

TESTIMONY

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
CHAIRMAN, FERNANDO CABRERA**

Oversight – New York City's Early Voting Rollout

**Presented on
Monday, November 25th, 2019**



**SINCE 1962
COUNCIL OF SCHOOL
SUPERVISORS &
ADMINISTRATORS
Local 1:AFSA, AFL-CIO**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Cabrera, and distinguished members of the City Council. The Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) is Local 1 of the American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA). CSA represents some 16,000 In-service and retired Principals, Assistant Principals, Educational Administrators, Directors and Assistant Directors of city-funded early childhood centers. As school leaders, we are grateful for this opportunity to address the issue regarding early voting rollout.

CSA fully recognizes the importance of our city's early voting initiatives and encourages greater voter turnout for a healthy democracy. When schools serve as early voting sites, however, the necessary procedures increase security risks and present operational challenges that disrupt the educational process. We ask the City Council to join with us in strongly urging the Board of Elections (BOE) to avoid using schools as early voting sites in order to prevent the potentially harmful impact on our children.

Earlier this year, the Mayor's office provided the Board of Elections with potential early voting sites, and the BOE selected from among those with no input from the general public. The Department of Education (DOE) first began notifying school administrators that their buildings would be used as early voting sites just three short weeks before the October 26th start date. Thirty-three principals were suddenly informed that the BOE required use of the facilities for 10 straight days. Although students are always off on Election Day, they would be in class during the entire early voting period.

Our members immediately began to raise concerns, which we shared repeatedly with the DOE. We also expressed our frustration that affected school leaders weren't consulted sooner about the use of their facilities. In fact, according to city BOE executive director Michael Ryan, education officials knew about 23 of the schools as early as last spring. One principal learned that her building would be utilized when voting rights advocates and local representatives suddenly gathered outside of her building.

As our members had warned, early voting had a direct impact on critical school safety procedures. Protocols simply fell by the wayside. According to the DOE's protocols, anyone who visits a New York City public school must show photo identification when signing in during a school visit. They are then given a visitor's pass to display at all times. However, during early voting, everyone was permitted to enter a school as long as they indicated they were there to vote. No identification was required. In many instances, these visitors were only met by BOE poll workers and the NYPD officers assigned to the school site when they arrived at the voting booths. In many cases, they were able to walk freely through school halls, past classrooms and bathrooms.

Using schools as an early voting site also resulted in disruptive programming changes. If a school lost its cafeteria to the voting process, students were forced to eat boxed meals in classrooms. If a school lost its gymnasium, physical education suffered. School administrators had to work diligently to minimize voter access to children; this often required altering

schedules and restricting student access to common spaces that are usually relied upon. In many schools, dismissal procedures had to be reorganized, raising further safety concerns.

All in all, early voting in schools turned out to be a monumental task for school leaders, creating an unfair burden on already overburdened school administrators. We would like to publicly acknowledge and thank the school leaders who made early voting possible while minimizing the disruptions and protecting our children from harm. They also bore the brunt of assuaging understandably anxious parents.

Early voting should, of course, continue next year. It simply should not occur in our schools. It is worth noting that of the 248 early voting sites across the state, only one other school outside of NYC was used for these purposes. And while state election law allows other building leaders to opt out when they are designated as early voting poll sites, it does not allow school leaders to do so. We ask the City Council to help amplify the voice of our school leaders and urge the Board of Elections to find alternative early voting sites for next year and beyond.

Sincerely,

Mark Cannizzaro