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Team Forms to Analyze City Schools

By [JENNIFER MEDINA](#)

For years, education experts have dreamed of a group that would gather reams of data on New York City's public schools, analyzing the numbers to figure out what works, and what does not, in schools.

Now, after years of major changes to the system under Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#), a group of academics has formed the Research Partnership for New York City Schools to do just that kind of analysis.

The partnership includes social scientists from [New York University](#), [Columbia University](#)'s Teachers College and the [City University of New York](#), who have already begun researching topics like school financing and high school choice. They will present their reports at an inaugural conference Friday at the CUNY Graduate Center.

"This is something that everyone needs," said Kathryn S. Wylde, the president of Partnership for New York City, a group of business leaders from throughout the city that supports the effort. Ms. Wylde, who endorsed the Bloomberg administration's takeover of the schools in 2002, called for such a research group in 2005, after commissioning a "progress report" of the Bloomberg changes.

The group is modeling itself after the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the [University of Chicago](#), formed in 1990, when that city's schools were undergoing their own major changes. The Chicago group has produced dozens of reports in the nearly two decades since, becoming an important and respected source of education research.

The New York partnership has received initial financing from private organizations, including the Gates, Carnegie and Spencer foundations. But many details of its operation are unsettled, like which university will be host to the council and how the council will determine topics to pursue.

The governing board includes Schools Chancellor [Joel I. Klein](#); [Randi Weingarten](#), the president of the city teachers' union; William G. Bowen, the former president of [Princeton University](#); and Robert L. Hughes, the president of New Visions for Public Schools, which has helped start dozens of small high schools in the city.

As researchers did in Chicago, the New York group plans to collect data across the city to track things like how students perform over time, how long teachers stay in the system and how schools spend their money.

“We want to be an outside agency that is looking at data to see what is really effective,” said Richard Arum, a professor at New York University who has been organizing the group through the Social Science Research Council.

Critics have suggested that the presence of Mr. Klein and Ms. Weingarten on the board would undercut the group’s independence. But John Q. Easton, the executive director of the Chicago group, said that by including officials from the school system, the group would ensure that its findings would be respected.

“Part of what has made us trusted is that we had all the opposing voices together,” Mr. Easton said in a phone interview this week. “If they don’t buy into it, it’s not going to be listened to.”

In Chicago, school officials are notified of each of the research topics before they are published, a practice that will almost certainly be duplicated in New York.

Some of the most useful work, Mr. Easton said, has come out of research on high school student performance, where researchers found that performance in ninth grade was a strong indicator of whether students would drop out. While the conclusion might appear obvious, he said, it sent ripples through the school system.

“You move from speculation to evidence,” said Paul Goren, the vice president of the Spencer Foundation, which has also financed the Chicago program.