

IDEAS & OPINION

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5 Numbers That Can Change Our Schools

By THE REV. DAVID BRAWLEY and RAYMOND DOMANICO

Mayor Bloomberg takes charge of the city's public school system tomorrow. We agree with his focus on improving the quality of education, and we applaud his victory in Albany in winning control.

But our own battles with the school bureaucracy have taught us that its failed culture possesses a hidden genius: Its ability to absorb and repel the most significant policy changes unless those changes are followed up by aggressive actions to remove personnel and alter behavior.

To make good on his promises, Bloomberg must begin with the realization that the school system remains a massive jobs program — a patronage mill that never fails to put the needs of adults ahead of the needs of children.

To build a system that puts children first and is committed to improved performance, he must clean house of political hacks and worthless ideologies. As a former businessman, the mayor understands the importance of bottom lines. Here are some numbers he should focus on:

5,000 That is the number of administrators in the 32 backward community district offices, in the endless warrens at the Board of Education's 110 Livingston St. headquarters and in other scattered buildings around the city who need to be removed. They must be urged to return to the classroom as teachers — if they are qualified — or to pursue other careers.

The board's two-tier administrative structure has allowed headquarters administrators to manufacture work for themselves and for district bureaucrats that waste days, even years, and millions of dollars in ways that have nothing to do with classroom instruction or school improvement.

In the 30 years that this system has existed, nothing good has come of it. Check the drawers in many of those bureaucrats' desks, and you'll find restaurant menus, commuter schedules, the phone numbers of local politicians — and little else.

When the system has produced successes, it was because of the initiative of individual teachers, principals, students and parents — often at odds with the bloated bureaucratic corps.

The Board of Ed admits to having 8,600 administrative staff positions. We'd bet the number is even higher. A reduction of 5,000 could save the system close to a half-billion dollars and would free up precious space for classrooms and other productive educational uses.

40,000 That's the number of children, out of 80,000, who can be freed from the inept and endless bilingual education program. The program is the worst of both worlds for some of the

city's most vulnerable students.

It offers inadequate instruction in Spanish and other languages to most students — and almost no instruction in English. The results are predictable: low graduation rates, educationally crippled kids and frustrated parents.

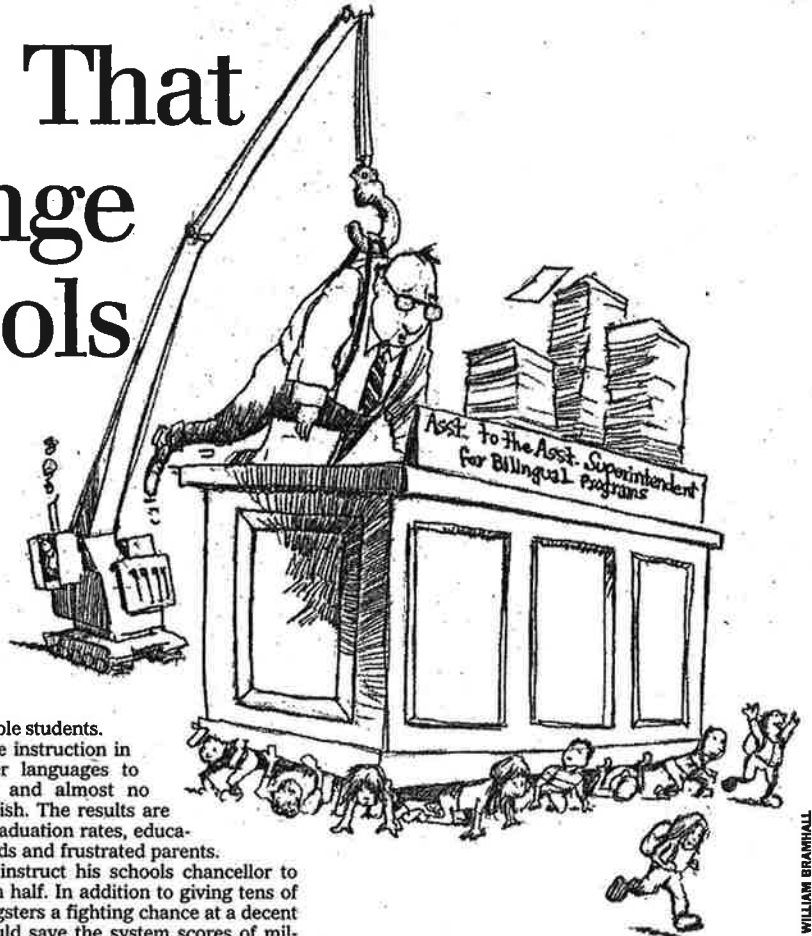
Bloomberg can instruct his schools chancellor to cut this program in half. In addition to giving tens of thousands of youngsters a fighting chance at a decent education, that could save the system scores of millions of dollars a year.

The defenders of the costly and unworkable bilingual education program will wail and threaten lawsuits, but the mayor should seize the offensive and give immigrant parents what they want — real English instruction for their youngsters.

3,000 That's the number of veteran teachers who should be reassigned to the 300 or so schools in the poorest neighborhoods that have failed chronically for more than two decades.

Now that the mayor has agreed to a costly billion-dollar settlement with the teachers union, he must move aggressively to match teacher experience and talent with student needs. The schools trapped in educational dead zones will never revive unless they are staffed with top talent. Ten experienced teachers in each of these schools would be more important than any new program or slogan or gimmick.

125 That's the number of high-quality principals who should be recruited and trained each



year. While the Board of Ed spent 30 years spawning bureaucrats and regulations, it refused to tackle the problem of preparing the single most important person in any school — the principal.

Bloomberg must take steps immediately to create a top-flight training school for principals. This institution should draw on the best minds in city government, the corporate community and the City University of New York. The city should invest an entire year of training in each person who leads a public school.

And to bring new ideas into a system that has been immune to them, the city should begin recruiting principals and superintendents from out of the city and out of the state. New York City is a magnet for the country's best talent in finance and marketing. There is no reason why it shouldn't attract the same caliber of educational leaders.

12 That's the number of months the mayor has to wipe the grins off the faces of the local political hustlers who benefited from the failed educational programs of the past and are busy posing as educational reformers today.

Our program calls for 40,000 fewer students in bilingual education, 5,000 fewer bureaucrats, 125 newly minted educational leaders and 3,000 veteran teachers placed where they are needed most. It can be done in a year's time, if the political will is there.

If it is, we believe that the really important numbers will begin to change dramatically: 10-percentage-point increases in reading and math scores in a year's time and the first real improvement in the city's abysmal high school graduation rate.



Bloomberg is up against a system that has a genius for guarding the status quo

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