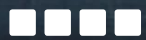


MAYOR de BLASIO'S PROSE PROGRAM:

**BIG
PROMISES,
LITTLE
INNOVATION**



Students**FirstNY**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For years, charter schools have led the way in education innovation. Freed from the obstacles that stifle progress in traditional district schools, charters deliver transformative improvement through innovative reforms such as extended learning time, data-driven instruction and establishing a culture of high expectations. This success is the reason charters have been embraced by a broad cross section of leaders of both political parties, including President Obama, who has hailed charters [“as incubators of innovation in neighborhoods across our country.”](#)

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has chosen a different path, refusing to support any policy opposed by the teachers’ union no matter how successful it has been in improving academic outcomes for kids. Mayor de Blasio’s anti-charter school crusade has become a hallmark of his time in office, earning him the UFT’s support for his reelection at the expense of families desperately looking for better school options for their children. In return for a large donation to his political operation, the Mayor even delivered a sweetheart contract deal to the union that granted large raises without any concessions.

One key element of that contract was a program hailed as the union-backed answer to charter schools – the Progressive Redesign Opportunity for Excellence (PROSE). The PROSE program was announced with much fanfare, and the Mayor pledged that the program would bring innovation, promising that “these (200) schools can reinvent themselves.” Chancellor Carmen Farina touted the program as having [“new, innovative practices that can serve as a guide for all of our school communities.”](#) StudentsFirstNY [raised questions](#) about the scope and impact of the PROSE program from the moment it was announced, and on behalf of our parent members, we have worked over the past 14 months to gain access to information about the program to determine whether it is living up to its promise. Unfortunately for New York City students, PROSE schools have fallen far short of the standard set by charter schools as incubators of innovation.

PROSE: THE MAYOR'S ALTERNATIVE TO CHARTER SCHOOLS

When the first group of PROSE schools were formally announced during the summer of 2014, the Department of Education [promised](#) that the program would drive innovation:

"The PROSE program was established as part of the new contract between the UFT and the DOE to allow schools to implement innovative plans that fall outside of the Chancellor's Regulations or UFT contract. All 62 schools voted to implement innovative plans as part of the PROSE program for the 2014 – 2015 school year."

Mayor de Blasio has hailed the PROSE program, saying: ["The PROSE concept is rewriting our approach to education from the ground up"](#) and ["This is going to be a national model for reform, and one that I think is going to bear fruit very quickly."](#) United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew said, ["The power of PROSE is that it allows schools to develop their own ideas on what is going to move education for their students"](#) and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten claimed that ["PROSE may be the best kept secret in American education."](#)

After the first cohort of 62 schools, the Mayor and the UFT added another 64 schools to the program for the 2015-2016 SY and then 16 more schools during this current 2016-2017 SY. The ultimate goal of the PROSE school program was to have up to 200 schools join its ranks.

PROSE SCHOOLS: CHARTER-LIKE INNOVATORS?

When it comes to true innovation in public education, charter schools have long led the way. In 2014 – the same year the de Blasio Administration rejected charters in favor of the union-backed PROSE program – noted Harvard University economist, Roland G. Fryer, Jr., detailed the most successful charter innovations in ["Injecting Charter School Best Practices Into Traditional Public Schools."](#) In his analysis, Fryer noted five best practices that saw positive academic results for students attending charter schools that could be utilized by district schools:

1. Extended Learning Time
2. More-Effective Teachers and Administrators
3. High-Dosage Tutoring
4. Data-Driven Instruction
5. Establishing a Culture of High Expectations

To see if schools in the PROSE program were implementing any charter best practices identified by Fryer, StudentsFirstNY submitted a request to the Department of Education on February 2016, asking for the following:

- The cost of additional funding for PROSE schools.
- The application and finalized plan for each school in the PROSE program.
- The average class size for each school selected to participate in the PROSE program.

After more than a year of delays, the NYC DOE finally presented a small portion of the data that StudentsFirstNY requested. Despite asking for PROSE funding, class size data and the full PROSE application process, the NYC DOE only provided StudentsFirstNY with initial application information for the original cohort of 62 PROSE schools.

What is clear from a review of the applications is that a majority of these schools proposed innovations focused on adult needs and not on what is most important: improving the academic experience for the students at the school. These innovations mainly focused on modifying the way teachers are evaluated, granting teachers the flexibility to spread out the hours they are contractually obligated to work, and scheduling professional development for teachers at various times throughout the academic calendar where in some cases school days were shortened for students or students were not required to come to school at all.

Chart 1: PROSE Applications Lack Real Innovation

Cohort I: Categories of PROSE Innovations	# of Schools (out of 62)
Increasing Teacher Schedule Flexibility	46
Changes to Professional Development Structure	42
Changes to the Teacher Evaluation Rubric	37
Modifications to Traditional Class Schedules	25
Using Mastery-Based Assessments for Students	14
Modifications to Parent/Teacher Engagement	11

Innovations listed in chart represent most commonly requested proposals by the original PROSE schools cohort. Chart does not include unique requests such as a change in enrollment processes, internship/community service opportunities, changes to graduation requirements, changes to school food funding, and purchasing materials from non-DOE vendors, among others. None of these requests are included in the best practices identified by Dr. Fryer.

The heavy focus on providing school staff with greater overall flexibility clearly illustrates that the teacher’s contract is riddled with restrictions that stifle innovations on behalf of students. Furthermore, in order to become a PROSE school, a joint panel with the City and the UFT must approve the application and then a minimum of 65 percent of the UFT staff must approve the changes. Consequently, it is not surprising that most of the changes approved by the UFT were designed to improve staff conditions and don’t focus on true innovation.

A small portion of schools did propose innovations matching the best practices highlighted by Fryer, including the use of student data on various performance-based assessments to drive teacher instruction. Our review found that most of the schools beginning to implement data-driven instruction are transfer high schools. This policy would prove more effective if started earlier in the process, with more elementary and secondary schools using data to ensure they are meeting the needs of every student before they fall behind.

Chart 2: PROSE Schools Fail to Adopt Charter Best Practices

Cohort I: Fryer’s Charter School 5 Best Practices	# of Schools (out of 62)
Extended Learning Time	0
Human Capital	6
High-Dosage Tutoring	1
Data-Driven Instruction	14
Culture of High Expectations	1

PROSE INNOVATIONS DON'T DRIVE CHARTER-LIKE RESULTS

In an attempt to assess the impact of innovations in the original PROSE cohort, StudentsFirstNY analyzed how these schools fared since the changes were made in 2014.

- Elementary and middle schools in the PROSE program had **lower ELA and math proficiency scores** when compared to other city elementary and middle schools that were not in the PROSE program.
 - + ELA growth in charter schools was **double** that of PROSE schools and while charter schools saw positive growth on the state math exam, PROSE schools saw a **decline** from when these schools first joined the program.
 - + In PROSE schools, ELA proficiency grew by 28% from 2014 to 2016, while charter schools nearly **doubled** those results, improving by 53%.
 - + In PROSE schools, math proficiency **declined** by 2%, while charters saw an 11% increase.
- In PROSE high schools, the graduation rate (72%) was **significantly lower** than charter schools (77%) for the 2015-16 school year.

Chart 3: PROSE Schools Fail to Match Charter Student Achievement Growth

ELA growth in charter schools was double that of PROSE schools. Charter schools saw positive growth on the state math exam, but PROSE schools saw a decline from when these schools first joined the program.

ELA PROFICIENCY GROWTH

PROSE: 28%

CHARTER: 53%

MATH PROFICIENCY GROWTH

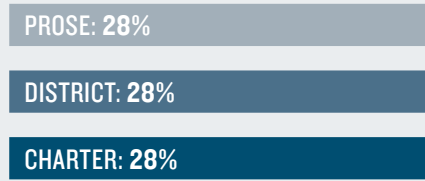
PROSE: -2%

CHARTER: 11%

Chart 4: NYC Charter Schools and the District Outperform PROSE on ELA Tests

On the state ELA test, PROSE schools improved 7 percentage points, which is less than all New York City schools which improved by 10 percentage points, and charter schools, which improved by 15 percentage points during the same length of time.

ELA PROFICIENCY BEFORE PROSE SCHOOLS



Charters improved faster than PROSE schools on ELA

ELA PROFICIENCY AFTER TWO YEARS OF PROSE SCHOOLS



Chart 5: PROSE Math Scores Dip While the District and Charters Go Up

When you take a closer look at math proficiency, PROSE schools actually did worse over time (dropped by 1 percentage point) compared to all NYC district schools (up 2 percentage points) or charters (up 5 percentage points). It is important to note that PROSE schools serve a variety of income levels and neighborhoods, while charters primarily serve low income students of color.

MATH PROFICIENCY BEFORE PROSE SCHOOLS



MATH PROFICIENCY AFTER TWO YEARS OF PROSE SCHOOLS



Gap between charters and PROSE schools in math widened as charters improved faster

Chart 6: PROSE Graduation Rates Trail Charters and the District

StudentsFirstNY also compared high school graduation rates of PROSE, district, and charter schools, finding significant differences. Charter graduation rates (77%) were significantly higher than PROSE school graduation rates (72%) in the 2015-16 school year.

2016 GRADUATION RATES



CONCLUSION

The PROSE program is one of Mayor de Blasio's signature education initiatives – one that he claimed would [“show that, here in this city, reform is synonymous with public education, and we're making it better all the time.”](#) Upon closer examination, the Mayor's plans have come up short in a variety of ways:

- **Limited Innovations:** Most of the details uncovered by StudentsFirstNY reveal that the changes at PROSE schools have focused on easing teacher evaluations and adjusting teacher scheduling rather than adopting charter-like innovations.
- **Lackluster Improvement:** Despite promised “innovations,” PROSE schools have failed to show significant improvement since they were added to the program.
- **Serious Transparency Problem:** The NYC DOE has withheld specific details of what innovations are in place at PROSE schools, despite repeated inquiries. It took the DOE 14 months to supply one sixth of the information requested by FOIL.
- **PROSE Schools Continue to Lag Behind Charter Schools:** Charter school students outperform PROSE schools and charter growth surpasses that of PROSE schools.

Despite the lofty promises of Mayor de Blasio and the NYC DOE, it is clear that PROSE schools are not as innovative or effective as the charters they seek to emulate.

If the Mayor wants to improve student outcomes at PROSE schools, and frankly at all NYC DOE schools, he should encourage the kinds of innovations that the Fryer study found effective. Mayor de Blasio must also stop obstructing the growth of charter schools that have consistently produced results for students. Both of those actions require that the Mayor stand up to his political patrons and advocate for the needs of students.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

StudentsFirstNY focused the analysis on PROSE schools in the original cohort for the following reasons:

- The original cohort has two full years of data.
- DOE failed to supply the applications for subsequent cohorts and the publicly available information (from press releases) was incomplete.¹

Chart 7: Cohort I Provided Most Comprehensive Data

PROSE School Cohort	1 Year of Data	2 Years of Data	Original Applications	NYC DOE Press Release Summary of Innovation
1st (2014-2015)	✓	✓	✓	Incomplete
2nd (2015-2016)	✓	X	X	Incomplete
3rd (2016-2017)	X	X	X	✓

If one were to analyze publicly available information on the second and third cohorts, along with what the DOE supplied for the first cohort, the picture is no different. The PROSE school innovations are not charter best practices and are mostly focused on the adults.

Chart 8: Innovation Analysis Including Public Information on Cohorts 2 and 3

All 3 Cohorts: PROSE School Innovation ²	# of Schools (out of 81)
Increasing Teacher Schedule Flexibility	56
Changes to Professional Development Structure	52
Changes to Teacher Evaluation Rubric	37
Modifications to Traditional Class Schedules	34
Modifications to Parent/Teacher Engagement	17
Using Mastery-Based Assessments for Students	14

Chart 9: PROSE Schools Across Cohorts Fail to Adopt Charter Best Practices

All 3 Cohorts: Fryer's Charter School 5 Best Practices	1st PROSE School Cohort	2nd & 3rd PROSE School Cohorts
Extended Learning Time	0	2
Human Capital	6	0
High-Dosage Tutoring	1	0
Data-Driven Instruction	14	0
Culture of High Expectations	1	0

1. The press release for the second cohort described the proposed innovation at just three schools out of the 64 schools admitted to the program. The press release for the third cohort includes the proposed innovations for all 16 schools included. Reviewing the brief summaries for the three schools in the second cohort and the 16 schools in the third cohort reveals that the major trend for PROSE school innovation continues to focus on adult needs.
2. This analysis is of 81 PROSE schools – the original 62 applications provided by the DOE and the 19 from two press releases.

LEARN MORE:

[STUDENTSFIRSTNY.ORG](https://www.studentsfirstny.org)