to a new model for support is one part of a broader school improvement vision Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña have outlined over the past year. The central element of this vision is the Framework for Great Schools, the DOE's new roadmap to recognizing schools' strengths and diagnosing schools' weaknesses in order to set a better course of action for driving student achievement.

The framework considers the interplay of leadership, professionalism, culture, community, and instructional vision and how these factors work together to help students succeed. Across the school system, the framework establishes a shared goal of building a school's capacity across six essential elements:



Figure 1: The Framework for Great Schools

1. **Rigorous instruction:** Classes are driven by high educational standards and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.
2. **Collaborative Teachers:** The staff is committed to the school, receives strong professional development, and works together to improve the school.
3. **Supportive Environment:** The school is safe and orderly. Teachers have high expectations for students. Students are socially and emotionally supported by their teachers and peers.
4. **Strong Family-Community Ties:** The entire school staff builds strong relationships with families and communities to support learning.
5. **Effective Leaders:** The principal and other school leaders work with fellow teachers and school staff, families, and students to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success.
6. **Trust:** The entire school community works to establish and maintain trusting relationships that will enable students, families, teachers, and principals to take the risks necessary to mount ambitious improvement efforts.

The framework is grounded in research by Dr. Anthony Bryk and the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research. Dr. Bryk and his colleagues examined schools in Chicago over a seven-year period and asked why some schools improved while most stagnated. Using robust survey instruments, they found that schools strong on these six elements were 10 times more likely to improve on reading and math scores and attendance than other schools, and 30 times less likely to stagnate.

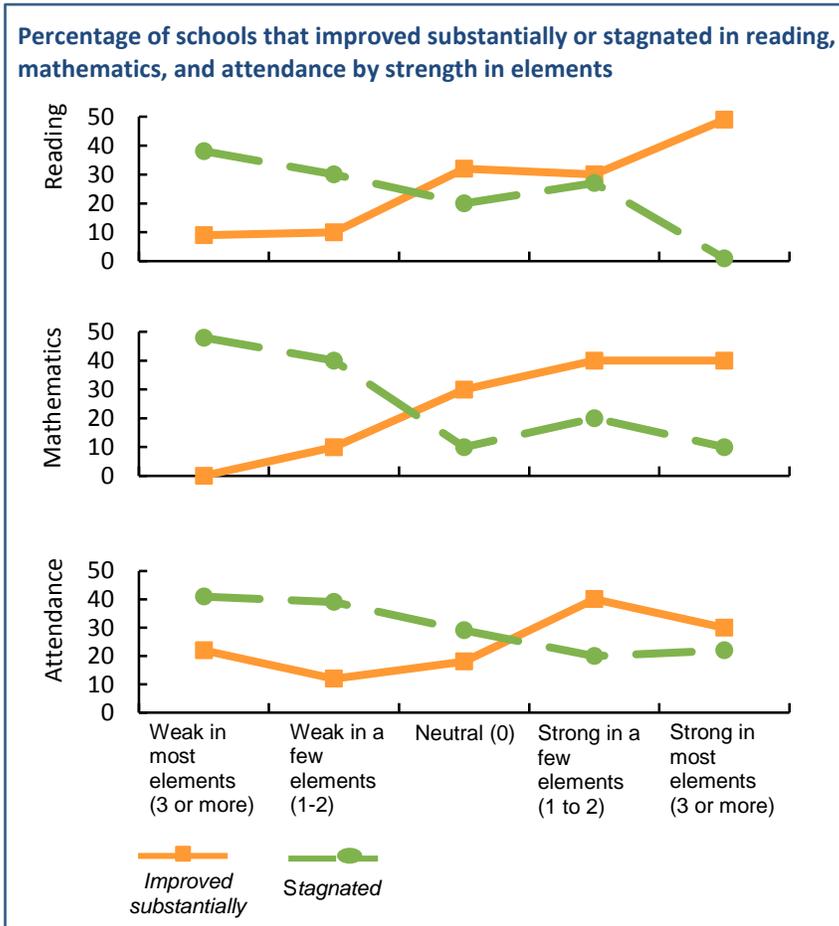


Figure 2: Schools strong in the majority of elements were 10 times more likely to show substantial improvement in student achievement than schools weak in most elements. Moreover, schools weak in most elements were 30 times more likely to stagnate across achievement measures than schools strong in most elements. Chart adapted from *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research, p. 94.

Research from across the country further validated these findings. Each of the six elements has been empirically shown to improve student outcomes. A full bibliography of this research can be found in Appendix B.

In addition to external research, the DOE discovered similar findings using its own tools. As Figure 3 demonstrates, schools that performed strongly across the elements of the framework in 2013 – receiving the top score of “Well-Developed” on their Quality Review, an existing DOE

school evaluation program that already measures schools on the framework elements – were six times more likely to outperform the city average in English in 2014 and five times more likely to outperform the average in math in 2014 than schools who were rated “Below Proficient” in their previous year’s Quality Review.

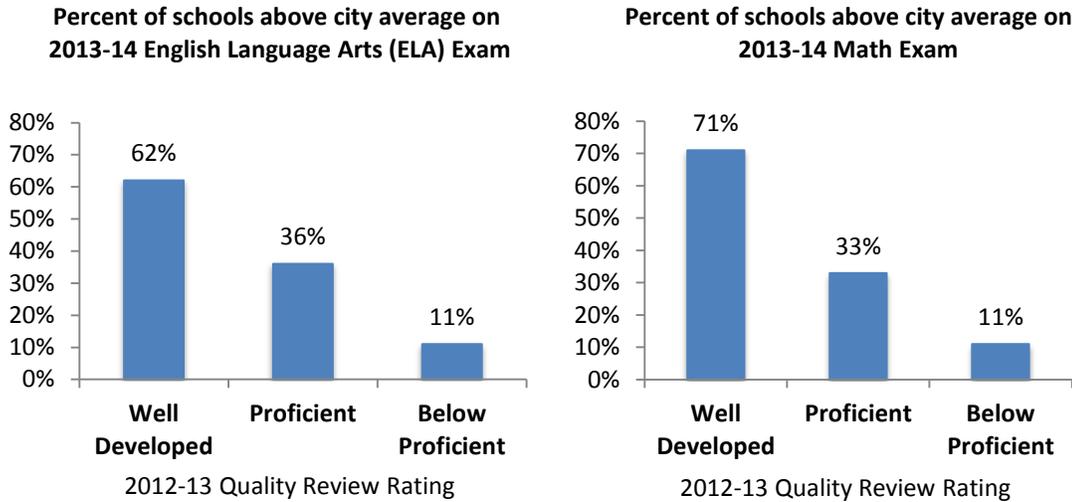


Figure 3: Internal NYCDOE analysis of 349 NYC elementary and middle schools

In order to further apply the elements to New York City’s schools, the NYC School Survey has been modified to incorporate questions aligned to each of the measures within the specific context of the City. The teacher survey has been distributed and will be followed by distribution of surveys to families and students in the coming weeks. Our school leaders and superintendents will receive the first set of data by this spring, several months earlier than in previous years¹, to allow schools to use the survey results to inform planning for the coming school year.

We are also focusing on the framework in our work to improve our most struggling schools. The DOE worked with the schools in the recently announced School Renewal Program² to submit School Comprehensive Educational Plans (SCEPs) to the State that are aligned to the elements of the Framework for Great Schools, to help them organize for improvement.

More information about the research behind the Framework for Great Schools and how it has been adapted for New York City is available on the DOE website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/framework>.

¹ School Survey results have typically been shared in the fall of the school year following their administration (i.e., results from 2012-13 school year shared in fall of 2013-14 school year).

² Program to improve 94 of the city’s most struggling schools.

Enhanced Accountability: Improved Report Cards

This fall, we unveiled our new version of report cards: the School Quality Snapshot for families and the School Quality Guide for school staff.

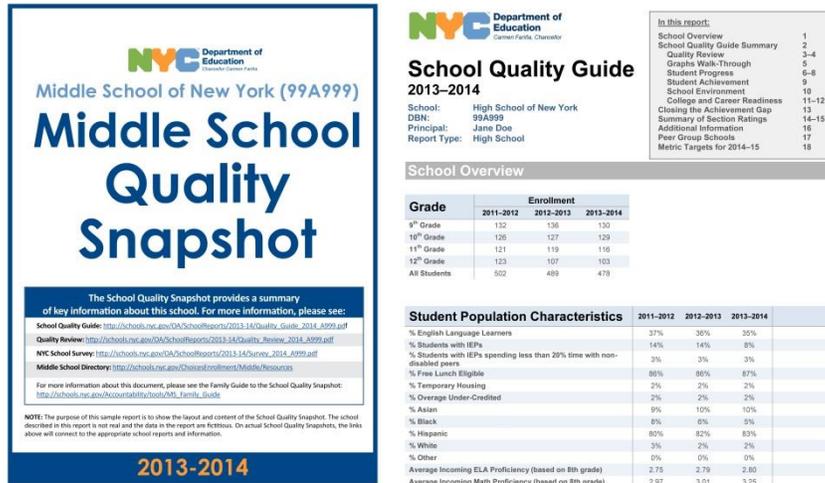


Figure 4: Sample of School Quality Snapshot and School Quality Guide. Detailed reports can be found at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/report/default.htm>

These reports present critical information in a more useful way than their predecessors. The Snapshot includes scores on state tests, graduation rates, Regents pass rates, and a school's track record in closing the achievement gap – all shown compared to the average scores of the schools in its district for K-8 and across the borough for high schools, as well as average scores across the City.

Moreover, for the first time, the School Quality Guides set targets specific to each school for improvement, and show trends in performance over the past three years. These goals go beyond just scores on high-stakes tests, including multiple measures that predict readiness for college and careers (e.g., credit accumulation by each grade level, Regents exam pass rates across subject areas). These goals are shared with the entire school community including families – not just the school leader.

Metric Targets for 2014–15

The previous pages in this report have shown the school's performance in 2013–14 and earlier. In contrast, this page is forward looking and shows targets connected to the category ratings for the 2014–15 school year.

	This School's 2013-14 Results	2014-15 Metric Values Needed for Each Rating			
		Not Meeting Target	Approaching Target	Meeting Target	Exceeding Target
Student Progress					
Percent of Students Earning 10+ Credits in 1st Year (n=215)	79.2%	74.3% or lower	74.4 to 80.3%	80.4 to 86.6%	86.7% or higher
Percent of Students Earning 10+ Credits in 2nd Year (n=245)	76.4%	69.9% or lower	70.0 to 76.4%	76.5 to 83.3%	83.4% or higher
Percent of Students Earning 10+ Credits in 3rd Year (n=217)	73.6%	67.8% or lower	67.9 to 74.5%	74.6 to 81.7%	81.8% or higher
Percent of Students in School's Lowest Third Earning 10+ Credits in 1st Year (n=80)	77.0%	55.3% or lower	55.4 to 65.5%	65.6 to 76.3%	76.4% or higher
Percent of Students in School's Lowest Third Earning 10+ Credits in 2nd Year (n=77)	72.9%	51.7% or lower	51.8 to 61.8%	61.9 to 72.5%	72.6% or higher
Percent of Students in School's Lowest Third Earning 10+ Credits in 3rd Year (n=72)	71.5%	50.2% or lower	50.3 to 60.8%	60.9 to 72.0%	72.1% or higher
Average Completion Rate for Remaining Regents (n=503)	77.8%	77.0% or lower	77.1 to 80.4%	80.5 to 84.0%	84.1% or higher
English - Weighted Regents Pass Rate (n=283)	1.04	0.87 or lower	0.88 to 0.97	0.98 to 1.07	1.08 or higher
Math - Weighted Regents Pass Rate (n=393)	0.95	0.86 or lower	0.87 to 1.02	1.03 to 1.19	1.20 or higher
Science - Weighted Regents Pass Rate (n=420)	1.15	0.95 or lower	0.96 to 1.13	1.14 to 1.33	1.34 or higher
Global Studies - Weighted Regents Pass Rate (n=258)	1.04	0.75 or lower	0.76 to 0.88	0.89 to 1.02	1.03 or higher
United States History - Weighted Regents Pass Rate (n=207)	1.19	0.83 or lower	0.84 to 0.97	0.98 to 1.12	1.13 or higher
Student Achievement					
Four-Year Graduation Rate (n=160)	75.1%	59.8% or lower	59.9 to 66.8%	66.9 to 73.3%	73.4% or higher
Six-Year Graduation Rate (n=181)	82.4%	62.1% or lower	62.2 to 68.4%	68.5 to 74.8%	74.9% or higher
Four-Year Weighted Diploma Rate (n=160)	219.4%	157.4% or lower	157.5 to 188.0%	188.1 to 213.5%	213.6% or higher
Six-Year Weighted Diploma Rate (n=181)	215.1%	153.4% or lower	153.5 to 181.9%	182.0 to 205.7%	205.8% or higher

Figure 5: Sample school targets for 2015-16 school year as noted in School Quality Guide, p. 18 <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/AF61A812-FE31-43AB-8547-EE5BA7B64F51/0/SchoolQualityGuideHighSchool.pdf>

With these changes, the DOE is providing more data, and better data, which is easier for families to understand than ever before. It is a huge leap forward in accountability.

A New School Support Structure

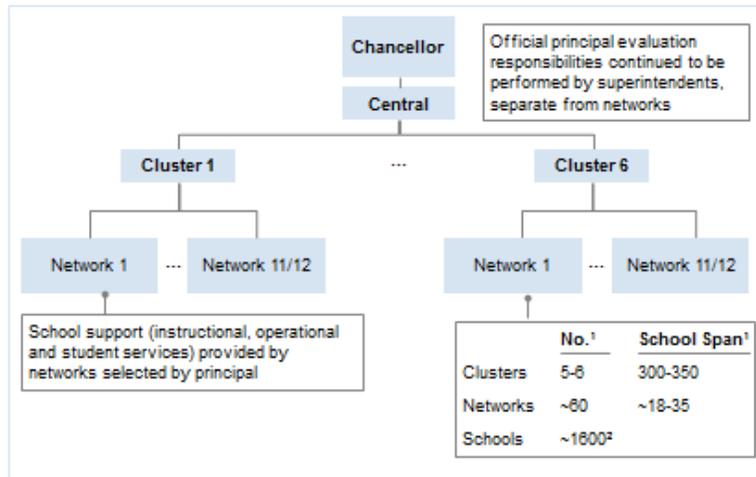
Since 2010, the school support system has consisted of roughly 55 Children First Networks (CFNs), which were managed by five to six cluster teams. Each network provided a full range of instructional, operational, and student services supports to 18 to 35³ schools and employed 14 to 16 staff members.⁴ Each year, principals could select which CFN to belong to, and they could choose any network, regardless of geographic location.

Some networks were led by DOE staff, and others were managed by Partnership Support Organizations (PSOs), external organizations contracted by the DOE to provide support services to several hundred schools. These non-profit organizations and university partners provided support, coaching, and guidance on school program management, planning, and enhancement, and received additional staffing and resource support from the DOE.

³ Exceptions granted on case by case basis.

⁴ PSO-led networks received 10-11 DOE staff, in addition to PSO staff.

Children First Network Structure



¹ Based on initial CFN rollout ranged to today's figures ² Includes schools served by CFNs; excludes D75, D79, charter

Figure 6: Overview of Children First Network Structure

While there were some important and positive features of the CFN system, several challenges emerged, according to our research and extensive interviews:

- It could not be established that student achievement improved as a result of the new school support structure. In fact, the system saw its most rapid improvement under previous structures from 2002 to 2009, when the New York City graduation rate⁵ increased from 50.8% to 68.1%, an increase of 34%.
- In this structure, school support and supervision were split. While superintendents, separate from the networks, retained formal principal evaluation responsibilities, they had limited authority and minimal staff. The networks, which were tasked with providing support and spending time in the schools, had no formal authority to fire or rate principals. This meant that those with authority did not have resources they needed, and those with resources did not have authority.
- The distribution of support resources was inequitable; networks had the same number of staff, whether they served 25 schools with 7,000 students or 25 schools with 40,000 students, and whether most of the schools were high-performing or low-performing.
- The system was often perceived as confusing to school communities and families, because the network they belonged to could be far away, and did not have a clear role in resolving family issues (See “Case Study: Improving Support for Families” on page 13 for additional information). Parents and families expressed that they did not know what resources were available and how to access them, or where to call if an issue was not resolved at the school level.

⁵ The New York City traditional graduation rate (first adopted in 1986) is used to allow for historical comparison (the NY State graduation rate was first published in 2005). In this calculation method the cohort consists of all students who first entered ninth grade in a given school year, excluding certain disabled students (students in self-contained classrooms and District 75 students). Graduates are defined as those students earning either a Local or Regents diploma, an IEP diploma, a Skills & Achievement Commencement Credential (SACC), a Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential (CDOS), or New York State approved high school equivalency degree. August graduates are included.

- Because networks were not rooted in geography, they could not approach issues efficiently at a neighborhood level. In some cases, several networks worked with schools in the same building, and many networks had schools across three or four boroughs⁶.
- Because each network was independent, it was challenging to staff every network equitably with the talent and expertise necessary to meet all the needs of the schools in that network. In some cases, higher-performing schools attracted the best talent to their networks over time, while the networks serving schools in greatest need did not.
- The system provided little information or accountability to the central office.

Our new approach to school support is guided by six critical principles:

1. **Clear lines of authority and accountability so all schools improve.**
Schools get supervision and support from a unified system under the direction of the superintendent. In addition, superintendents are held accountable for helping school leaders improve performance.
2. **Families have one place to call if they cannot resolve problems at the school.**
With clarified roles and additional personnel at superintendents' offices, families will have a resource with authority in their community to resolve issues quickly: the superintendent.
3. **School leaders maintain the critical independence over budget and human resources they have had, so they can continue to drive improvement.**
These reforms build on those of the past by maintaining principals' control over these critical management tools.
4. **Provide customized support so school leaders can focus on those improvement efforts most likely to boost achievement.**
By using the Framework for Great Schools as a guide to support decisions, the new system will help school leaders focus on those new initiatives most likely to improve performance in their school. We also won't stray from what is working – when a school is doing well, the school leader will retain or have even more independence.
5. **Provide one-stop support to school leaders.**
Many school leaders liked the fact that the networks provided instructional, operational, and student services support in one place. That is preserved in the new support system.
6. **Create equity in the system by providing more intensive support to schools that need it most.**
We must ensure that the neediest schools get the most support, and schools with large populations of students with additional needs have the supports to address them.

⁶ 37 of 53 networks analyzed (70%) had schools in three or more boroughs. Thirteen of these networks did not have at least 50% of their schools in any one borough.

The new school support structure consists of four major parts:

1. Superintendents' Offices: each of our Community and High School Superintendents will be responsible for providing schools with the resources they need to succeed and hold school leaders accountable for results, specifically by:
 - Supervising and functioning as the rating officer for principals
 - Targeting supports to schools based on their respective assessments aligned to the Framework for Great Schools
 - Working with their respective geographically based Borough Field Support Center (BFSC) and Central Teams to ensure this support is cohesive and comprehensive. There will be seven BFSC's each led by a Borough Field Service Center Director, and they will house the full range of school support personnel, including experts on: instruction, operations, student services, health resources and counseling, and supporting English Language Learners and students with special needs
 - Facilitating the implementation of the broader DOE vision for instruction within the district (e.g., Common Core Learning Standards, Citywide Instructional Expectations)
2. Borough Field Support Centers (BFSCs): each of our seven geographically located Borough Field Support Centers will utilize a BOCES model (Board of Collaborative Educational Services⁷) in the provision of support to schools and will:
 - Provide high-quality, differentiated support in instruction, operations, and student services such as safety, health, and wellness, as well as support for English Language Learners and students with special needs
 - Responsible for the local administration of policies set by central divisions
3. Central Teams, under the leadership of the Chancellor, will:
 - Work with both the Borough Field Support Centers and the superintendents to guide the policy implementation for their portfolios
4. Affinity Groups, formerly called Partnership Support Organizations, will continue to play a role in this new support structure:
 - These Affinity Groups will report to superintendents and be held accountable for school performance
 - The Department will facilitate the opportunity for schools to collaborate across the city through professional learning communities, such as the Learning Partners Program

⁷ In 1948, the New York State legislature created Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to provide shared educational programs and [services](#) to school districts within the state. Today there are 37 BOCES, incorporating all but nine of the state's school districts. BOCES partner with districts to provide a broad range of services that help meet the evolving educational needs of students. BOCES membership is not currently available to the "Big Five" city school districts: New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, and Syracuse. The BOCES network is capable of including municipalities and divisions of the state with school districts in the provision of cost-effective services. <http://www.boces.org/AboutBOCES/WhatisaBOCES.aspx>

New School Support Structure

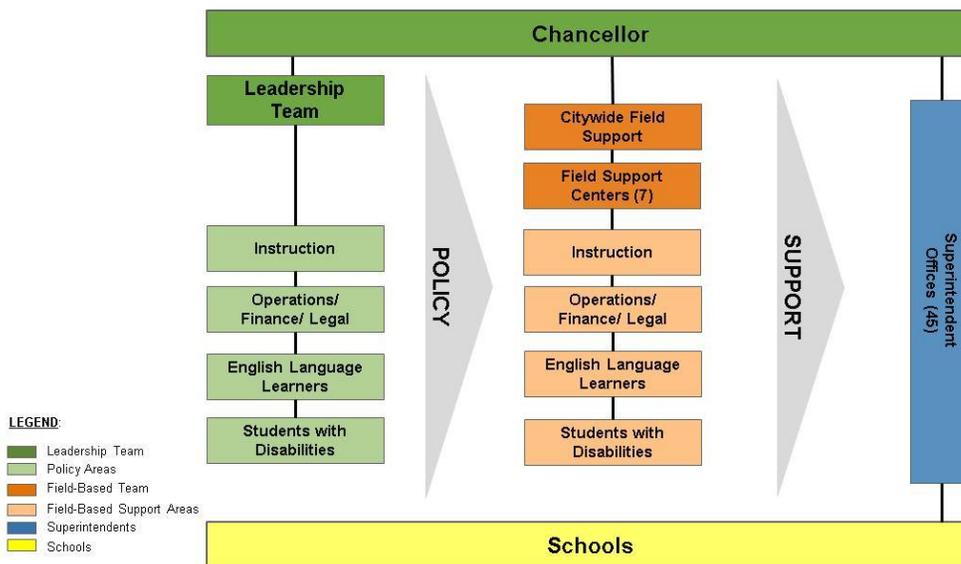


Figure 7: Overview of New NYCDOE School Support Structure

In this new system, superintendents work with principals to ensure that they receive the targeted support they need from the Borough Field Support Centers. If the Borough Field Support Center is not getting a principal the support she needs, that superintendent will escalate the issue to the central office. If we are to hold schools accountable for results, we must provide support when it is needed.

The Borough Field Support Centers will have the staff necessary to build up specialized expertise – so whether a principal needs help with teaching strategies for elementary school-age English Language Learners or for advanced mathematics in high school, or even in fashioning a new human resources strategy, the center will be able to provide the best advice.

The new school support structure builds on positive aspects from the prior system of networks and clusters, while addressing aspects that were previously problematic. The new system does not inhibit schools’ ability to continue to collaborate through informal professional learning communities citywide.

We are beginning the work of transitioning to the new structure right away, so that it can be in place and operational for the first day of school in September 2015.

To implement this system, we will leverage the talent that exists in our system, as well as hire to fill functions where we have gaps. Most importantly, through the seven BFSCs, all areas of the City will have the same access to the best resources our system has to offer.

A New Approach for Struggling Schools: Flexibility with Support

The old Board of Education and community school boards were rife with patronage, inefficiency and ineffective bureaucracy. That is why this administration believes so strongly in the reforms of the last administration that put the schools under the control of the Mayor and Chancellor, and ultimately gave more independence to principals. The administration also believes in empowering school leaders, because ultimately, they will have the greatest influence over whether our schools and our students succeed.

One of the most important reforms in New York City schools of the past 15 years was giving principals control over two crucial management levers: hiring and budget decisions. As a former principal, Chancellor Fariña understands how critical that independence is, and is committed to continuing that practice in all schools except those that are most struggling.

New York City was alone in the country in allowing every principal to choose the level and source of instructional, operational, and student services support he or she received, regardless of school performance. While some principals were able to use this autonomy to drive achievement in their schools, others struggled without direction on how to improve.

As part of Strong Schools, Strong Communities, superintendents will utilize a school's performance data, the Framework for Great Schools, and the professional judgment they have gained through experience to raise student achievement in struggling schools. All schools will continue to maintain control over their budgets and hiring. Customized direction and support will be given to schools that are weaker on performance or on framework measures to help them improve and drive student achievement. The goal of this approach is to ensure that those schools that are doing well can continue to develop their practices and share them across the system, while those schools that require additional support receive what they need to improve.

This approach builds on best practices from around the country. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools (North Carolina) and Denver Public Schools (Colorado) have both employed a model that gives greater independence to schools with higher student achievement. Houston Public Schools (Texas) and Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland) alter flexibility based on a school leader's performance.

The recently announced School Renewal Program for 94 of the city's most struggling schools demonstrates this approach in action. Additional staffing and funding will be provided based on the needs of each school. These may include additional mental health and social-emotional supports, additional school-based staff, or trained instructional/leadership coaches.

The Mayor, Chancellor and DOE leadership will closely monitor school progress via regular data reports and frequent visits to the school. Schools have at most three years to show significant improvement before DOE considers restructuring the school. If schools fail to meet benchmarks each year, or the superintendents lose confidence in the leadership of the school, superintendents will make the changes necessary to ensure each child has a high-quality education.

These changes aim to meet principals where they are, building on successful reforms to give schools more independence while providing more support to principals that need it.

Case Study: Improving Support for Families

In the past, when families had a question to ask or needed to address an issue that had not been resolved at the school, they faced a range of confusing and conflicting options. For example, parents looking for information on how to get their child the speech therapy services she needed may have been directed to contact the school's network. Yet, like many families, these parents may not have known which network supported their child's school, nor the correct person within the network to contact. Networks were often not located near the school, and parents may have been unable to travel to the network to raise their questions so their child's needs were often left unmet. Parents may have gone to the Superintendent's Office or contacted the Borough or District Family Advocate (B/DFA); yet with limited staff in the Superintendent's Office, addressing the problem could take time. Parents may have called P311, but it was unclear to the family where the request would go and who was responsible for getting them the information they needed. Ultimately, these parents may have received different information from different sources, or received no response at all. The impact of these challenges was clear – the parents could not get the support they needed.

In the new support structure, these parents will have one clearly defined place to go: the Superintendent's Office. The Superintendent's Office will have a second family-facing staff member (in addition to the B/DFA), called a Family Support Coordinator, who will be dedicated solely to resolving the family's questions and concerns. The Family Support Coordinator will be the parents' single point of contact, charged with managing their case until it has been resolved. The Family Support Coordinator will be empowered to collect all of the necessary information from the family, work with partners across the DOE, provide updates to parents on the status of their question, and ensure parents get the information they need. With these changes, the Superintendent's Office will ensure issues are resolved quickly, consistently, and accurately - the type of support our families deserve.

Conclusion

These efforts taken together demonstrate a clear and immediate path forward. With a proven framework to assess what support a school needs to improve; a new, streamlined system to provide that support; and more and better data on performance, school communities will have the tools and support they need to boost student achievement, enabling us to reach the vision of Strong Schools, Strong Communities.

By leveraging and respecting the professional judgment and experience of educators across the system as well as having honest conversations with New Yorkers about the challenges we face, we will develop a clear system for accountability and expect to see gains in student achievement.

School leaders and superintendents will work together to identify the interventions necessary for their specific school and community. We will hold them and ourselves accountable for ensuring that each child graduates ready for college, careers, and to become an active adult in our democracy.

This new approach represents a significant step in our journey toward a more perfect school system. Our work will not be complete until all children graduate high school fully prepared to pursue the future they imagine for themselves.

Appendix A: A Historical Retrospective of Support Delivery

Since the passage of mayoral control in 2002, three major shifts in support delivery have occurred. Each of these shifts re-organized the way that instructional, operational (e.g., budget, human resources), and student services (e.g., health and wellness, youth development, safety) supports were provided to schools.

Regional Model (2003-2007): The DOE re-organized 32 separately governed community school districts and centrally managed high school districts into 10 K-12 Regions (each with a Regional Superintendent), a special education district (District 75), and a district for alternative schools (District 79). Geographically-based Regional Operations Centers (ROCs) and Student Placement and Youth and Family Services (SPYFS) offices provided operational and student services support to schools.

In 2004, the DOE launched the **Autonomy Zone** pilot, which offered principals flexibility in curriculum, professional development, budget and hiring in exchange for higher levels of accountability. The Autonomy Zone began with approximately 30 schools in 2004 and grew to roughly 330 schools in 2006, when it was renamed the **Empowerment Zone**.

School Support Organizations (SSOs) and Integrated Service Centers (ISCs) (2007-2010): School Support Organizations (SSOs) were created to replace instructional support provided through Regions. Schools could select one of 11 SSOs, regardless of their geography, spread across three categories:

1. Learning Support Organizations (LSOs) managed by DOE staff, including many former Regional Superintendents;
2. Empowerment Support Organizations (ESOs) modeled after Autonomy Zone/ Empowerment Zone pilots launched in 2004; and
3. Partnership Support Organizations (PSOs) run by external partners, including non-profits and universities (e.g., CUNY, New Visions).

Integrated Service Centers (ISCs) provided operational and student services support to schools in their geographic area, across SSOs. Superintendents, separate from a-geographic SSOs, retained official principal evaluation responsibilities.

Children First Networks (CFNs) (2010 -2014). DOE created about 60 a-geographic Children First Networks (CFN) to provide instructional, operational, and student services supports. All principals were able to choose their network, and were granted autonomy over instruction (including curriculum and professional development), budgeting, and hiring decisions. In the 2013-14 school year, most networks served between 18 and 35 schools and had 14-16 staff. Superintendents retained formal principal evaluation responsibilities, but with limited authority and minimal staff.

Appendix B: Research on the Impact of Individual Elements of the Framework for Great School in Improving School Performance

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