Drain NYC's School Swamp

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But the school system does work — just not for the kids.
It works, quite brilliantly, as a bipartisan jobs program. It works as a patronage base for state legislators and City Council members.
It works as a sinecure for the administrators who play solitaire on their computers in a bloated and harmful bilingual bureaucracy. It works for a small army of testing companies and consultants and so-called education reform advocates. It works for cost-plus developers and renovators of existing buildings.
It works for Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, the chief opponent of mayoral control and the most powerful of tribal chieftains who dominate various portions of a system as lacking in central authority and accountability as the nation of Afghanistan.
So what is to be done?
The new mayor has announced that he'll make education one of his top priorities. But then he undercut his own announcement: He said he would seek "partnerships" with many of the same people and institutions that benefit from the status quo.
Mayor Bloomberg should apply his business experience to the crisis in education. He should recognize the fact that the school system won't surrender to rhetoric or reason. It will only respond to a hostile takeover.
If he can't get the Legislature to abolish the board and give him total control, he should get himself appointed schools chancellor and bring in a chief operating officer who reports directly to him.

Once Bloomberg truly takes charge, he can begin to take on the system's obvious, difficult, but addressable problems:
- He can eliminate corrupt or do-nothing local school districts and boards.
- He can organize a radically improved training and recruiting program for the all-important front-line managers of the system — the principals.
- He can do the same for the system's front-line workers — the teachers.
- He can direct his housing and community-development executives to create a space bank for innovative public and charter school expansion.
- He can follow through on the creative bilingual-education reform effort worked out by Metro IAF and Mayor Giuliani, which was grudgingly accepted and never implemented by Chancellor Harold Levy.

In short, he can make New York City the world capital of educational experimentation and innovation.

A portion of the system is bank-
rupt — condemning nearly a quarter of a million of the city's most vulnerable students and families to a lifetime of intellectual debt. Just as with Enron, the system's executives and consultants and pols make a killing. The children and families just get killed.

We're glad the mayor made the first move. But now he must act aggressively and prove that schools can change as positively and as profoundly as the city's transit, safety and housing cultures did — and that he is the man with the wits and the guts to change them.

Then he will be able to take his place with all of the other agents of public change who have improved life immeasurably in this magnificent and unfolding city.

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