



By her own account, Cathleen P. Black, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's choice to be the next New York City schools chancellor, has had almost no experience with the public education system. But for nearly 20 years, she played an influential role in a company that did: Coca-Cola.

As America awoke to a national obesity epidemic and schools tried to rid their hallways of sugary drinks, Coca-Cola emerged as the biggest and most aggressive opponent of the scientists, lawmakers and educators who tried to sound the alarm.

The company unleashed a flurry of lobbyists, donations and advertising to fight the efforts, prompting local officials to describe it as "bullying" and "unconscionable." Even as other large food manufacturers embraced the public-health measures, Coca-Cola dug in its heels, rewarding schools that kept selling its products and threatening those that would not, officials said.

Through most of these battles, Ms. Black, the magazine executive nominated last week to lead the nation's largest school system, was one of 14 people on the company's board of directors, and she sat on a company committee that focused on policy issues including obesity and selling soda to children. On a board that meets six times a year, she was privy to internal debates about the company's combative strategy, and there is no public evidence that she ever questioned it.

[More...](#)