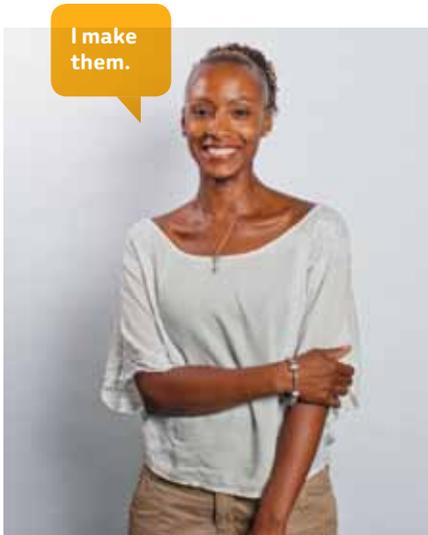


It's me!



I make them.



I'm in on it!



Could be me.



Us, too!



And me.



# Schools Are Us

Who calls the shots?



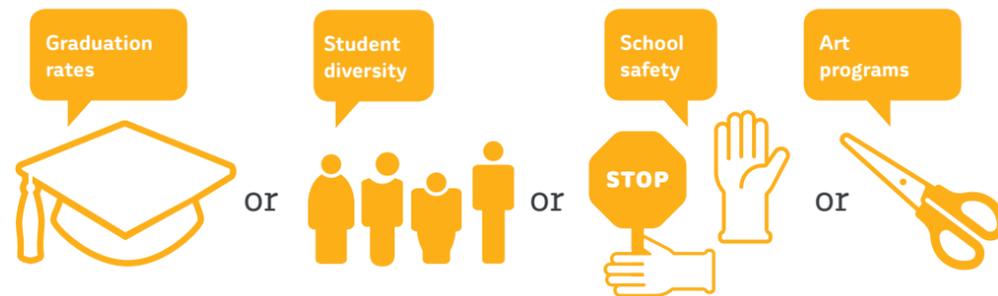
**Who makes decisions in our public schools?**

**MAKING POLICY PUBLIC**

# How can I participate in improving my child's school?

## You are an expert when it comes to your child's needs.

Maybe you care about



These are just some of the things that directly impact the quality of your child's education. There are lots of decisions to be made about priorities for our public schools, but it's not always clear who makes them.

## How are the decisions that impact my school made?

In most U.S. cities and towns, [local school boards](#) made up of community members make decisions about priorities for their public schools. But not in New York City.

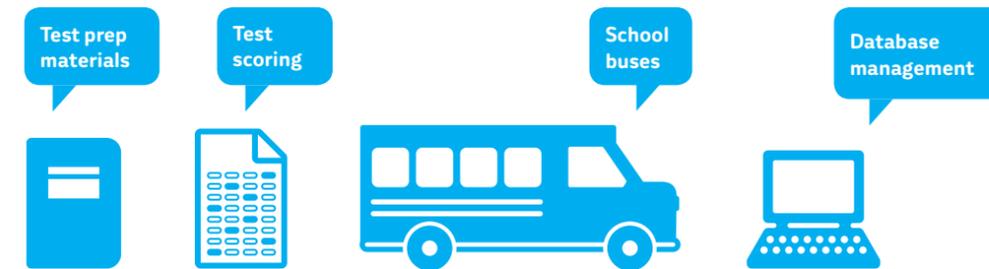
In 2002, New York State legislators voted to approve "[mayoral control](#)" of public schools. That means the Mayor has direct control over how the city's schools operate. Decisions are made citywide by a central authority.

In 1969, Mayor Lindsay organized the New York City school system into 32 community school districts. Members of each districts' school board were elected by community residents. This was an important way for people of color in particular to shape their community.

Mayor Bloomberg had to seek approval from the Justice Department for the 2002 mayoral control law because it diminished the representation of communities of color in city government, in violation of the Voting Rights Act.



These decisions can be about or who gets contracts to the work with the Department of Education on things like:



## But what about my school?

Not all decisions about public schools are made centrally by the Mayor. Decisions can also be made by the students, parents, educators, and administrators that make up a school community.

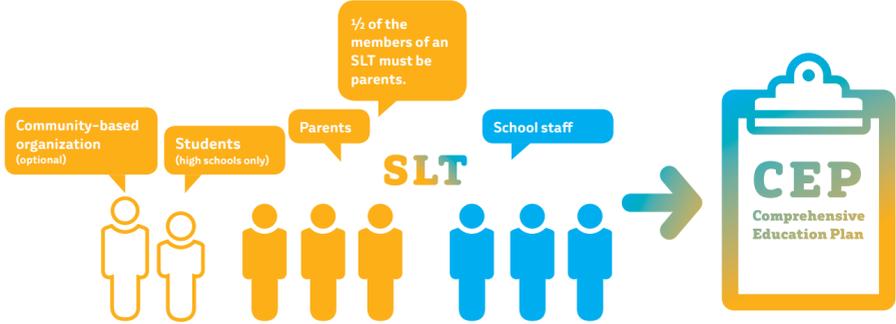
Beyond  and  you can play a leadership role in shaping your school's priorities.

State education laws require that every [public school](#) have something called a **School Leadership Team (SLT)**. School Leadership Teams are made up of parents, teachers, students (in high schools), and administrators. Each year, SLT members identify priorities for their school and a plan to achieve their goals. In the best-case scenario, everyone's voice in the school community is represented by someone they have elected to work on this team.

But not charter schools.



## How do School Leadership Teams work?



A **School Leadership Team** or SLT, is a group of parents, teachers, and administrators who meet monthly to make decisions about their school.

SLTs represent school staff and parents equally. Members make decisions by **consensus** so that all participants can have a real say in how the school is run. Parents from the Parent Association or Parent Teacher Association elect their SLT representatives. The other members are:

- school staff (such as administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, or paraprofessionals)
- students (if it's a high school)
- representatives from local community-based organizations (that are usually already partnering with the school)

Anyone can attend an SLT meeting. SLT members can receive up to \$300 per year for their service.

### What does the SLT do?

Members meet once a month to develop a Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) for the year. A CEP is a long-term plan that puts the school's educational priorities and goals in writing. Each year, the SLT works together to identify goals for the school, strategies to meet those goals, and ways to align the school budget to those goals. All of this is written up in the CEP.

The CEP is a real document with real power to change your school. The Principal makes the school's budget, but the budget has to follow the CEP and the goals laid out in it.

Every year, the SLT also reviews whether there has been progress on the previous year's **goals**, using the evaluation criteria from the last CEP.

Do you know who is writing your school's goals?

There are many kinds of goals the SLT can set

### For example...

- Increase your school's diversity
- Find ways to support struggling students
- Increase college preparation support
- Reduce suspensions
- Bring more arts into the curriculum
- Start a sports program
- Change homework policies
- Require school uniforms
- Fix the bathrooms
- Improve classroom spaces
- Organize hearings to address co-locations
- Organize hearings to address school closings
- Evaluate the Principal's support of your school's SLT

### True Story!

The parents, educators, and students in the Bronx Academy of Letters' SLT set a goal of shifting the school's disciplinary culture from punishment to working with students to address disruptive behaviors through mediation and community service. As a result, the school hired deans to run peer mediations and pays its staff to coordinate restorative practices.

### True Story!

The SLT at the Neighborhood School in the Lower East Side requested a new admissions policy that gives priority to English Language Learners and students eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch for the first 40% of open kindergarten seats.

But there are things an SLT can't do

- Hire or fire school staff
- Determine what happens in the classroom
- Punish students, teachers, or the Principal
- Make the school's **budget**
- Evaluate teachers or evaluate the Principal's overall performance
- Keep a school open if the Department of Education has decided to close it

But the Principal must consult SLTs on the development of the school's budget, which has to align with the priorities and goals laid out by the SLT. SLT members can make a formal complaint if the Principal does not consult them.

### True Story!

Chicago has a system similar to SLTs called Local School Councils (LSCs). Parents in Chicago are enthusiastic about participating in their LSCs. In 2010, there were 6,700 candidates competing for the 5,400 available LSC positions.

## Common Concerns About SLTs



There are lots of different decision-makers in the school system

### The Panel for Educational Policy (PEP)

is the most important body actually making decisions. But as a parent, it's hard for you to access.

The PEP votes and has the final say on things like:

- Admissions
- Gifted & Talented programs
- School openings and closures
- Siting and co-locations of charter schools
- Citywide contracts over \$1 million
- The citywide school budget

### How are members chosen?

The Mayor appoints eight of the thirteen members. The Borough Presidents select the remaining five members (one from each borough). Student representatives are nonvoting members.

### Who does the PEP represent?

So far, the PEP has approved every proposal the Chancellor has put forward. The majority of the 98 votes cast by the PEP in the first 80 meetings were unanimously in favor of the Chancellor's **policies**. And the Chancellor is appointed by the Mayor.

In 2004, the PEP was split on Mayor Bloomberg's proposal to make third graders repeat the grade if they didn't score high enough on their standardized English and Math tests. To avoid a split decision, the Mayor forced the resignation of three members of the PEP.

Here are two you should know about. Read the poster to find out about the rest.

**School Leadership Teams** are accessible to parents and teachers, and you can have a say at your school if you're on the SLT. The SLT can address things like:

- Afterschool programming
- Facilities
- School safety

### How are members chosen?

Parents elect their SLT representatives and teachers elect teacher representatives. In high schools, the SLTs' chapter bylaws should explain how students are selected (and, ideally, the student body elects students for the SLT). A school's SLT bylaws should also outline the election and removal process for its members.

### Who do SLTs represent?

Someone on your school's SLT represents you. It's up to you to know if they're making decisions you agree with. You can find out who is on your SLT by asking your PTA President or your Principal. If you are on an SLT, it's up to you to get input from the people you represent.

SLTs set the goals for their schools, but they do not have input on how the NYC school system operates.

### So where do I fit in?

New York City's school system is the largest school system in the country. One way you can have a voice in your school is by serving on your SLT. Open the poster to see where else your voice is represented in our public school system.



# What can I do next?

Get involved!



## I'd like to be on my School Leadership Team.

You can start by sitting in on your SLT's next meeting to see what it's like. Just ask your Parent Teacher Association (PTA) President, United Federation of Teachers (UFT) Chapter Leader, or Principal when the next meeting will be.

If you want to become a member of your SLT, talk to your PTA President, UFT Chapter Leader, or Principal to find out your school's process for selection and representation.

## I just want to have input on my SLT.

Check the SLT meeting agenda and minutes, which must be posted in a visible place in your school. The best way to be represented is to be an active member of your PTA or UFT chapter. That might mean attending meetings when you can, helping to make phone calls, or just having conversations with other parents in the school community who are able to participate more. Talk to your PTA President or UFT Chapter Leader to find out how you can be involved.

Give input!



Organize!



**Making Policy Public** is a program of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). CUP partners with policy advocates and graphic designers to produce foldout posters that explain complicated policy issues, like this one.

[makingpolicypublic.net](http://makingpolicypublic.net)

### Collaborators

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**Designer:** Silas Munro

**The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)** is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement. [welcometoCUP.org](http://welcometoCUP.org)

**Teachers Unite** is an independent membership organization of public school educators supporting collaboration between parents, youth, and educators fighting for social justice. [teachersunite.net](http://teachersunite.net)

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**Thanks to:** Clara Ameno, Devan Aptekar, Fatima Baba, Debbie Clements, Sam Holleran, Marjorie Ingall, Kim Nauer, Milo Novelo, Jake Rodriguez, Melissa Rodriguez, Sarah Serpas, Denise Soltren, Dyske Suematsu, Javian Torres, Mark Torrey, Annika Wolanczyk, Roxanne Wolanczyk

## I want to be more involved in our city's schools.

Grassroots organizations across New York City bring students, parents, and teachers together to give voice to community concerns about our schools. Not sure where to start your search for a group that matches your interest? Contact Teachers Unite at [info@teachersunite.net](mailto:info@teachersunite.net) for tips on organizations doing great work.

Consider running for your school district's Community Education Council. Find out how to get involved by visiting: [schools.nyc.gov/Offices/CEC](http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/CEC)

The mayoral control law will be up for re-authorization in 2015. Let your New York State Assemblyperson and New York State Senator know how you feel about mayoral control by sending them a letter, putting together a petition, calling them, or tweeting them. Better yet, arrange a meeting with your representative and a group of your community members to discuss your position.

**Support for this project** was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts; the Nathan Cummings Foundation; the Surdna Foundation; A Blade of Grass; North Star Fund; and public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



**New York City's public school system is complicated.**

**Here's who makes decisions about your school, and how you can participate.**



# This is your School!

There are over 1,700 public schools in New York City.

# Schools Are Us

**This icon appears where you can have the most say in decisions about our schools**

- as a parent
- as a teacher
- as a student

**Parents**  
You want to be involved in your child's education. Where can you have a say?



**Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Association (PA)**

The PTA is the primary way for you to be involved in your child's school. The role of a PTA varies from school to school, but they shape the school community by doing things like fundraising and planning community events. All parents are automatically members of the PTA. PTA members elect parent representatives to be on the School Leadership Team.

**Students**  
They are directly affected by the decisions made at all levels of the school system. Where can they have a say?



**Student Government**

High school students can make decisions about their school as part of student government or their school's School Leadership Team. Ideally, student government elects student representatives to be on the School Leadership Team.

**Teachers**  
They are the most important people to talk to about how your child is doing in school, and you should talk to them first if you have any concerns. They can also help guide you to the people who can address your concerns. As members of the school community, teachers should also participate in shaping their schools. Where can they have a say?



**United Federation of Teachers (UFT)**

The UFT represents public school teachers. The members of a school's UFT chapter elect representatives to be on the School Leadership Team.

**School Staff**  
There are school staff that make up the school community in addition to teachers. They include custodians, lunchroom workers, school safety agents, and paraprofessionals. Where can they have a say?



**Staff Unions**

School staff can belong to unions such as the UFT, DCU, or SEIU 22BJ. Staff members elect representatives from their own union chapter to be on the School Leadership Team.

**Principal**

The Principal, a DOE employee, is the leader of the school and manages the school budget, staff, and operations.

**Parent Coordinator**  
The Parent Coordinator works for the Principal and is an employee of the Department of Education. She or he addresses parent concerns and strengthens parent involvement.

## Every public school has a School Leadership Team (SLT)

**A School Leadership Team or SLT, is a group of parents, teachers, and administrators who meet monthly to make decisions about their school.**

SLTs are required to write a Comprehensive Education Plan outlining their goals and priorities for their school, and strategies to meet those goals. Goals can include things like increasing school diversity or decreasing suspensions.

Each SLT has an equal number of parents and school staff. They're easy to join. Mandatory members are:

- The PTA President
- Parents
- The Principal
- The United Federation of Teachers Chapter Leader

Additional members can include:

- Other school staff
- A minimum of two students (if it's a high school)
- Representatives from local community-based organizations

**Title I is a federal designation for low-income families. In New York City, school eligibility for Title I funding is determined by the percentage of students at the school who are eligible for free lunch.**

**Title I Parent Advisory Council (PAC)**

They help inform decisions about how Title I funding is spent at their school. The Council also reviews the Comprehensive Education Plan to make sure it is serving the school's low-income students. The Council is made up of parents whose children are eligible for free lunch.

Before schools were organized by networks, issues that affected more than one school, like lunches or school buses, were addressed by district offices. Parents could easily visit their local district office and speak with their Superintendent or staff. Since networks mainly interact with Principals, parents rarely know what network their school is in or how to get support from networks.

### Networks

Schools are organized into districts, but since mayoral control began, schools also have to choose a support network to belong to. Networks were designed by the Department of Education to bring together Principals from schools with common philosophies so that they can help each other with common problems. The network also provides technical assistance to schools. Each network serves about 25 schools from across the city.

## Your school is in a District with other schools

**If your child is in elementary or middle school, they are probably attending school in your school district. You can get involved in decisions about your school district to make sure that the schools are meeting your community's needs.**

Following a historic citywide struggle over local control of schools in the late 1960s, Mayor Lindsay organized the school system into 32 community school districts. With decentralized school districts, local school boards could make curricular and hiring decisions that they felt best served the children of their communities.

Neighborhood-based school districts include only elementary and middle schools. High schools belong to a citywide district. The citywide high school district has all the same decision-making and advisory groups as a neighborhood-based school district.

**Title I District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)**

The Title I DPAC represents the needs of low-income students at the district level and provides support to the Parent Advisory Councils in their district. One Title I representative from each school serves on the Title I DPAC. The chairperson from the Title I DPAC serves on the District Leadership Team.

**Community Education Council (CEC)**

The CEC evaluates the Superintendent, approves school zones, holds hearings on capital plans, and advises the Chancellor and the PEP. The Community Superintendent must report to the CEC at monthly meetings about school progress in the district. Members include 9 parents elected by the PTAs, 1 nonvoting student, and 2 community members appointed by the Borough President.

**Presidents Council**

Presidents Councils support PTAs in their district or borough. They meet monthly and help facilitate PTA elections, revise PTA bylaws, conduct workshops, and may be asked by the PTA to help settle disputes. Presidents Councils are made up of representatives from the PTAs in their school district. There is also a Presidents Council in each borough that supports high school PTAs. The President of the Presidents Council serves as a mandatory member of the District Leadership Team.

## Every district has a District Leadership Team (DLT)

**District Leadership Teams review the goals and priorities for their district that are laid out in the district's Comprehensive Educational Plan. They also support and review their district's School Leadership Teams.**

Mandatory members are:

- Administrators
- Union representatives
- Parents

Additional members can include:

- Community Education Councils
- Community-based organizations

Prior to 2002, the UFT District Representative was elected by union members. Now, the UFT District Representative is an employee of the UFT.

**United Federation of Teachers (UFT) District Representative**

UFT District Representatives provide support to the UFT Chapter Leaders.

**Community Superintendent**

Superintendents are employees of the Department of Education. Some of their responsibilities currently include appointing and rating Principals, approving teacher tenure decisions, and approving school budgets.

**Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE)**

The Division of Family and Community Engagement is responsible for strengthening parent involvement in schools. Every district and borough has a designated member of the Division of Family and Community Engagement staff, who provides professional development and technical support to SLTs.

**District and Borough Family Advocates**

Borough Family Advocates serve high school parents and families, while District Family Advocates serve elementary and middle school parents and families.

There are also two citywide districts: District 25 for Special Education, and District 79 for Alternative Schools and Programs.

## Citywide

**There are advisory committees made up of parents from across the city that represent groups of students with shared needs.**

**The Citywide Council on English Language Learners**

This committee advocates on behalf of students in English Language Learner programs. The committee is made up of 9 parents who have a child enrolled in an English Language Learner program, 2 appointees of the Public Advocate, and 1 nonvoting English Language Learner high school senior.

**The Citywide Council on Special Education**

This committee advocates on behalf of students who have Individualized Education Programs. The committee is made up of 9 parents of students with Individualized Education Programs, 2 appointees of the Public Advocate, and 1 nonvoting high school senior.

**The Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council**

This council is made up of presidents of each district's and borough's Presidents Council. Members meet monthly to identify parent concerns to the Chancellor or the Chancellor's delegate.

**The Citywide Council on High Schools**

This committee advises the Chancellor and Panel for Educational Policy on the needs of public high school students. It is made up of 10 parents and 1 nonvoting high school senior.

**Mayor**  
The Mayor is responsible for all of the city schools' operations as of 2002, when New York State legislators voted to approve mayoral control of NYC public schools. That means the Mayor's office has direct control over how the city's schools operate. The Mayor appoints the Chancellor (and can fire her or him at any time) and a majority of the Panel for Educational Policy.

## Mayor's office

**Chancellor**

The Chancellor runs the Department of Education (DOE), which operates all of New York City's public schools. The Chancellor is appointed by the Mayor. The Chancellor's duties include controlling and operating schools, establishing new schools, selecting Superintendents, intervening in schools or districts seen as failing, creating systems to evaluate teachers and Principals, and much more.

**Panel For Educational Policy (PEP)**

The Panel for Educational Policy votes on policies the Chancellor proposes. Those decisions range from what schools are co-located or closed to which test scoring companies get contracts with the city. The Mayor appoints 8 of the 12 members, and the 5 Borough Presidents appoint 1 member each. The Chancellor is a nonvoting member.

**New York State**  
State laws play a large role in public education policy in the U.S. Most of the bodies on this poster are required by New York State law.