The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities. CUP's Urban Investigations project builds afterschool programs in which public high school students explore fundamental questions about how the city works. Students collaborate with CUP teaching artists to create multimedia teaching tools that reach audiences in the fields of art and social justice.

In the fall of 2013, CUP collaborated with teaching artist Max Allbee and students from Vanguard High School to find out who has a say in the public school system, and where students’ voices can be heard. We investigated the different bodies that make up the NYC school system, and learned about student and community decision-making power at the school, district, and city level by interviewing parent and student advisory groups, academics studying education systems, and school administrators. We designed this robust to show how decisions are made and where students can find a voice in the machine.

In New York City, the **PANEL FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY** votes on all policies, budgets, contracts, regulations, and changes to buildings and programs that the Department of Education proposes.

Lisa Donlan, District 1
Community Education Council

The mayor doesn’t make day-to-day decisions, the **CHANCELLOR** does. But if the chancellor does something the mayor doesn’t like, he or she is gone.

Paola de Kock, Citywide Council on High Schools

In the **PANEL FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY**, the mayor appoints eight of thirteen members and the borough presidents appoint one member each. The panel passes on the policies that the mayor and the chancellor have already decided on.

Norm Fruchter, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

There’s some **STUDENT VOICE** in the NYC school system, but there’s almost no real student decision-making about anything important at all. Urban systems are afraid of students.

Norm Fruchter, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

If there were a **STUDENT GOVERNMENT** that was real, that was really representative of the diversity of students, then it could say what was wrong, and the administrators would listen. It would make school better for students, teachers, and the administration.

Norm Fruchter, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Vanguard High School is a Title 1 school in Manhattan committed to cultivating the resources necessary to become literate, articulate, analytical, reflective, and empathetic citizens.

Vanguard High School
Students: Lauren Baysley, Daphne Davis, Juliesa Ghene, Eddie Holland, Abrahmaz Khreem, Andy Mason, Nika Murillo, Devin Stagg
Project support: Erica Doyle

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Lisa Donlan, District 1 Community Education Council; Norm Fruchter, Annenberg Institute for School Reform; Bill Blane, Vanguard High School; Judith Kafka, Baruch College; Paola de Kock, Citywide Council on High Schools; Karen Watts, Brooklyn high school superintendent.

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