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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Joseph P. Viteritti, ed. *When Mayors Take Charge: School Governance in the City.* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009. xiv + 255 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8157-9044-0; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8157-9043-3.

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Published on H-Urban (November, 2010)
Commissioned by Robert C. Chidester

Mayoral Control of Schools in New York and Beyond

When Mayors Take Charge: School Governance in the City, edited by Joseph Viteritti, is a collection of articles examining the history and current practices of school governance in New York City and other U.S. cities that have recently implemented mayoral control of public schools. While mayoral control has recently been implemented in some large cities as a way to improve struggling school systems, the contributors make clear that mayoral control of schools was the norm throughout much of U.S. history. During the Progressive Era it was replaced in most U.S. cities with elected school boards because of concerns over corruption.

In 2002, the New York state legislature took control of New York City public schools away from elected school boards and placed it in the hands of the mayor. That law expired in 2009, and the state legislature had to decide whether to continue the current system of school governance, amend it, or return to elected school boards. As part of the reflection and analysis leading up to the 2009 deadline, the New York Commission on School Governance solicited papers on mayoral control from political scientists, historians, and education researchers studying school governance in New York City and other U.S. cities. Those papers have been collected in this edited volume, and while they were originally written to help the New York state legislature decide what to do about school governance in New York City in 2009, they continue to be relevant even though that decision has now been made (mayoral control was extended to 2015, with some modifications of the initial policy). The book is divided into three sections: the first is an overview of mayoral control across the country; the second presents case studies of school governance in Boston, Chicago, and Detroit; and the third focuses on New York City.

In the first section, Viteritti, Jeffrey Henig, Michael Kirst, and Kenneth Wong explain why school governance matters, give the broad contours of mayoral control across the United States, and present the case for and against mayoral control. They explain that mayoral control is supposed to lead to improved outcomes for students by integrating education with other city services like parks and recreation, transportation, public health and so on. Furthermore, the mayor should be able to attract more resources to schools from business leaders and retain middle-class parents. In contrast to elected school boards, mayors can act more rapidly and efficiently to implement reform. On the other hand, mayoral control seems to limit citizen participation and voice in the school system, because mayors are farther away from "the people" than elected school board members. African American and Latino communities are especially likely to feel marginalized by mayoral control. The success that mayors have in attracting corporate support has its downside as it can lead to privatization. A too-rapid pace of reform risks abandoning previous efforts just when they may start bearing fruit.

Judging whether these trade-offs are worth it depends on whether mayoral control works to improve student achievement. Of course it is very hard to figure this out for numerous reasons: those specific to school governance include that mayoral control is implemented differently in different cities, making it hard to compare; mayoral control has not been in place in most cities long enough to see how it goes with different mayors; mayoral control is usually implemented when schools are doing very poorly; and so forth. A strength of the book is that Viteritti included pieces by scholars with a range of perspectives on mayoral control. Henig is more negative about the effects of mayoral control on student test scores, noting that the evidence is mixed and that it seems to increase the achievement gap. On the other hand, Wong sees a more positive picture of higher scores being associated with mayoral control.

While the focus of the book is New York City, it is

greatly enriched by placing the issue of school governance in the national context. The second section of the book presents case studies by John Portz and Robert Schwartz (of Boston), Dorothy Shipps (of Chicago), and Wilbur Rich (of Detroit). While the details of school governance vary in each city and over time, the same issues arise in all of them. The central trade-off seems to be between democratic participation and integrated management. While most of the book is quite dry, Shipps's chapter has a more engaging narrative style; also, she highlights other social institutions (research organizations and independent media) that are necessary to build capacity for reform.

In the last section of the book, Diane Ravitch, Clara Hemphill, and Viteritti analyze school governance in New York City, presenting the historical and recent variations in the configurations and powers of school boards and the mayor. As in other cities, avenues for parent and community decision-making about schooling have decreased under mayoral control; yet unlike some other cities, mayoral control is viewed favorably, with a slight majority of residents wishing it to continue, albeit with more checks on the mayor's power (p. 221).

This volume gathers together work by leading scholars in the field of school governance, making it a useful starting point for those interested in the issue and a valuable text for education policy courses. Many of the contributors have published extensively on the topic, and scholars specializing in school governance will already be familiar with their work. Another drawback is that like many edited volumes it is somewhat repetitive. While most authors move back and forth well between the details of their arguments and the big questions they are raising, I would have liked them to draw more connections between school governance and other school reform issues. A notable exception is Kirst, who suggests that if mayoral control does not succeed, school vouchers will become more prevalent (p. 62).

As the authors make clear, "mayoral control" includes a range of school governance structures, and they suggest that further research and experimentation is needed to find models that work best in various contexts. While improving school governance is only one piece of improving education, *When Mayors Take Charge* sheds light on the tensions and conflicts inherent within our public education system.

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Citation: Deborah Lustig. Review of Viteritti, Joseph P., ed., *When Mayors Take Charge: School Governance in the City*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. November, 2010.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31334

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