



Case Study of WCC's Work on School Choice and Equity in New York City

BACKGROUND

The Women's City Club of New York (WCC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, multi-issue activist organization that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. WCC works to shape public policy to promote responsive government through education, issue analysis, advocacy and civic participation. Now in its second century of service, WCC has focused its efforts to empowering women to become more civically engaged.

Since its inception, public education in New York City has been a major focus of WCC. Access to a sound education is essential for all students in order to prepare them to become capable citizens. WCC has hosted several public programs that dealt with equity in education, school choice, and the teaching of civics. This case study focuses on WCC's recent investigation and involvement in the debate surrounding school choice, as well as past programs covering a range of education-related topics.

ACTIONS

WCC established the Public Policy Committee (PPC) Working Group on Public Education, whose mission is to secure access to quality and affordable public education. In recent years, WCC held several public conferences and events relating to school choice and equity, including a school choice debate in May 2017.

Events

- **Public Funding For School Choice in NY: Pathways or Threats to Educational Equity and Excellence.** (May 23, 2017) WCC hosted an event developed by members Laura Wolff, Amy Schwartz and Public Policy Committee Working Group. The event featured keynote speaker Michael A. Rebell, Executive Director, Campaign for Educational Equity and Professor of Law and Educational Practice Teachers College Columbia University, and a panel Panel, moderated by Shawn Morehead, Program Director, Promising Futures Education and Human Justice, The New York Community Trust; and including, Zakiyah Ansari, Advocacy Director,

Alliance for Quality Education; Beverly Donohue, Senior Policy Advisor, New Visions; and, James Merriman, Chief Executive Officer, New York City Charter School Center.

- **Changes in NYC Public School Choice Options.** (April 12, 2010) The New York City Department of Education's CEO of Student Enrollment, Elizabeth Sciabarra, discussed the changing landscape of the City's public schools and the challenges that arise from expanding options for students.
- **Quiet Revolution in our Public Schools: NYC's Small Schools Initiative.** (June 16, 2009) The expert panel discussed how the City's Small Schools Initiative contributes to educational reform.
- **How Will the Coming Fiscal Crisis Affect the Children in NYC's Public Schools?** (April 8, 2008) This event featured Kathleen Grimm, Deputy Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education.
- **Civics in the Schools.** (January 20, 2005) This event featured Carmen Farina, Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at the New York City Department of Education.
- **The Changing Charter School Picture.** (January 23, 2003) This event featured a discussion on WCC's report, *Snapshot of NYC's Charter Schools 2002*, and included a panel moderated by Clara Hemphill, author of several books on the best City public schools, and featuring: Ira Schwartz, Senior Policy Coordinator, New York State Education Department; Jonathan Gyurko, Director, New York City Office of Charter Schools; Michele Pierce, Director, Harriet Tubman Charter School; and, Monte Joffee, Principal, Renaissance Charter School.

IMPACT

As a result of the panel on public funding for school choice in New York City, several attendees expressed interest in being involved in WCC's PPC Working Group. The discussion set the stage for future alliances, WCC advocacy, and public programming. As a result of the program, stronger connections have been established with two of the meeting speakers and their organizations:

- Michael Rebell: The panel led to conversations and plans to collaborate further on the civic education
- Zakiah Ansari/Alliance for Quality Education: The panel led to a meeting with Alliance for Quality Education's Executive Director, Billy Easton, who could be an effective partner in the future.