

Research Brief

Empowerment Schools

Question: What are “Empowerment Schools?”

Summary of Findings:

In a Nutshell

In education, the pendulum continues to swing from one side to the other, all in an effort to find the “right” way to educate all of its students. The concept of empowerment, what it means and who should be empowered to provide the “best” way to instruct students, has been one that has been explored from many different perspectives from students, to parents, to community, to business, to teachers, to districts, to states, and to the federal government. In the most recent wave of how to best meet the needs of students, New York City, New York and Clark County, Nevada have been leading the field in instituting “Empowerment Schools.” According to New York City’s reference guide, “Empowerment schools are premised on the fundamental belief that schools will only succeed at the highest levels if school leaders are given greater authority to design their own paths to success”

(<http://www.broadprize.org/2006BroadSymposiumEmpowermentSchoolsRefGuide.pdf>

p. 1).

In this day and age of NCLB, making AYP, union contracts and central office mandates, what does it mean if an educational institution has been deemed as an “empowerment school?” From what the research reports, they appear to have the following characteristics:

- in NYC, a dollar amount is attached to each student and follows them to the school they chose to attend (about \$600 per student)
- in Nevada, the first four schools were given about an additional \$150,000 per year for 3 years
- principals have more freedom in:
 - determining how discretionary funds will be used
 - hiring
 - staffing
 - determining the length of the school day and year
 - designing curriculum
 - implementing professional development programs
 - determining how students will be continuously assessed

- schools must follow the Department of Education rules and regulations, in particular in:
 - fiscal reporting
 - placement of and services for students who receive special education and gifted and talented support
 - social promotion criteria
 - providing strong core curriculum especially in English/language arts, math, science and social studies
 - active parent involvement
 - respecting labor contracts
 - following enrollment criteria
 - keeping facilities up to par
 - providing a new teacher induction program

In Nevada, there has been a debate about allowing more sites to become “empowerment schools,” but not giving them additional funding. In NYC, each “empowerment school” is a member of a network support team, whose responsibility it is to provide assistance and support to its 20 member schools. Principals are the bottom line and are evaluated regularly. If it is determined that the school and its students are not performing up to higher standards, it is possible that the principal could be fired, the school could be closed and/or the school could be restructured.

As of this writing, there is little research about the effectiveness of this model. Although this structure is relatively new, it is another step towards the recognition that the “one size fits all model” is not working and that each school is the best judge about how to most effectively meet the needs of its students.

Resources:

- Children first today
A description of the empowerment schools in NYC is provided in this article.
<http://print.nycenet.edu/AboutUs/ChildrenFirstToday/default.htm>
- Children first statement of performance terms
This contains a copy of the agreement for empowerment schools in New York City.
http://print.nycenet.edu/NR/rdonlyres/D0620D76-156C-42B6-9422-B8E1A39035DB/24798/CHILDRENFIRSTSTATEMENTOFPERFORMANCETERMS_FINAL_Jun.pdf
- Commentary from U.C.L.A.
This is a brief explanation of research done across the U.S. on schools that are considered to be “choice” or “empowered.”
<http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/x15219.xml>
- Democrats present their plan for empowerment schools
A proposal in Nevada for empowerment schools is described in this article.
http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2007/Mar-16-Fri-2007/news/13216945.html
- Empowerment schools

A very brief description of the empowerment program in NYC is presented in this piece.
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Empowerment/default.htm>

- Empowerment schools
An explanation of the school empowerment program in NYC is given in this article.
<http://www.cei-pea.org/publications/1106notes.pdf>
- Empowerment schools forced to take a turn
This article is about Clark County, NV and the governor's suggestion that more schools become empowerment sites, however, may not be given the additional funds that the first schools received.
<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/sun/2007/apr/30/566637845.html>
- Empowerment schools-New York
This is a list of all of the empowerment schools in NYC.
http://www.insideschools.org/nv/NV_empowerment_schools_331.php
- Empowerment schools: More tests, fewer meetings
A description of some of the concerns and issues facing empowerment schools is provided in this article.
http://www.insideschools.org/nv/NV_empowerment_schools_jun06.php
- Empowerment schools: Reference guide
This is a full reference guide for the empowerment schools in NYC. It includes all guidelines for and expectations of the schools.
<http://www.broadprize.org/2006BroadSymposiumEmpowermentSchoolsRefGuide.pdf>
- Firms agree to aid 'Empowerment Schools'
A brief description of ways in which four companies in Clark County, NV are planning on working with four schools in that area to help support and enrich the curriculum is provided in this piece.
http://www.redorbit.com/news/education/629777/firms_agree_to_aid_empowerment_schools/index.html
- Giving principals more control
An overview of pilot empowerment schools program in NYC is given in this article.
<http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/education/20060623/6/1891>
- Governor Gibbons plans for more 'Empowerment Schools'
This is a very brief article that describes empowerment schools.
<http://www.kvbc.com/Global/story.asp?S=6279615>
- NY mayor to give more control to public schools
This piece describes the empowerment program in NYC schools.
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/13/nyregion/13educ.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&oref=slogin
- Profiles in education Eric Nadelstern, CEO, empowerment skills

This article describes NYC's empowered schools program.

<http://www.educationupdate.com/archives/2007/SEP/html/spot-eric.html>

- Public school empowerment
From the Children First program in NYC, this provides a description of the empowerment program.
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/ChildrenFirst/PublicSchoolEmpowerment/default.htm>
- UFT: Empowerment schools can work under the right conditions
Some ways in which empowered schools are working are described in this article.
http://www.uft.org/news/teacher/general/empowerment_schools/

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