

August 10, 2006

Dear Honorable Legislators,

During the past decade, there has been a concerted effort by business and political interests in Los Angeles to erode established oversight mechanisms governing public spending at the Los Angeles Unified School District. The effort we see in Los Angeles has been repeated in large urban school districts nationwide—those districts with the deepest pockets—touted under the rubric of “urban school governance reform.” In reality, this effort is a tightly orchestrated campaign intended to wrest the governance processes that determine the spending of public dollars from the sunshine of public scrutiny.

The attached timeline and attendant archives respectively document, in brief and in depth, the players and the initiatives they have launched in an attempt to eliminate accountability using electoral processes, legislative processes, and whatever other means might prove expedient. A cursory review of this timeline and the archives here attached will demonstrate the aforementioned thesis in glaring relief.

While the trend at every level of government is around increasing the centralization of authority in the executive branch, let us not confuse concentration of authority with increased accountability. Executive authority, as embodied in Mayoral control of school districts nationally, most notably in New York, where the graduation rate is still under 39%, in Chicago, where the graduation rate is no better than 52% and in Detroit, where deficiencies under mayoral control resulted in a return of power to a publicly elected board of education, is being cited by Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa as the model of reform. Yet despite their failure to improve student achievement in their respective cities, Mayor Bloomberg in New York, Mayor Daly in Chicago and the mayor of Detroit were all re-elected, discrediting the notion that a Mayor with purview over education would be held accountable by voters if the improvements he promised failed to materialize. *There simply is no evidence to suggest that Mayoral takeover improves student achievement, and when not, that Mayors are held accountable at the ballot box.*

Billionaire Eli Broad & former L.A. Mayor and California Secretary of Education Richard Riordan have been attempting to gain access to the power and the purse strings of the second largest school district in America for some time. A slate of candidates they handpicked comprised the so-called “reform board” that held a majority of board seats for a period of four years. During the tenure of this board majority, the attacks upon the independence, authority and budget of the Office of the Inspector General were ceaseless and the effort to ratify in policy the recommendations of the Committee on Effective School Governance were consistently opposed by the majority of stakeholders and as a result, never successfully implemented. But, if at first you do not succeed, try, try again.

The vetting process around this legislation, AB1381, was inadequate. It was so lacking that the United Teachers Los Angeles leadership, whose president was one of only a handful of people who brokered the deal, barely received the simple majority of

representative votes it needed to have official union backing. Moreover, the deal contradicted the leaderships' previous opposition.

The fact is that AB 1381 diffuses accountability for student achievement by creating a nexus of entities with vague and often contradictory responsibilities and powers. The one and only clear line of authority in the entire bill—albeit an invisible line—is drawn directly from the sitting Mayor to literally billions in inadequately protected taxpayer monies, through his designated superintendent, whose primacy in budgetary matters is codified in this legislation.

As a contravening measure, we believe that the restoration of the eliminated provisions in (AB 2425 Office of the Inspector General) legislation introduced by Assemblyman Keith Richman in 2002 would enhance that offices' ability to protect the public interest.

We are not apologists for the Los Angeles Unified School District, nor are we defenders of the status quo. We are convinced, however, that this *legally questionable* legislation seeks to disenfranchise the voters of The Los Angeles Unified School District, and that if adopted, will worsen the quality of education in Los Angeles. It will also impede the public from holding anyone accountable.

If after reviewing the accompanying material you find our concerns to be legitimate, we would urge you to oppose AB1381 and to convince your colleagues to do likewise. Your consideration in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Eugene Krischer
Director, Friends of the Children

George Buzzetti
Chairman, Association for Accountability and Equitable Education