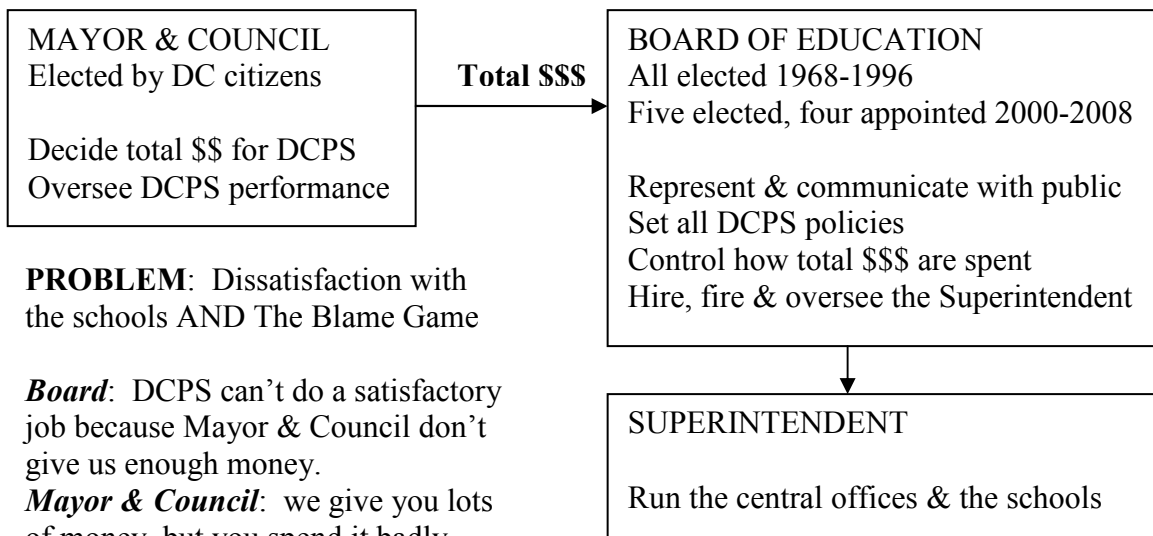


## HOW THE DC PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IS GOVERNED

Mary Levy February 2007

Control of and responsibility for the DC Public School system (DCPS) is – and always has been – divided. The United States Congress has the power to control and oversee all DC government, including public schools, sometimes enacts laws for us, and frequently calls DCPS and City officials in for hearings.

Since 1974, the big division within the District has been between the Mayor and Council on one side and the Board of Education on the other, as the former set the total funding for the schools and the latter controls how DCPS operates and how its money is spent:



Since 1996, it has become even more complicated. Congress is still involved, and the Mayor and Council still decide the total funding for DCPS. But the Board of Education has lost control of various functions to the Mayor and Council and other institutions:

- The City's independent Chief Financial Officer (CFO) controls the schools' budget, payroll, accounting, and vendor payments.
- The City's Police Department (under the Mayor) controls school security.
- The City's Procurement Office (under the Mayor) handles all contracts over \$1 million and the Council must approve them.
- The DC State Education Office (under the Mayor) sets rules for verifying DC residency, conducts an audit of enrollment each year, and oversees food service.
- The DC Federal District Court controls transportation of special education students through an Administrator who answers only to the Court (\$75 million a year to transport 4000 special education students).

**PROBLEM:** Dissatisfaction with the schools AND The Blame Game, with more people to blame

## THE GOVERNANCE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN DC COMPARED WITH OTHER CITIES AND STATES

In the rest of the United States, public education is a function of state governments.

- Subject to federal laws against discrimination and federal education grant requirements, state governments control and deliver public education.
- All states except Hawaii have created local school districts, to which they give some power and some responsibility – but they can change this any way, any time.
- Local school districts hire their Superintendents and staff, deliver education services, and pay part of the cost through local property taxes.
- State governments set standards and rules, pay part of the cost through state taxes (usually income and sales taxes), and retain the power to take over local districts.
- State governments have state education agencies that oversee local school districts for compliance with state rules and with federal grant rules.

Local school districts elsewhere have one of three different governance systems:

- The majority, including two-thirds of the big cities, have elected school boards that impose property taxes to fund the schools. They answer to the state government, but not to mayors or councils or other local officials.
- Many of the rest have school boards appointed by a mayor or county executive and/or council, and get their funds from the city or county council.
- A relatively small number – including DC and our suburbs -- have the divided system: elected school boards dependent on separate elected officials for the local part of their funding.
- But even where mayors and councils provide the money and appoint the school board, only the school board controls how the money is spent.

The District of Columbia is different because – except when Congress interferes – it acts as city and state combined:

- Our Mayor is also our Governor.
- The Board of Education of DCPS is also the DC State Board of Education and the Superintendent of DCPS is also the DC Chief State School Officer.
- Thus the Board and Superintendent oversee themselves.

AND over one-fourth of DC public school students are enrolled in public charter schools, which are in competition with DCPS:

- Each public charter school is its own independent local school district.
- Charter schools are overseen by their chartering authorities (many by an independent board appointed by the Mayor and the rest, originally chartered by the Board of Education, by a new authority yet to be decided).
- The DCPS Superintendent and Board have no authority over the charter schools.