# Governing Local Accountability

## The Health of School Committees and Councils in Gateway Cities

Part Three in a Series of Three Papers

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# Introduction

The first paper in this series called on communities to establish local accountability practices that complement and augment state and federal accountability frameworks. Using Gateway City school and district improvement plans as our gauge, the second paper argued that communities are not currently supplementing state and federal accountability in this manner. In this third and final paper, we trace the dearth of local accountability practice to fundamental weaknesses in our governing institutions at both the school and the district levels.

Massachusetts law tasks school councils—governing bodies composed of principals, teachers, parents, community members, and students (in the case of high schools)—with developing school improvement plans that include measurable strategic goals. School committees are similarly tasked to approve district improvement plans and to oversee superintendents charged with meeting their objectives. In the second paper, we analyzed both types of plans and found that they rarely include such goals, leaving school councils and districts lacking in their performance of this critical governance function. The absence of transparent and well-formulated goals in school and district plans suggests that communities could do much more to heighten accountability for improved performance both in academics (the core of state and federal accountability policy) and in other areas of student learning, consistent with local values and priorities.

To better understand why school committees and councils struggle to provide this form of local accountability, we examine data from three sources: an online survey we conducted of randomly sampled school council members, results from the most recent Gateway City school committee elections, and various bodies of academic research relating to school governance and accountability. This three-dimensional approach illuminates structural problems and provides perspective on how education policymakers might better position Massachusetts communities to respond to governance challenges that undermine local accountability practices.

## Findings

### 1. Survey responses suggest that most school councils do not play a meaningful role in school governance.

While Massachusetts has had school councils in place for over two decades, there has been very little research examining their function and performance.[1] To learn more, we collected 149 responses to an online survey we conducted of school council members across the state.[2]

We found that fewer than one-third of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their councils have influence over the hiring of principals, or decisions regarding the school budget. Only 15 percent agree when asked if their school council shapes curriculum, and just 12 percent report influence over the hiring of teachers. Even in operational areas that seem particularly suited to school councils, such as engaging community partners and communicating strategic priorities to parents, less than half of members surveyed agree that their council performs such functions (Figure 1).

Most concerning is the limited role school councils play as governing bodies charged with establishing strategic priorities. Consistent with findings from the second paper in this series, less than half of school council members report setting measurable goals for academic learning in a school improvement plan. A small majority (58 percent) "agree" or "strongly agree" that their school councils produce improvement plans with nonacademic measures of a well-rounded educational experience.

Two patterns stand out in this area of questioning. First, responses from urban districts diverge from answers provided by others. While school council members from urban districts report slightly more agreement when asked about their influence in budgeting and hiring, they are significantly less likely to agree that their plans include measures of academic learning (28 percent of urban respondents vs. 46 percent of respondents from suburban or rural districts) or goals related to nonacademic

measures of a well-rounded educational experience (41 percent of urban respondents vs. 57 percent of respondents from suburban or rural districts). Second, as evident in Figure 1, responses to these questions vary considerably between principals and other school council members: over 80 percent of principals say their improvement plans include measures of a well-rounded education, compared with just 42 percent of the teachers, parents, and community members surveyed.

Comments provided to open-ended questions suggest school council members have real role confusion, with little agreement or understanding about what function these bodies serve. Several principals suggested that councils are advisory bodies, not actual boards with responsibilities for shared decision-making in establishing strategic priorities. Many

parents felt that principals see the councils as less-than-useful advisory bodies, as "window dressing" without real value, necessary only for compliance purposes. One parent wrote:

> I always wondered about our role. I asked our principal, but never got a response. Nor did we read anything about our role. We never shared the info we received with any parents, unless it was just one on one, with friends, etc.

While overall the survey results indicate that most Massachusetts school councils are not performing their statutory functions, a handful of respondents report that their councils are effective collaborative bodies. Several principals took time to underscore their belief that school councils can serve important purposes. For example, one principal shared:

## Figure 1:
## Percent Who "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that School Councils Perform Each Function
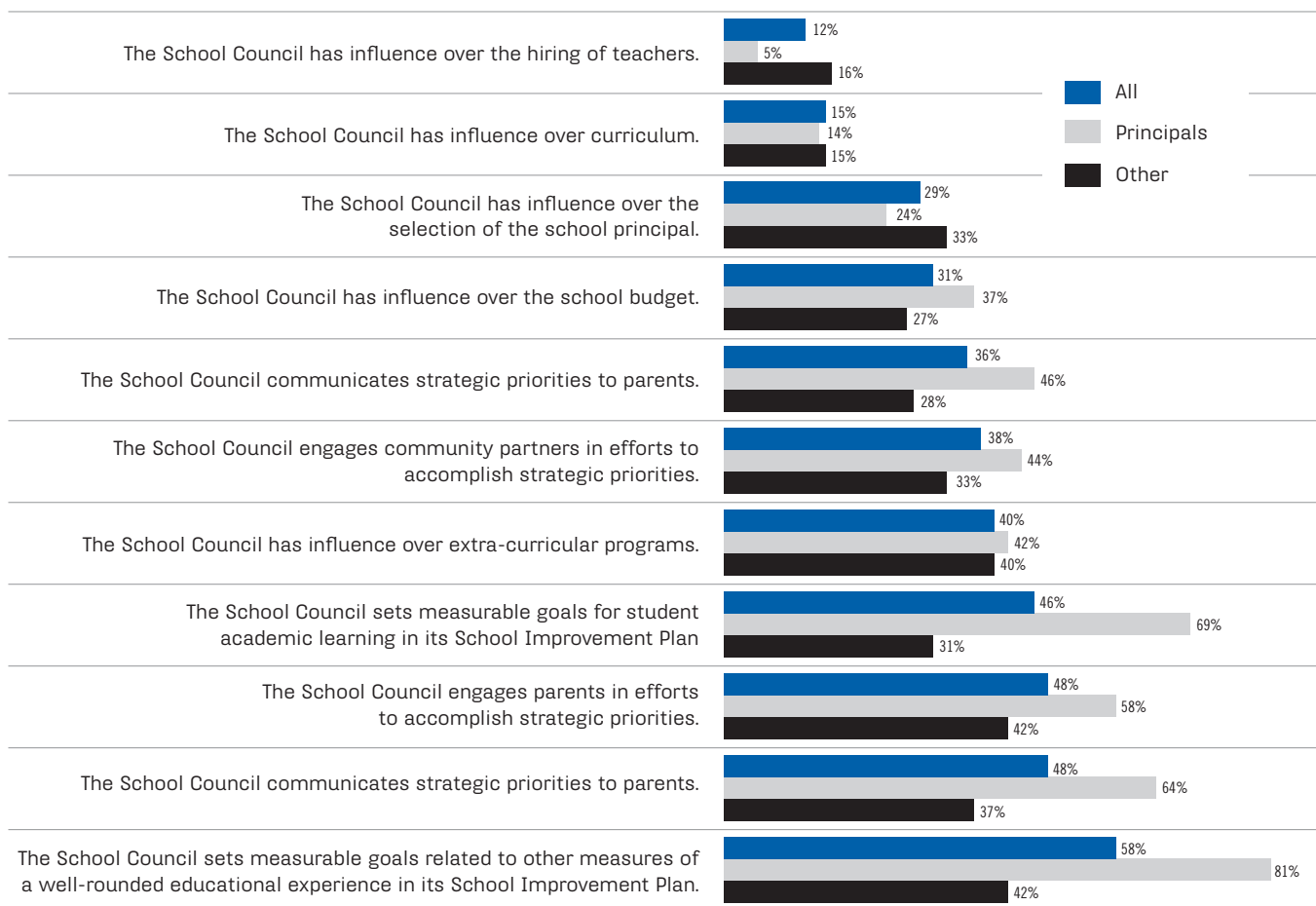


Source: MassINC survey

As a principal, I work very hard to maintain a strong School Council. I think this has been successful, but it seems somewhat unusual. I don't think that state or district forces have been very helpful in supporting or maintaining these groups—it really falls almost 100% on the principal.

## 2. The current weak state of school councils has implications for parent engagement and leadership development.

Any discussion about the value of school councils as governing bodies must also consider the important role these institutions could play engaging parents and developing them as civic leaders.

School councils clearly struggle to identify parents willing and able to serve. Only about one-third of parent members responding to the survey report obtaining their seat through a competitive election. Recruitment challenges surfaced repeatedly in open-ended comments; several respondents suggested that finding parents to serve is especially difficult in urban districts with high enrollment churn. Others noted that their school councils struggle to recruit a diverse membership, and they see the resulting imbalance as a source of institutional racism within their community.

As school councils function presently, the time commitment of membership alone does not appear to be the most formidable barrier to parent participation. About two-thirds of parent members report spending less than an hour per week on school-council-related matters, and generally councils meet just once a month (70 percent) during the school year.

The failure to provide a formative and meaningful experience might contribute to lack of participation. The vast majority of parents (71 percent) on school councils indicate that they sought council seats in order to help improve their schools, as opposed to helping to keep an already strong school healthy (18 percent) or out of a desire to get involved in the community (5 percent).

In addition to expressing frustration with the limited role of their councils, two-thirds of parents say they had no training to prepare them for serving. To the extent that training did occur, which about one-quarter of the parents received, it was largely limited to learning about school council functions. Far fewer received training in how to build valuable skills in areas such as budgeting (8 percent), parent engagement (5 percent), or strategic planning and goal setting (3 percent).

## 3. With few candidates vying for seats, Gateway City school committee elections are extremely uncompetitive.

In Gateway Cities with limited leadership pipelines, lack of leadership development at the school council level means that fewer citizens are prepared to seek seats on school committees. While competition is not always a positive for improved school performance, as we will discuss in the next section, many Gateway Cities have a critically low number of candidates seeking school committee positions.

Figure 2:
Competitiveness of At-Large School Committee Elections, 2017
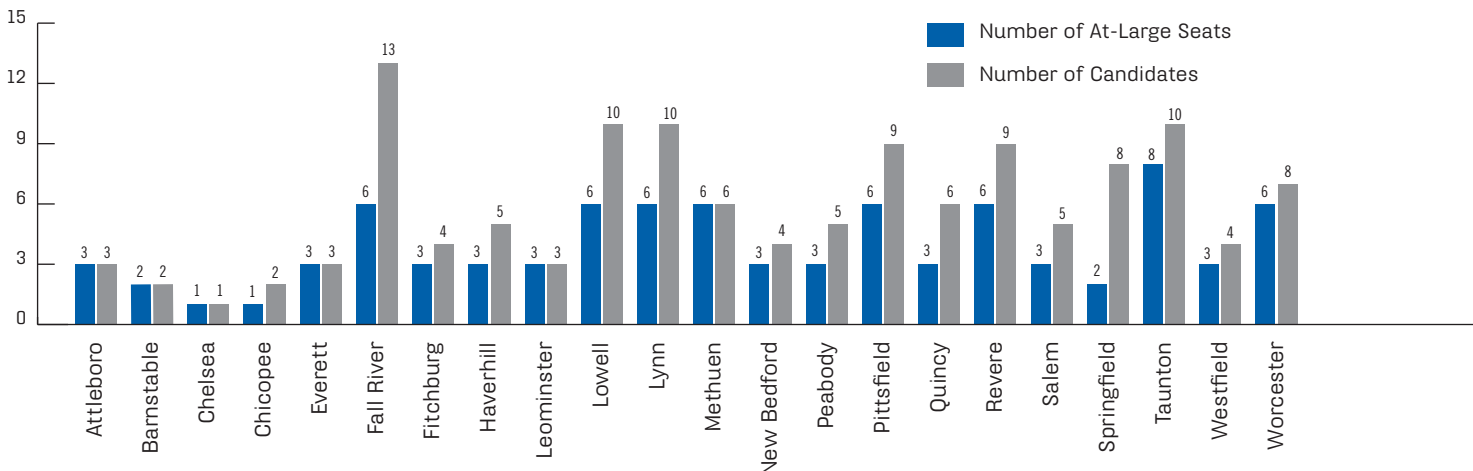
In 2017 elections for at-large school committee seats in Gateway Cities, on average, there were just 1.5 candidates per seat (Figure 2). With 185,000 residents, for example, Worcester fielded only seven candidates for six at-large seats. In more than one-quarter of Gateway Cities (6 of 22), the number of at-large candidates equaled the number of at-large seats, meaning that each person running automatically won a seat.

Competition was equally low in school committee ward races in 2017 (see Figure 3). Only one of six and two of nine ward seats in Attleboro and Chicopee, respectively, were contested. In Chelsea, none of the eight ward seats saw a competitive election. In fact, two of the wards drew no candidates until concerned citizens stepped forward at the last minute and sought the positions as write-in candidates.

In the 44 ward races where incumbents sought to retain their seats, only 13 faced a challenger, which means fully 70 percent of incumbents on Gateway City school committees ran unopposed. And among the incumbents with challengers, only two lost. Overall, 95 percent of incumbents held on to their seats.

### 4. Gateway City school committees lack both racial and ethnic diversity, as well as gender balance.

Structural challenges that make it difficult to achieve racial and ethnic balance on Gateway City school committees are particular cause for concern. Figure 4 shows that, on average, the student population of Gateway City school districts is nearly two-thirds (64 percent) nonwhite. Just 14 percent of full-time staff in
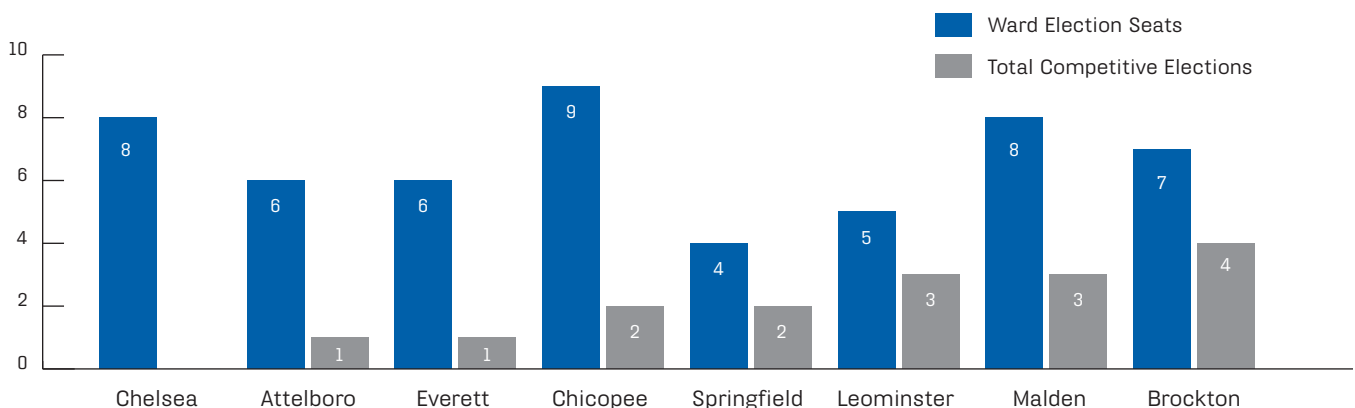
Gateway City schools are nonwhite. Research presented in the next section reveals a strong link between the racial and ethnic composition of staff and school committee members. Our analysis of Gateway City school committees finds nonwhite members hold only 11 percent of seats; more than half of Gateway Cities (13 of 24) have no nonwhite school committee members.

Gender disparities are also prevalent. Less than 40 percent of Gateway City school committee members are women, yet women comprise 80 percent of staff in Gateway City school districts. Several Gateway City school committees are extremely unbalanced by gender. No women at all sit on Fall River's seven-member school committee. Everett's nine-member board and New Bedford's seven-member board each has just a single woman. And just two of seven school committee members in Haverhill, Lowell, Lynn, Peabody, Pittsfield and Quincy are women. Highlighting these extremes further, not one Gateway City school committee is as unbalanced by gender in the opposite direction.

### Discussion
Our data show little evidence of local accountability practices in Gateway Cities, and academic research on education governance helps to explain why. Beginning with school-level governance and working our way up to school-committee and district-level governance, we explore and contextualize this literature below.

Figure 3:
Competitiveness of School Committee Ward Elections, 2017
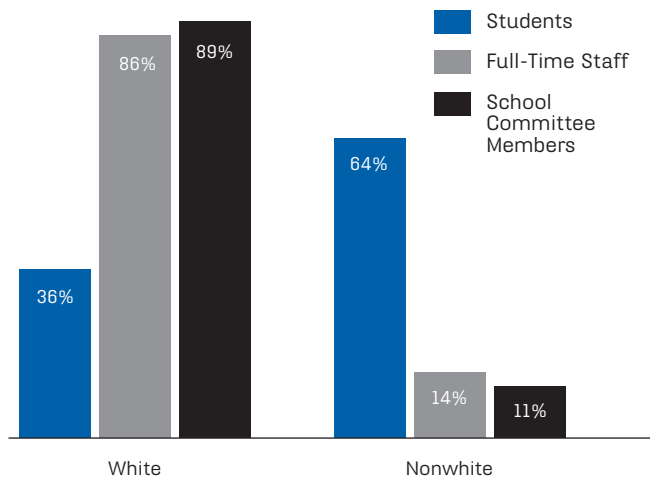
Source: Authors' analysis of data from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

## 1. Increasing local accountability through school autonomy initiatives.

Perspective on the functioning of school councils in Massachusetts can be found in closely related research on school autonomy initiatives across the United States. For decades, education reformers experimented with granting more decision-making authority to individual schools. Although it has been underappreciated, research on this period of experimentation reveals that the success of these autonomy initiatives ultimately hinged on their ability to foster a stronger culture of accountability within the school community.

The first iteration of efforts to provide individual schools with greater autonomy began in the 1960s and '70s, and accelerated through the '80s. A variety of forces precipitated the move to what educators at the time called school-based management. Civil rights-era political leaders wanted to empower communities to take ownership of their local schools, and, much like today, they hoped to redirect central office spending back into the classroom. Education policy leaders believed that allowing school communities the freedom to innovate might help them overcome constraints that make education inherently difficult to change from the top down.[4]

## The History and Function of School Councils in Massachusetts

The 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) required all schools to form school councils.[3] Principals co-chair school councils, and membership must include teachers, parents, community members, and, in high schools, at least one student. While schools can determine the number of members, the council must have an equal number of parents and teachers, and the law calls upon the school to see to it that the body is "broadly representative" of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school. The law also encourages the local Parent-Teacher organization to be the vehicle for electing parent members to the school council. Teachers are selected by a vote of the faculty.

The law describes four main areas of responsibility for councils. They include assisting the principle in:1) Adopting educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards; 2) identifying the educational needs of students attending the school; 3) reviewing the annual school building budget; and 4) formulating a school improvement plan. Matters related to collective bargaining are the only are where the law specifically prohibits school council involvement.

Massachusetts was not the first state to require parent involvement in school governance. California, Florida, Kentucky, and South Carolina all passed legislation establishing school-based improvement councils with parent participation before Massachusetts added the requirement in the 1993 Education Reform Act. Federal law also has a long tradition of involving parents in school-level governance. In the 1970s, the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was amended to require Title I schools to create parent advisory councils. While the 1981 reauthorization of ESEA eliminated this requirement, the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) contained a number of provisions relating to family involvement and parent participation in school improvement.

Researchers carefully followed these school-based management efforts. By the 1990s, it was clear that the model had not produced much improvement. Too often, school-based management initiatives focused on governance rather than improving teaching and learning, and most schools lacked sufficient capacity to use their new authority constructively.[5]

In the 2000s, borrowing from the success of independently governed charter schools, educators and education policymakers responded with a new wave of autonomy initiatives that focused explicitly on driving improvement in instruction. Many of these efforts had baked-in accountability provisions: if schools did not show demonstrable improvement, they could lose their autonomy. Rather than making the objective simply to decentralize governance, these initiatives concentrated on providing more flexibility in hiring, curriculum, and scheduling. To the extent that these new forms of autonomy included alternative approaches to school-level governance, most often the innovation sought to facilitate more collaboration between teachers and school administrators. Drawing further from the lessons of the past, districts also provided much more capacity building in order to position their autonomous schools to thrive.[6]

While the evidence to date is still quite limited, it indicates that many autonomous schools in the latest wave of experimentation have risen to the challenge, producing substantial gains in student performance.[7]

## 2. Increasing local accountability by engaging families in school governance.

Family involvement in school governance is an established component of state and federal law (see side bar, p. 5) and the focus of several long-term research-practice partnerships.[8] This gives us a large body of evidence to draw from as we think about how local accountability practices activate parents to advance school improvement by creating a culture of "social accountability," as discussed in the two previous papers.

Research findings on family involvement in school governance is mixed. In part, evaluators note that in many places the establishment of school governance bodies that include parents has been extremely weak.[9] While the results are often disappointing, the literature reveals important lessons about the barriers to successful engagement of families in school governance.

First, if parents are to coalesce and contribute productively to school improvement, inter-parental relationships are key. In many urban districts, these relationships are severely limited for a variety of reasons. Cities simply have more residential churn, which disrupts relationships and makes it difficult for many parents to justify an investment of time and energy in new ones that are also likely to be short-lived. Also, city schools often draw families from many cultural backgrounds. This diversity enriches the school community but also makes it less likely that parents will enter the system with established relationships, and having less in common, they often encounter more difficulty forming new ties.[10] In urban districts with schools that are also socio-economically diverse, there are real and perceived power differences between parents, which creates yet another impediment to the formation of bonds.[11]

Establishing trusting relationships between teachers and parents is also more challenging in urban districts for reasons similar to those stated above. Studies consistently find that low-income parents often have difficulty interacting with teachers and other school professionals due to status differences. This barrier may be compounded in schools with high percentages of African-American parents, who often have deep reservations stemming from their own youthful school experiences with racial discrimination and conflict.[12]

Schools that effectively engage parents in governance often begin by first establishing trust. They ask and listen to parents to identify their concerns, rather than allowing the priorities of school leaders to frame the relationship. In high-poverty neighborhoods, schools also work to help families access basic services, creating understanding and nurturing rapport before discussing higher levels of parent involvement in school governance.

Schools that succeed in attracting parental participation in school governance also provide a variety of types of involvement, so that every parent has an opportunity to contribute and form relationships. Ultimately, only a small number of parents will likely participate in leadership activities. But with the approach outlined here, those who do become involved in school governance will have more relationships with the larger body of parents, who will in turn have a more meaningful connection to the school community at-large. Together, these school communities work to co-design and continuously improve new programs with the full support of parent advocates.[13]

## 3. Increasing local accountability through high-functioning school committees.

Given the prevalence of school committees and their central role in providing accountability for school performance, research on their effectiveness in this area is surprisingly limited. Still, several recent studies have drawn a clear line between how school committees execute their accountability functions and student achievement in the schools they oversee.[14] Most notably, these studies suggest that school committees that produce strategic plans with measurable goals do increase their district's performance on test scores and graduation rates.[15] Moreover, they find, it is not the specific goals the school committee establishes that is most important, but rather finding unity of purpose to provide strategic direction. Districts where committee members agree on the accountability outcomes they want schools to produce are more successful at generating improvements in student learning outcomes.[16]

Political scientists have researched the barriers democratically elected school committee members encounter in reaching agreement on outcomes. These scholars note that charter school boards do not face such constraints and are therefore much more likely than traditional public school boards to define accountability goals based on student achievement gains.[17] They also point to an intense disconnect between accountability outcomes and superintendent contracts. Similar to the findings reported in the second paper in this series, academic research shows that the contracts school committees negotiate with superintendents rarely include accountability measures, particularly measures related to narrowing achievement gaps between student subgroups, which has been the central focus of state and federal accountability efforts since NCLB.[18]

Many scholars have probed the relationship between elected membership and school committee performance to better understand why school committees have not assumed a stronger role in providing accountability. Studies show that citizens are more likely to vote and have more information about the issues when school committee elections take place at the same time as general elections.[19] Similarly, students have better learning outcomes in communities that select school committee members in even-year, higher-turnout elections.[20] There is also evidence that school committees are more responsive to citizens in the face of electoral competition, although studies do not find that such competition leads directly to increases in test scores or graduation rates.[21]

## 4. Local accountability and school committee diversity.

School committee diversity is an urgent topic in the context of local accountability in most Gateway Cities, especially in view of a significant body of evidence that school committees with diverse membership heighten accountability and improve student learning outcomes.

Studies show that parents of color feel better about the performance of their schools when they live in districts with minority school committee members.[22] Other research suggests that they have good reason for such confidence: students of color who attend schools in districts with minority school committee members are less likely to be suspended, expelled, or enrolled in special education, and more likely to take higher-level classes.[23]

At least in part, these impacts stem from the connection between governance and hiring. School committees with more diverse members seem to hold their systems accountable for hiring more diverse administrators, and in turn, districts with more diverse administrators hire more diverse educators.[24]

This pathway of diverse school committee membership leading to more diverse staffing patterns appears to be critical to improving learning outcomes. Numerous studies show that minority students fare better in schools with more minority teachers, even when individual students do not themselves have a minority teacher. Moreover, school districts with more minority teachers have fewer minority students in special education, as well as lower rates of suspension and expulsion, higher enrollments in upper-level classes, and higher graduation rates among students of color.[25]

Studies show that the composition of school populations often changes much faster than the demographic makeup of school committees. From a fundraising perspective, the barrier to entry is generally lower for candidates seeking these seats compared with other elected positions, however, a variety of other factors limit the ability of racial and ethnic minorities to win school committee elections. Most prominent among them is the all at-large structure, which is employed in nearly two-thirds of Gateway City school districts.[26] (In at-large elections, candidates run citywide in multi-seat contests and voters are allotted as many votes as there are seats. This math allows one large neighborhood or cohesive voting block to garner all of the seats).

## Policy Recommendations

For local accountability to thrive, a strong focus on strengthening school and district governance is undoubtedly in order. Educators have long understood the fragility of these governing institutions and have sought to find ways to manage around this fundamental weakness, rather than addressing it directly. This will no longer do. We need governance systems with less friction so that they can respond to the constant social and economic change in the world as we know it today, and create more vertical and horizontal alignment across communities, so that high-quality teaching and learning occurs in a variety of settings and students can make successful transitions from one stage to the next. Toward this end, we conclude with three policy ideas for consideration:

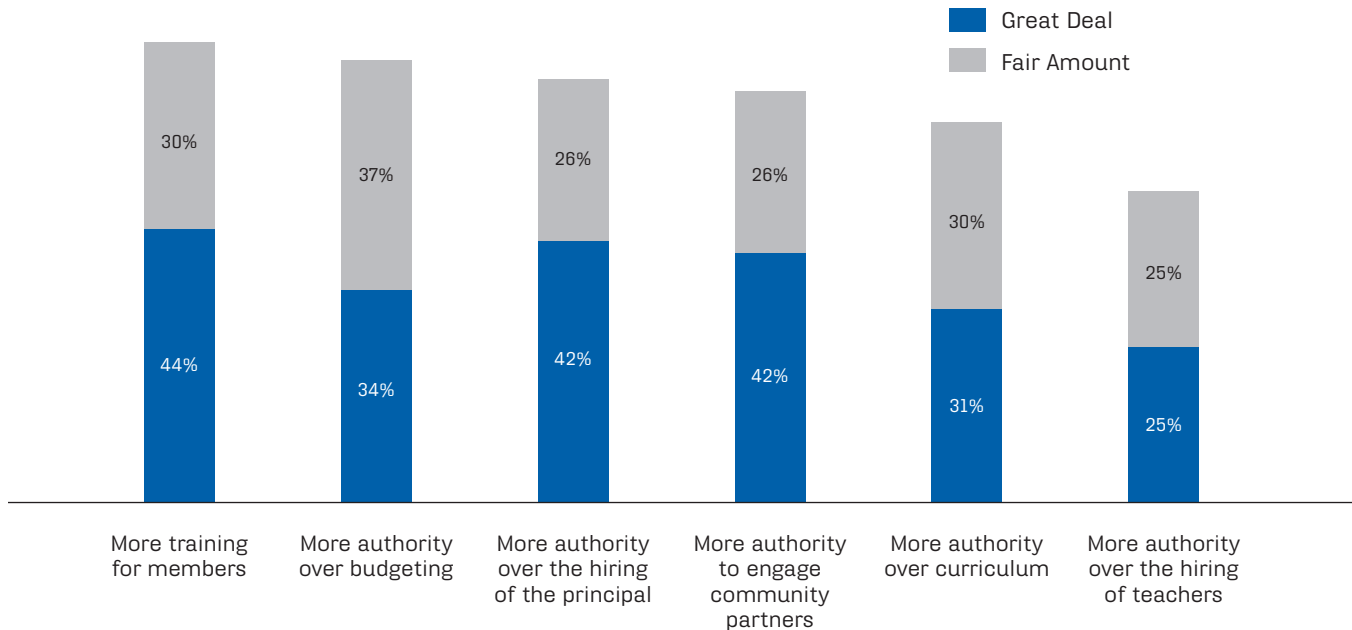### 1. Make schools a breeding ground for civic leadership.

Leadership development is absolutely essential to the fate of Gateway Cites. Small urban communities that face complex challenges in increasingly turbulent times depend on a bullpen of leaders with a large stock of mutual trust. From the research evidence behind the Working Cities Challenge's collaborative leadership for systems-change model to the Lawrence Partnership's demonstrated impact, the powerful connection between leadership, resiliency, and sustained progress merits a considerable push for making Gateway City schools breeding grounds for civic leadership.[28]

No other system in the community is better positioned to contribute to the leadership pipeline and the development of social capital than the public schools. This potential remains largely untapped. Although most school council members believe that more training would make their councils more effective (Figure 5), they currently receive little to no training. New school committee members must attend trainings offered by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, but preparing members to serve in urban districts, where the assignment is far more difficult and complex than elsewhere is challenging. Research suggest school committee training programs often struggle to impart the necessary skills.[29]

Positioning schools to develop leaders is largely a community responsibility. However, there are relatively simple ways the state could assist. For instance, DESE could support efforts to better prepare school council members by developing core online training modules. Completion of this limited training session should be required to give parents and community members serving on these bodies a common understanding of the state policy framework under which school councils operate. More importantly, by requiring such training, the state could create a central list of school council members. Contact information for school council members would certainly provide value to researchers seeking to learn about their experiences.

Even more important, this information would allow both statewide and local groups to invite council members to appropriate trainings and convenings. The Mel King Institute for Community Building offers a wide variety of community development trainings that are extremely relevant for urban school leaders. And Gateway City chambers and other community-based organizations that offer leadership training

**Figure 5:**
**Percent of Respondents Who Think the Following Changes Would Contribute a "Great Deal" or "Fair Amount" to the Effectiveness of Their School Council**



Legend: Great Deal (blue), Fair Amount (gray)

| Category | Great Deal | Fair Amount |
|---|---|---|
| More training for members | 44% | 30% |
| More authority over budgeting | 34% | 37% |
| More authority over the hiring of the principal | 42% | 26% |
| More authority to engage community partners | 42% | 26% |
| More authority over curriculum | 31% | 30% |
| More authority over the hiring of teachers | 25% | 25% |

Source: MassINC survey

would be better positioned to market to parent leaders with easily accessible lists of school council members.

Training and coaching models for school committee members are equally critical. Survey data from the National Association of School Boards show that most members need more training, and that, on average, it takes two years before they feel knowledgeable enough to perform the job well.[30] Given the complexity of governance in urban districts and the frequently high turnover on urban school committees, finding more training opportunities is crucial.

Lastly, the decline of local newspapers leaves a leadership void and a major obstacle to the development of strong local accountability practices. While social media can fill this void to a degree, too often citizens take to the medium with strongly felt positions on an issue. We can take steps to prepare members of our schools communities to serve as citizen journalists so that they can learn about the issues from all vantage points and follow them with objectivity.

City Bureau, which trains and pays "Documenters" to attend school committee meetings and gather unbiased information in Chicago and Detroit, is one emerging model.[31] Not only is this a high-potential strategy for filling the information void, studies show that those who engage in citizen journalism may be more likely to take the leap and run for school committee themselves in the future.[32] This is an area where modest state funding could leverage dollars from small community foundations and play a significant role reinforcing our democratic institutions for the long term.

### 2. Reinvigorate and empower school councils.
The notion that school councils should serve an important function, as envisioned in the 1993 education reform law, remains promising yet elusive. We should redouble efforts to produce more high-functioning school councils with three aims:

- Creating more transparency around school goals and progress toward them

- Engaging parents in school governance and preparing more residents for civic leadership, as described above; and

- Finding balance between school autonomy and proper alignment with state and district goals

Strengthening school councils will require both efforts to clarify their function and powers, and strategies to prepare principals to work cooperatively with school councils.

While the function of school councils will vary to some degree across contexts, we must empower more school councils to develop strategic goals (aligned with state and district learning priorities), and to communicate these priorities and progress toward meeting them to their school communities and community partners. Above all, involving school councils in principal selection and school budgeting seems fundamental to fulfilling their core strategic planning function, and such actions are entirely consistent with current law and DESE guidance.

Some experienced school leaders believe that principals can work with school councils effectively if it is a priority for the district. They suggest making the school council relationship a component of the principal's evaluation to underscore the significance of this component of the job. However, others feel that urban principals are stretched too thin to work effectively and cooperatively with their councils. They point to the charter school leadership model, which often deploys two full-time employees: one responsible for instructional leadership and a second to cover administrative duties. This arrangement positions school leaders to work in partnership with an empowered board.

The "Network of Schools" approach is one model that merits further exploration. It calls for unifying a group of schools under one governing body and a single executive officer. This model could make sense if a school community embraces the same design principles as others in the district or region. A common model in the charter landscape, the network approach could provide an efficient structure for governing traditional public schools in a manner that maximizes local accountability.

Springfield's Empowerment Zone takes this form, and it is has produced a "Roadmap to Student Success," a multi-measure performance framework that provides a holistic snapshot of school performance. The High School of Commerce, which falls under the Empowerment Zone governance structure, led a process to develop a "graduate profile" that articulates the full range of outcomes stakeholders want students to achieve. Their efforts to understand local context and future trends, and how they related to learning and development embody the principles and practices of local accountability.

### 3. Support efforts to develop new governance models at the community level.

Structural challenges that undermine the performance of school committees must be addressed. At a minimum, we should pursue changes that allow these bodies to reflect shifting diversity in school populations. We should also explore ideas for more radical change to school committee governance.

An important governance debate with bearing on the issue of school committee performance concerns whether these bodies should be elected or appointed. Currently, school committees oversee K-12 instruction. While this focus is critical, instruction is complex and does not lend itself to direction by an elected body. The evidence is pretty clear that voters do not follow pedagogical debates, and few lend their support to a school committee candidate based on his or her track record on improvements to teaching and learning.

Some use this evidence to argue for moving to mayoral control of local school districts. While some research suggests that the mayoral-appointment approach may have benefits, especially in large difficult-to-manage cities with a history of dysfunctional governance, on balance the track-record for mayoral appointment of school committees is mixed. Furthermore, removing public education from the electoral process reduces the visibility of education issues and eliminates the invaluable social capital that elections generate.[33]

Gateway Cities should consider inventing new governance structures that are more akin to children's cabinets (see sidebar p. 11). Cities could provide these bodies with jurisdiction over youth-serving systems and services from birth through the transition into college and career. This model would promote public discussion about investments and strategic priorities for youth development more broadly, leading to accountability for outcomes such as kindergarten readiness, social-emotional development, and college and career success, which are currently very difficult to ascribe to any one actor in a community's child development system.

A children's cabinet model may well function best as a hybrid governing body, made up of both elected representatives and

those who hold key positions, such as presidents of local community colleges, community health centers, early learning, and afterschool providers. Such a body would undoubtedly have a larger store of political capital, and the ability to pair significant school system resources with those in local government and private nonprofits.

The move to a radically different approach to education governance is supported by a large body of research that shows electoral coalitions are unstable and rarely broad enough to have influence over all of the systems that contribute to the performance of students in urban districts. Successful urban school reform initiatives are led by cross-sector governing coalitions that include childcare and human service agencies, health providers, and community-based organizations that are able to establish mutual trust through efforts to enhance the welfare of underrepresented groups in the community.[34]

Combined with stronger school-level governance (or governance provided by networks of schools), a hybrid body for district-wide oversight would allow communities to rethink the function of its central office. The superintendent of schools, one of the highest-paid professionals in an urban community, would be a CEO responsible (and accountable) for developing strategy, building connectivity, and improving outcomes across systems.

Finally, this shift in responsibility might lead to less effort on delivering administrative services at the district level. With schools free to seek this support competitively from regional providers, a more efficient delivery model could emerge, one that the Center on Reinventing Public Education, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, and many other education-policy thought leaders have recommended in the past.[35]

## Learning from the Design and Function of Children's Cabinets

Although children's cabinets originated as state-level efforts to coordinate policy, the practice is increasingly common at the local level.[36] In particular, many cities use children's cabinets to create integration between early-learning centers, the public schools, and other service providers. These initiatives seek to align the efforts of families, educators, health care and human service providers, the private sector, and city departments. Generally they have appointed governing boards with members representing both the public and private sectors, who provide general oversight and leadership on resource development, policy, and advocacy.[37]

Harvard's Education Redesign Lab has worked to support a broader mission for children's cabinets. Their approach relies heavily on mayoral leadership, often with the school district playing a central role as the "hub of services" provider and the superintendent co-chairing the governance structure. This reworking of children's cabinets strives to ensure that all participants of the governing body have decision-making authority so that the cabinet is able to provide high-level leadership, align resources, and produce systems change. Consultants serve as honest brokers, facilitating the work of the cabinet to keep it moving.[38]

## Notes

1  Leslie Stein. "The Influence of Local School Councils on Parent and Community Involvement in Local School Councils in Massachusetts." Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst. 2009.

2  While it is difficult to disaggregate to Gateway Cities with precision, the results are surprisingly stable across community contexts. See methodological appendix for more on sample size and sampling methods.

3  See: M.G.L Chapter 71, Section 59C.

4  Jane David. "Synthesis of Research on School-Based Management." *Educational Leadership* 46.8 (1989).

5  Rodney T. Ogawa and Paula A. White. "School-Based Management: An Overview." In S.A. Mohrman and P. Wohlstetter (eds). *School-Based Management: Organizing for High Performance.* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass,1994).

6  For example, see Meredith I. Honig and Lydia R. Rainey. "Autonomy and School Improvement: What Do We Know and Where Do We Go from Here?" *Educational Policy* 26.3 (2012); Annelise Eaton and others. "School Autonomy in Action: A Case Study of Two Massachusetts Innovation Schools" (Boston, MA: Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, 2018).

7  Honig and Rainey (2012); Eaton and others (2018).

8  Most notably, James Comer's School Development Program and Joyce Epstein's National Network of Partnership Schools. See Thomas D. Cook and others. "Comer's School Development Program in Chicago: A Theory-Based Evaluation." *American Educational Research Journal* 37.2 (2000), 535-597; Joyce Epstein. *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools.* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

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