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FIXING THE PIPELINE: SOLUTIONS TO DISPARITIES IN GIFTED EDUCATION IN NEW YORK CITY

BACKGROUND: A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) recently revealed a plan to improve diversity in New York City's (NYC) schools.ⁱ While this plan takes some small steps in the right direction, more must be done to address this chronic disenfranchisement, particularly within the City's Gifted & Talented (G&T) programs and the New York City Specialized High Schools (NYCSHS). Recent statisticsⁱⁱ concerning diversity in the NYCSHS substantiate and highlight the breakdowns with integrating NYC's schools in regards to racial and socio-economic lines.

Furthermore, the levels of segregation at the NYCSHS are exacerbated by the inability of the DOE to effectively make G&T education widely accessible and inclusive because strong G&T programs historically have had high placement rates at the NYCSHS.

Every year, students and families await the results of the test to determine who will receive an offer into one of the DOE's citywide or districtwide G&T programs. The families may change year to year; however, the statistical results are consistently problematic. The makeup of the G&T classrooms grossly misrepresents the makeup of the City's student body.

The statistics are undeniable. The citywide poverty rate for students is approximately 77 percent, but in gifted programs, that number is 43 percentⁱⁱⁱ, and while 70 percent of students citywide are black or Latino, they make up only 27 percent of the students in gifted programs.^{iv} It is clear that the current methods for identifying and enrolling gifted students are deficient.

The numbers are consistently as disastrous for admissions to the NYCSHS:

- In 2015, black and Latino students comprised over 46 percent of test takers, but received less than 12 percent of the offers.^v
- In 2016, black and Latino students made up just over 44 percent of test takers, but received only slightly more than 10 percent of the offers.
- In 2017, black and Latino students made up a little more than 44 percent of test takers, while receiving just over 10 percent of the offers.^{vii}

This is not even to mention students from these under-represented minorities who do not sit for the test. Clearly, attempts to increase diversity in these schools are stagnant at best. New approaches are desperately needed.

The DOE's current policies have failed to adequately provide G&T educational opportunities to every neighborhood and corner of NYC in an equitable manner. Consequently, the DOE is failing to provide the necessary challenging instruction to G&T students across the city beginning at an early age. This directly contributes to the NYCSHS' inability to admit students that represent NYC as a whole because rigorous early education during elementary and middle school leads to success with advanced learning later on. As a result, underserved students are not being set up to successfully access the NYCSHS and succeed in other advanced learning opportunities.

It is for this reason that our offices created the Gifted & Talented Education Task Force (hereafter the "Task Force") to hear directly from parents and community members, and tap into the expertise of the Task Force members, about these challenges and identify ways to reform the G&T program and NYCSHS system to better meet the needs of all New Yorkers. The Task Force was comprised of:

- Borough Presidents Eric L. Adams and Ruben Diaz Jr.
- Jeff Lowell, Deputy Policy Director to Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
- Monica Major, Director of Education to Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
- Raymond Sanchez Jr., Counsel and Senior Policy Manager to Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
- Ryan Lynch, Policy Director to Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
- Victoria Reing, Director of Policy to Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.
- Geneal Chacon – Panel for Educational Policy
- Steven Francisco – CEC 10
- Nancy Kheck – CEC 11
- Nikki Lucas – District Leader, 60th Assembly District
- Melanie Mendonca – CEC 23
- Katie Sperling – Parents' Alliance for Citywide Education
- Ralph Yozzo – CEC 16

What the Task Force heard at public hearings during spring 2017 was enlightening and informative. It highlighted once again the need for robust community engagement to identify sustainable solutions to our ongoing challenges.

For example, one Community Education Council (CEC) member at the Task Force's hearing at Bronx High School of Science on March 20, 2017 summed up the overarching challenge perfectly:

Our schools must exist for one reason alone – to help our children achieve their highest potential. Every student deserves an educational experience that allows them to thrive academically regardless of their background or zip code. The time is now to identify and cultivate top talent. – (District 9 CEC member)

Using the public hearing testimony and research conducted by Task Force members, this report outlines ways to achieve this goal by highlighting the challenges that face G&T students and parents, as well as identifying ways in which to improve accessibility to G&T programs to every New Yorker, deliver adequate resources to support G&T students throughout their educational careers, and look at new ways to diversify the NYCSSHS' population to better reflect the cultural mosaic of NYC as a whole.

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

This report makes the following nine recommendations and we are calling for their immediate implementation.

1. All communities must have equal access to G&T programs in kindergarten.

For far too long, the DOE has not done enough to ensure that G&T classes exist in the earliest grades in every community in this city. A student's zip code should not decide whether or not they have access to an accelerated learning environment, and these programs should be available from the kindergarten level upwards.

2. All students in public pre-K programs must be tested for G&T programs.

If more students are tested more students will qualify for G&T programs. The DOE should immediately enact a plan to test every student in a public pre-kindergarten (pre-K) program for G&T classes, in order to ensure that students in underserved communities are not left out of the selection process because of an information gap or any bias as to who is encouraged to take the test. An opt-out option should be available to parents.

3. Students who qualify for a G&T program must be offered a seat in their community.

Every student who qualifies for a G&T program and wants a seat in their district must be found a seat in their own community, be it their zoned school or another school in their local school district. Students should not have to leave their borough for a seat in a G&T program.

4. Increase knowledge of G&T programs by passing City Council Intro 1347.

City Council Member Robert Cornegy Jr.'s legislation would require the DOE to include materials about the G&T exam and programs along with universal pre-K information. This is a common sense measure to expand access to these programs, and we urge the bill's swift passage.

5. Middle school G&T programs must be expanded, so that the pipeline of feeder schools to high school is never broken. More citywide G&T programs^{viii}, which are proving a successful model, should be implemented in The Bronx, north Brooklyn, and elsewhere in the city where they are lacking.

The dearth of middle school G&T programs in this city, especially in traditionally underserved communities such as the South Bronx and north Brooklyn, is unsustainable and perhaps the largest impediment to a strong K-8 pipeline to the city's specialized high schools. Strong middle school G&T programs must be created in all communities, be they district level or citywide.

6. All students who need it should have access to free or low cost test prep for the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT).

Parents who cannot afford additional test prep services for the SHSAT should not see their children left behind for lack of funds. Programs that provide free test prep services for the SHSAT should be expanded dramatically to reach all students that would benefit from them. The top 15 percent of each Bronx middle school's 5th and 6th grades should be given automatic offers into DREAM-Specialized High School Institute programming.

7. The DOE must move to using admissions methods that do not rely solely on the SHSAT for the eight schools that rely on it.

Access to high-quality high-level public high school education should not be based entirely on the results of a single test. Additionally, the top five percent of each Bronx and Brooklyn middle school graduating class should be offered an automatic seat at a newly created, borough specific NYCSSHS. This will serve as an explicit incentive to children and drive performance.

8. G&T education should be inclusive.

G&T should allow for instances of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

9. The DOE should pay for a student's bus transportation to programs in other boroughs.

Currently, parents who do not have citywide G&T options in their own borough are forced to pay for costly bus service to send their children to schools in other boroughs. If adequate programs do not exist in a student's community, it is the school system, not the student's family, who should pick up the cost of busing the student to a program in another borough.

MAJOR THEMES: ACCESS AND TESTING

Throughout the course of the Task Force's work, trends emerged that can be broken down into two major themes: access and testing.

The overall problem of access – to transportation, quality of programming, and information about G&T programs – was summed up perfectly by a Bronx parent's testimony at the March 20, 2017 hearing in The Bronx:

I think we need to...dedicate that building to a G&T school, K-8 in the Bronx...As I said, I have two girls. The older one tested for G&T and she was accepted into NEST+m. The problem was, there was no busing across boroughs. My daughter was 6 or 7 at the time and my wife and I were both working so there was no way that we could bring her to school and back to Manhattan. And we didn't have the funds to pay for a private bus so we had to pass on that opportunity. My daughter eventually went to MS 180 in Co-op City and they had an honors program, but it isn't G&T...One of the problems we are seeing is that because there is no school, there is no interest to get that information out and so I have worked in a situation where I have seen G&T books, thousands of books, just lying in waste there. They are not getting to the parents and so it kind of defeats the purpose...We have no schools for them. – Bronx parent at a task force hearing

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT G&T

Although gifted programs have consistently placed their students in the NYCSHS, testimony at two public hearings held in spring 2017 clearly showed that parents were not being made aware of the programs and/or the testing procedures. Parents testified that DOE was not making them aware of G&T programs and testing and that parents had to investigate these opportunities for themselves. These parents recounted their experiences focusing on the challenges of information dissemination about testing. One parent stated:

I know schools that didn't even give out booklets for G&T testing...I only found out about the G&T program through a friend.

This results in many districts, like in the south Bronx and central Brooklyn, having a scarcity of students sitting for the test.

Insufficient information about the programs in certain areas is a clear problem that needs to be addressed by DOE. Moreover, it must do more to improve the flow of information regarding the availability of G&T testing and opportunities to parents.

ACCESS TO PROGRAMMING

In order to keep students engaged, they must be challenged throughout their academic career. Lessons in a general education classroom cannot consistently push the most advanced students to achieve at their maximum potential. For this reason, gifted students should be given the opportunity to be challenged by classroom instruction in classes solely dedicated to advanced learners.^{ix}

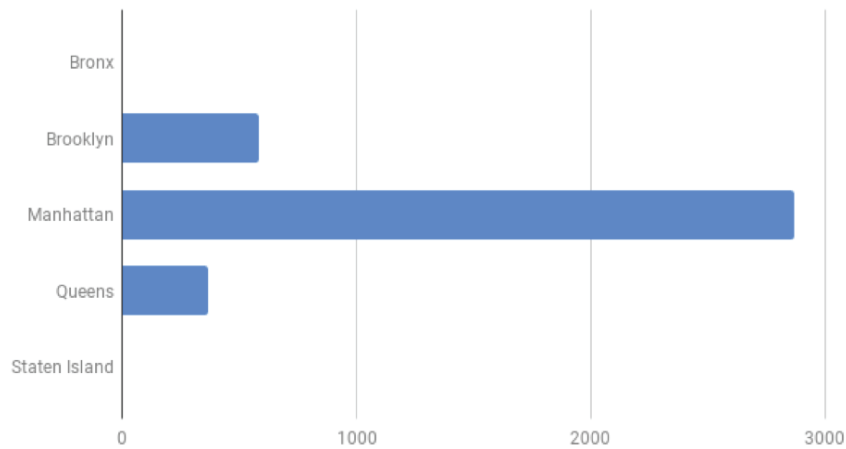
While the DOE is trending towards G&T entry at the third grade level beginning in September 2017, we have seen no convincing evidence that this later entry point is more optimal than providing G&T programming in lower grades. In fact, there is evidence that earlier exposure to G&T instruction is more beneficial for young learners.

This position was supported by comments and questions posed by the Task Force:

- Why not provide ample opportunities for G&T education in the grades when students are building initial reading skills and other important skills?
- If school performance records and attendance records are the factors at issue in determining success in these programs as the DOE has said in defense of the third grade policy, then why deprive all gifted students of a chance at early advanced coursework?
- Wouldn't behavioral and other support for gifted students and families help with attendance and performance of students whose testing indicates they could do the work of the G&T program?
- Couldn't additional services lessen the gap between ability and achievement at a young age?
- Why does the DOE rely solely in some programs on teacher identification for G&T education when such identification has proven biases?

It is also evident that The Bronx and north Brooklyn need citywide G&T schools. These successful schools create continuity for students in an accelerated learning environment by allowing them to continue in the same program with many of the same peers for grades K-8.

Seats by borough of Citywide Gifted and Talented – Where schools are located



Source: DOE enrollment data

The absence of citywide G&T programs in The Bronx and in north Brooklyn is an ongoing problem that leads to negative outcomes in terms of school and program diversity as well as access to accelerated coursework. While the Bloomberg Administration was tentatively planning the siting of a citywide G&T school in The Bronx, this commitment has not yet been made a reality.^x Parents at our Task Force hearings expressed a desire for more geographically accessible G&T options.

The pipeline feeding G&T students from one challenging educational experience to the next is broken due to a lack of options at the middle school level; this was brought up in numerous testimonies at the task force hearings.

We must fix that pipeline. Mayor Bill de Blasio has garnered much praise for his efforts on pre-K education; however, these programs remain a part of this disconnected system. In order to take full advantage of the investment in pre-K and 3-K programs, a pipeline from elementary and middle school levels is needed for students to access high quality high school educations on their way to excellent educational opportunities at the college and graduate levels. Elementary and middle school education are key pieces of the puzzle of educational opportunity at the high school level for all students, regardless of race and ethnicity.

A CASE STUDY BY THE TASK FORCE: DISTRICT 11 WHAT HAPPENED TO A FORMERLY SUCCESSFUL G&T PROGRAM IN THE BRONX?^{xi}

The Bronx currently lacks a middle school G&T program. The following is a case study of MS 181 in District 11 (D11), which used to house the one Bronx G&T middle school. As a result of anecdotal research compiled by the Task Force, a disturbing downward trend was identified in the number of students able to access the NYCSHS from the school after it was converted by the DOE from a G&T program into a “screened” Honors program.

Over the last decade, on average the demographics of the D11 students in G&T programming across grades K-8, has aligned closely with composition of the school population as a whole:

- Asian 4-8 percent
- Black 60-68 percent
- Latino 25-27 percent
- White 2-4 percent

Historically in D11, the K-8 G&T pipeline has shown little evidence of disparities in equity or access for black, Latino, and other minority populations that are currently underrepresented minorities (URM) in the NYCSHS. There are no shortages of intellectually talented URM students in The Bronx, and they’ve typically comprised the majority (consistently over 90 percent) of G&T seats in D11.

From the mid 1990’s, MS 181 was the preeminent G&T middle school program in the north Bronx. As a district program, it received the brightest students from D11, a majority from the only other G&T elementary program, PS 153; until PS 121 K-5 G&T seats were added. MS 181 served as a beacon for accelerated learners, as the only public school option for Bronx students who did not make it into citywide middle school G&T programs. It was also an essential component of a robust pipeline that offered highly capable Bronx children a proven pathway into elite NYC public and private high schools. In 2014, the last cohort of G&T students graduated from MS 181 – many destined for NYCSHS and top private/parochial institutions, all recruited on merit-based scholarships.

KEY ASPECTS OF THE G&T PROGRAM IN D11:

- From the 1990's, the G&T testing process has always included psychological evaluation, and D11 G&T admissions staff ensured that each applicant received a personalized assessment, including:
 - IQ testing to ascertain the breadth and depth of the child's potential
 - Assessment of the child's social and emotional maturity, and
 - Gauging their ability to deal with the rigor and stress associated with the accelerated pace of the G&T classroom.
- Psychological testing for G&T admission ended in the early 2000s. Veteran educators and leaders in D11 share a firm belief that a single test grade is not a valid indicator of a child's "fit" for any screened programs. Multiple measures are needed to create functional accelerated tracks.
- While key changes like a centralized admissions process for G&T K-5 programs took place in 2008-9, in D11 the middle school placements from PS 153 to feeder MS 181 without re-testing, remained intact until 2010. Students from other D11 programs and districts had to test into a G&T middle school program.
- By the 2012-2013 academic year the DOE altered the G&T testing paradigm for grades K/1 and soon after in 2014 the middle school G&T entrance exam was eliminated; this DOE policy effectively downgraded the MS 181 program to a screened honors program.
- Concurrently the middle school choice lottery was introduced, and DOE centralized the assignment of students to "screened" programs based on New York State (NYS) tests and grades; the MS 181 principal lost the discretion to populate students "of like abilities" into the allotted seats. Loss of transparency, placement of students based purely on numbers, and a loss of flow from local K-5 G&T classes forced key changes in educational programming at MS 181. The DOE introduced an enormously heterogeneous cohort from many schools which required a substantive reduction in the academic rigor of honors classes.
- Consequently, the numbers of MS 181 students placing into NYCSHS has also dropped significantly since the DOE change in the school.
- Today, the MS 181 screened program still offers n=50 seats to students from all over D11; of over 600 applicants about 8-10 percent are offered admission through the Office of Student Enrollment. The new rule for Admissions in 2017 is that NYS scores can only count for < 50 percent.

In D11, it appears that DOE's policy changes and centralization has effectively dismantled a highly successful legacy G&T pipeline, one that reliably served the needs of underserved children of D11 for decades.

PERSPECTIVE FROM PRINCIPALS – A HYBRID APPROACH FOR FURTHER STUDY

Principals from MS 181 and from another nearby school were supportive of a hybrid program, rather than the concept of a "G&T only" school. Often, students can show exceptional ability in a single or limited range of disciplines, without the overall academic performance to earn a seat in G&T programs. MS 181 Principal Christopher Warnock has long-term experience and success with channeling students from general and special education into accelerated math and other subjects when they demonstrate the ability to perform at that level (and vice versa when otherwise high performing accelerated learners need remedial support in a subject). Transitional students gain in terms of psycho-social and intellectual development from diverse peers as well as from the experiential learning in this unique environment. Similarly, G&T children recognize that exceptional ability occurs at all levels, even on the other end of the special education spectrum. It shapes their self-awareness and understanding of multiple intelligences.

What happens to PS 153 G&T students when they graduate? The majority of students continue in local, community schools. Many go into general education programs, or get placed by DOE into screened programs at two main local schools MS 180 and MS 181.

It is important to recognize that the average class size often decreases, from an average of about 28-32 students, because many students transition from G&T to elite private schools. This may comprise from 10-25 percent of the class; many of these students receive scholarships and/or financial aid to stay in these private schools. That may in part contribute to the low numbers of URM students that channel into specialized high schools from The Bronx.

ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION

Certain areas that do not have adequate G&T resources are further underserving students because current busing policies do not allow for opportunities for intra-city commuting to programs outside students' home communities. Current busing rules make the lack of citywide G&T programs in The Bronx and north Brooklyn an egregiously unfair situation.

Many parents testified that transportation issues were key to their decision about whether to apply to or enroll their child in G&T programs. One parent testified that one of his daughters qualified for citywide G&T and was offered a spot at NEST+m on the Lower East Side, but because of transportation challenges they decided to not pursue this educational opportunity:

My daughter was 6 or 7 at the time and my wife and I were both working so there was no way that we could bring her to school and back to Manhattan. And we didn't have the funds to pay for a private bus so we had to pass on that opportunity.

The families of students who are selected to attend a citywide G&T school in another borough must always provide their own transportation. This is a particularly acute problem in the Bronx since all citywide schools are out of borough. **For example, there are currently over 250 students commuting from The Bronx to four citywide schools in Manhattan and Queens.** NEST+m, located on the Lower East Side, has 80 Bronx students alone, further indicating that there would be tremendous interest in a Bronx citywide G&T school. The DOE provides a MetroCard for the child, but not for the adult to accompany their children to school. Currently, 807 students across all five boroughs attending citywide G&T schools use private bus services that cost \$3,000-\$4,000 a year. This cost adds a significant financial burden to families who are often struggling to make ends meet.

Private Bus Routes to Citywide G&T Schools 2016/17 and
Number of K-8 Students Commuting from Bronx to Citywide G&T Schools 2016/17

School	Number of Private Bus Routes	Number of Students Using Private Bus Service	Cost of Full Time Private Bus Per Student	Matrons?	Notes
Anderson	2	7	\$3,000 - \$4,500	No	
BSI	2	80	\$3,000	Yes	
NEST+m	13	490	\$3,000	Yes	NEST+m offers financial aid to students who are free-lunch eligible - they offer up to 1/3 the total cost of the bus or \$1,000, whichever is lower.
TAG	4	150	\$3,000	No	
Q300	4	80	\$3,000 - \$4,500	Elementary school age routes have matrons	Price difference depends on whether there is a matron and on how many riders are on the bus.

Total # Citywide G&T Students in 5 Boroughs Paying for Private Busing in 2016/17 = 807

Total # of Students Commuting from Bronx to Citywide G&T Schools in 2016/17 = 256
(120 to TAG, 81 to NEST+m, 50 to Anderson, 5 to Q300 - not all of these students use private bus)

Data Source: PTA Executive Boards of all five Citywide G&T schools

As a result of the above referenced policies, hundreds of students are required to commute for more than an hour each way to reach their schools. The impact of long commutes does not only end at a lighter pocketbook or wallet, but also the socio-emotional state of the students. Beth Spence, a researcher on this topic, has found that “long bus rides have a negative effect on family life, on the ability of students to perform well in school, and on their ability to fully participate in the school experience.”^{xii} She also points out that the opportunity cost or value of student time while commuting is ignored by education policymakers, and argues that commute length should be examined when making decisions about education quality.

Michael Fox has also studied the impact of long commute times and found that:

...students living farther away from schools must selectively drop activities from their schedules to compensate for the long bus rides. This is detrimental to their lifestyles as some may exclude...recreation, social, or homework activities.^{xiii}

Fox refers to the time spent on the bus/commuting as “empty time”^{xiv} which keeps students from filling their days with extracurricular enrichment or relaxation and even sleep. Many Bronx and Brooklyn children must start their journey as early as 6:30 AM in order to get to their schools throughout NYC or in other parts of their borough.

Testimony from the public hearings also provided anecdotal evidence of the impact of commuting on children. For example, one parent worried about the unsupervised time spent on the bus:

I had concerns about putting my baby on the school bus when you see so many things in the news about what happens on school buses, kids getting lost, kids getting left, or the violence that I have heard can happen when you have kids on a bus that are K-5 or K-8.

Another parent noted that long bus rides make it impossible for his child to take advantage of afterschool activities or sports because the bus has to leave before those activities are finished. The parent coordinator at PS 153 said:

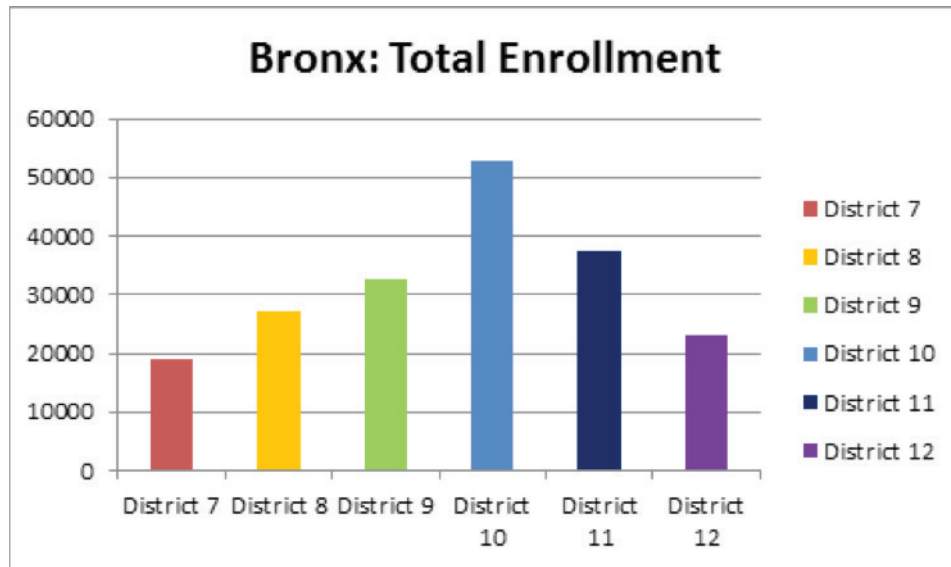
I feel like cattle are being herded instead of our children for the future. I am watching kids come off three to a seat and then we are wondering why we have issues with no matrons and no guidance.

While offering citywide G&T programs in underserved areas such as The Bronx, which lacks a citywide G&T program, is the priority, improved free transportation must be provided to connect families to the G&T programs they deserve in the ongoing absence of these programs.

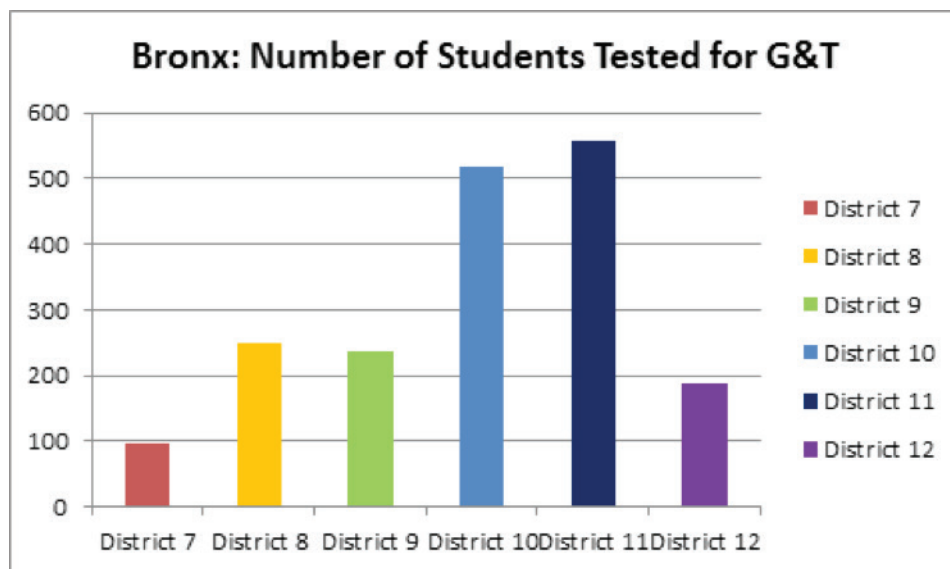
ACCESS TO TESTING AND TESTING RESOURCES

Currently, the city's G&T programs are significant feeders to the NYCSHS. Ensuring a more diverse student population in gifted programs could help address the diversity challenges at the NYCSHS.

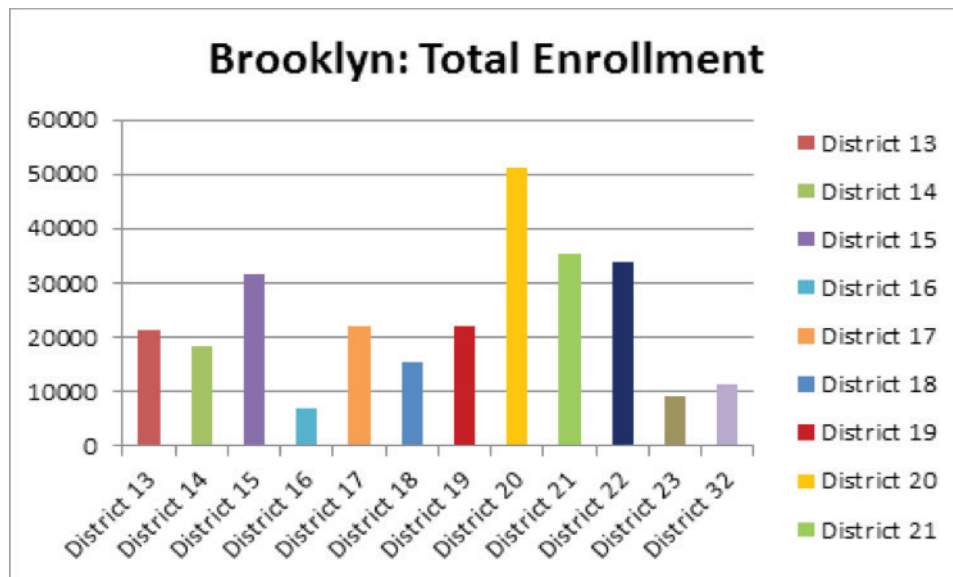
Studies have shown that teacher identification for G&T programs may have potential for racial bias. Reliance on teacher identification for who should test into programming is therefore not an optimal approach. Universal testing with an "opt-out" option for parents who do not want their children assessed would therefore provide a wider and fairer net for students taking the test and would qualify more students for G&T programs. The research suggests that universal G&T testing is fairer and helps diminish racial bias.^{xvi}



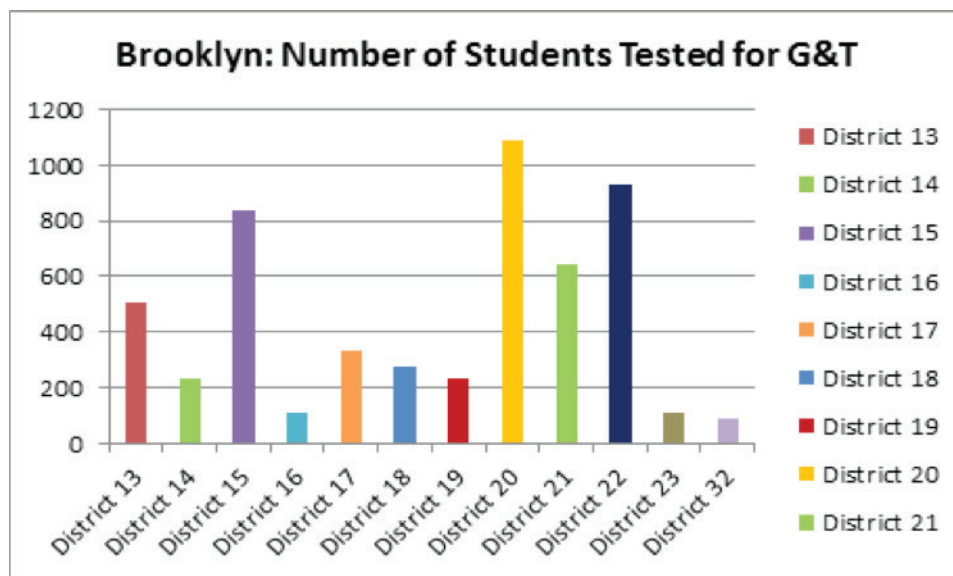
Source: DOE enrollment data



Source: DOE enrollment data



Source: DOE enrollment data



Source: DOE enrollment data

Under the Bloomberg Administration, plans were floated to test all students for G&T programming but this recommendation was never realized.^{xvii}

Using the SHSAT as the sole criteria for acceptance into the NYCSHS has also led to inequities of access because of the high cost and geographic dispersion of test prep services. Focused and dedicated test prep is essential because the SHSAT has historically required skills outside of the school curriculum. This situation has left underserved students, who often do not have the means to pay for test prep, or time to commute long distances, at a disadvantage compared to their peers.

In 2016, the DOE announced a moderate expansion to test prep programs using a combination of additional City and State funds. While the recent expansion of this program is welcome, the DREAM-Specialized High Schools Institute only incrementally addresses the problem and needs to scale up quicker to reach all students who need it. Moreover, the DOE should be more transparent in regards to the numbers of students who qualify academically for free test prep and those that actually enroll.

For example, in D7 and D12, there were only 20 and 26 8th graders, respectively, in the 2016-2017 class of the DREAM program. Further study must investigate the number of students on the waitlists for these programs and how many qualified students are simply not applying because of lack of publicity about the program or for other reasons. Identifying these metrics will ensure that more students would benefit from the program and whether a fresh look at the criteria for identifying eligibility beyond simply “free lunch” status is needed.

School District	2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
	Total DREAM 8th Graders	SHS Offers to DREAM 8th Graders	Total DREAM 8th Graders	SHS Offers to DREAM 8th Graders	Total DREAM 8th Graders	SHS Offers to DREAM 8th Graders	Total DREAM 8th Graders	SHS Offers to DREAM 8th Graders
7	s	s	s	s	20	s	15	s
8	32	s	26	s	52	13	54	19
9	25	s	20	s	64	s	73	10
10	28	12	39	10	56	10	98	26
11	25	s	42	12	55	14	113	34
12	15	s	11	s	26	s	19	s

Source: DOE statistics (s < 10)

ACCESS TO IEP INCLUSION

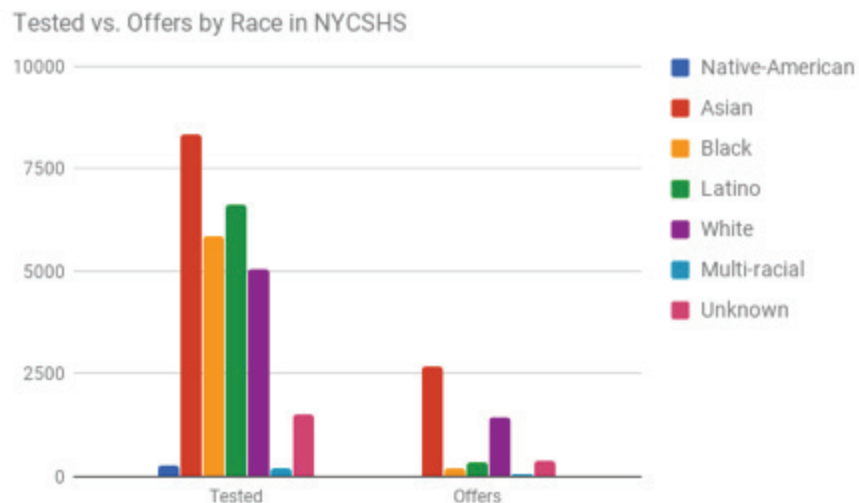
Students with disabilities represent 19.4 percent of NYC students,^{xviii} yet some of these students also qualify for G&T programming. Too often, students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) are forced to choose between gifted programming and the specialized services they need. Advocates for Children of New York shared stories with the Task Force about students excluded from gifted programs due to their disabilities or the existence of an IEP. Testimony provided by parents at our hearings also highlighted examples of parents being told that the G&T program could not accommodate the IEP.

Our G&T programs must truly be accessible by all students who meet the criteria. Students with IEPs and disabilities should not be excluded from gifted education simply because of that designation.

TESTING REFORMS FOR NYC SHS

Segregation and near-segregation in education is clearly not fair, a sentiment that no one should dispute in 2017. Famously, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation violates the constitutional rights of students. This Task Force believes that “quasi-segregation” and deprivation of opportunities to some of the City’s very best high schools and G&T programs does not evince equality either.

As mentioned above, according to data released in March 2017, the demographic make-up of the NYC SHS has yet to change to reflect the broader demographics of NYC. Only 3.8 and 6.5 percent of admissions offers to the eight NYC SHS went to black and Latino students this year, respectively.^{xix} In terms of actual numbers, that means that more than 6,600 Latino students in NYC applied for the NYC SHS but only 330 earned admission. Nearly 5,800 black middle school students in NYC applied to eight of the NYC SHS but only 194 were admitted. The admissions numbers for these two groups are well below the approximately 18 percent of total test takers that gained admission to one of the eight schools.^{xx} These numbers highlight that despite the vision of public education being premised on equity of access, we are not achieving this vision in New York City in 2017.



Source: DOE data

The DOE has taken a first step by eliminating the logical reasoning and scrambled paragraphs sections on this coming year's SHSAT (Fall 2017).^{xxi} The DOE's rationale for these changes is that they are striving to more closely align the test with what students are learning in class.^{xxii} While this is an important step, the Task Force does not see these efforts as far-reaching or efficacious enough. Not only must the elementary and middle school pipeline be fixed, the admissions methods must be adjusted as well. We must use multiple methods and find creative solutions to promote equity.

This initiative requires changes that must be implemented at both the City and State level. The Hecht-Calandra Act was passed by the State Legislature in 1971 to help preserve the selective status of the NYCSHS, but at the time only the three schools were in existence. The other five only use the test as standard practice, not as required by the Act. Hence, three of the NYCSHS – Brooklyn Tech, Bronx Science, and Stuyvesant—are required by State law^{xxiii} to use the SHSAT as the sole determinant of admission to the schools. The remaining five specialized schools – Brooklyn Latin, High School for Math, Science, and Engineering at City College, High School of American Studies at Lehman College, Queens High School for the Sciences at York College, and Staten Island Technical High School – are not listed in the State law and could therefore change the admissions criteria with a DOE rule change.

Unfortunately, the magnitude of inequities of access and diversity in NYCSHS will not simply be addressed by rewording a nearly 50-year-old law. A more aggressive approach that shifts the very paradigm of admissions to these schools is needed, and we must hold both the City and State accountable for the gross under-representation of certain minorities at the NYCSHS.

The inequity in high school admissions in New York City also manifests acutely in the rest of the City's high school system. A recent *New York Times* article demonstrated that the current school choice system is not creating equity for students of low socio-economic status, particularly for students and families in The Bronx.^{xxiv} Additionally, the lack of excellent screened schools in The Bronx is part of the backdrop for this issue. Screened schools serve a far larger number of students than the NYCSHS and none of the top 50 screened schools are located in The Bronx.^{xxv} For instance, a Bronx student is given lower priority than a Manhattan student for the top Manhattan schools because of the DOE's policy of giving priority to students closer to home.^{xxvi} Segregation, already present in NYC schools, is intensified by this approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All students in public pre-K programs must be tested for G&T programs.

One solution suggested by both The Bronx and Brooklyn borough presidents, in a March 2016 New York Daily News op-ed^{xxvii} and by testimony at the public hearings, is universal early screening for G&T programs. Early screening of all pre-K students has several advantages. First, it means that we are much less likely to miss a gifted student simply because their family did not know about the testing opportunity or the program because their pre-K teacher failed to tell them about the test, a truly unacceptable result. Under this proposal, parents would be welcome to opt out if they did not want their child tested. Second, this would help students who are at risk of not being sufficiently challenged in an under-performing school to be identified early and get into a program that can meet their needs. Later testing runs the risk that a student is behind simply because the school they attend cannot meet those needs. The DOE should identify gifted students earlier with on-ramps to the program at multiple ages rather than have students try to catch up later. This would have the additional benefit of allowing the DOE to identify those high potential students not flourishing in G&T from an early age and give them the support necessary within G&T education to allow them to flourish.

2. Middle school G&T programs must be expanded, so that the pipeline to high school is never broken. Citywide K-8 G&T programs should be located where they are lacking.

As a parent I feel deeply hurt that I have to put him in this environment that I know is not socially connecting for him and I have to schlep him to Manhattan every single day and so he loses the other parts of his life which is playing basketball or making friends in the neighborhood - so he lives this very fractured life. I would encourage us to have G&Ts in communities so that children can access this type of education in their home communities. (Parent at the Task Force's Brooklyn hearing)

The availability of G&T education is insufficient in NYC at both the elementary and middle school levels. Alumni of the NYCSHS recalled the highly rigorous "special progress" (SP) middle school program, what was once a pipeline to the NYCSHS.

Many of the alumni who testified at the hearings talked about programs they participated in during middle school that helped to prepare them for entry into NYCSHS. Some of these were G&T programs and others were part of SP classes at their middle school. Establishing more middle school G&T programs with accelerated learning can help improve performance on the SHSAT as well as performance in high school and beyond.

3. All students who need it should have access to free or reduced cost test prep for the SHSAT.

Better elementary and middle school education alone is insufficient to address the problem of underrepresented minorities at the NYCSHS. The Task Force believes sole reliance on this test is misguided; nevertheless, we recommend an interim step while this issue is rectified: free and/or low cost test prep for all those who are in financial need of it.

The DOE's DREAM Program must be expanded to capture additional students, and additional resources from New York State and NYC are needed to make this a reality.

Additionally, the Task Force recommends that priorities for seat allocation should be given to those that demonstrate significant financial need though a more objective metric than Title I free lunch, as, for instance, not all those who qualify apply for free lunch. Finally, the Task Force urges the DOE to consider that the top 15 percent of each middle school in The Bronx and central Brooklyn 5th and 6th grades be given automatic offers into a DREAM-Specialized High School Institute programming.^{xxviii}

4. Other admissions methods such as portfolio based admissions should be given serious consideration by the DOE and the State.

The NYC SHS have long been venerated as a path to social mobility for New Yorkers regardless of their socio-economic or ethnic background. This is no longer the case. All groups of New Yorkers are not being served by this bridge to many excellent colleges, universities, and careers.

Pipelines and the attendant problems of socio-economic inequality take time to fix, but we believe that we should make immediate changes that can help fix the problem of inequity now. We recommend the following alternative admissions methods:

- Multiple pathways for automatic admission to a NYC SHS should be implemented, including, but not limited to:
 - The top five percent of each Bronx and Brooklyn middle school graduating class should be offered an automatic seat at a newly created, borough-specific NYC SHS. This will serve as an explicit incentive to children and drive performance.
 - Opportunities should be allowed for math and science portfolios to serve as a means of admission to the NYC SHS.
 - We recommend the DOE establish procedures and standards for the admission to the specialized high schools of the city, including the grade point averages of applicants, personal statements of interest submitted by applicants and such other factors as the City shall determine to be necessary.

As an additional alternative to applications based solely on the SHSAT, the Community Service Society's proposal to switch the test for admission for the NYC SHS to the state test is worthy of consideration. That proposal also includes an opportunity for top middle school performers to receive admission provided their state tests are above a specified cutoff.^{xxix}

These alternate admissions schemes would go a long way towards changing the racial and ethnic makeup of the schools to be more equitable and are worth DOE's consideration.

5. All communities must have equal access to G&T programs in kindergarten, regardless of their zip code.

Not only is there inequity in NYC SHS admissions, there is inequity in where G&T programs are placed as well. Bronx and Brooklyn districts are missing G&T options at the kindergarten level, and for the reasons stated above, G&T options should be available at an earlier age. For instance, in The Bronx, D7 and D12 as well as Brooklyn's D16 and D23 G&T options have historically not been available to residents at all. In some instances, the DOE is adding third and fourth grade classes, but has still not committed to kindergarten, first, and second grade programs in all districts. We demand this commitment to programs from the earliest ages equally throughout the city.

6. Students who qualify for a G&T program must be given a seat in their community.

One of the more startling stories told by a parent at the Bronx hearing was from a mother whose son was assigned to a G&T program that did not exist. Upon receiving the assignment, she went to the school to discuss the program and nobody seemed to know what she was referring. The parent was led to believe that the program hadn't been operating because there were not enough students enrolled each year. Her son went without a G&T program that year. This is an entirely avoidable problem.

At first, this problem seems contradictory to the earlier claim that there are not enough G&T seats, but the more likely scenario is that there are not enough local students who were admitted to the program, in part because not enough local students took the G&T entry test. The base assumption that there are not enough G&T students to fill community programs is patently false. Ideally, with the adoption of universal G&T testing more students will be identified to fill seats. Until this happens, the Task Force recommends that programs be filled with students who came close to the cutoff score, or students identified via other means (teachers, grades, state tests – depending on the grade level) to ensure that qualified students get the chance they deserve.

Additionally striking is the data that 35 percent of qualifying test takers for G&T at the kindergarten level were not offered a seat this year for Fall 2017.^{xxx} This is unacceptable. Qualified students should be given the opportunities they deserve. Every year, more students test into the G&T programs than there are seats available.

7. DOE should provide free busing across boroughs at the elementary level to provide better access to G&T programs.

Busing is provided to students at G&T district programs according to the same eligibility rules as general education students. They are bused only within their district of residence and are not bused further than a five-mile route from any school in the district. Busing is provided to students at citywide G&T schools within the student's borough of residence, but not further than a five-mile route. Busing for charter and non-public students is provided within the student's borough, but not further than a five-mile route.^{xxxi} Exceptions to these guidelines include students in temporary housing and students mandated for specialized transportation due to their IEP.

It is clear that more G&T programs are needed, including citywide programs in The Bronx and north Brooklyn. If the best educational opportunities for gifted children are citywide programs, and those students are getting into the specialized high schools, then free busing needs to be available to make those programs accessible to all.

8. G&T education should include IEP students.

The DOE should not exclude students with an IEP from G&T programs, and students in G&T programs should have full access to any specialized services they need. The two program needs are not mutually exclusive. A parent should not have to choose between a G&T program and access to appropriate resources for their child or children.

9. Public knowledge of G&T programs should be increased by passing Intro 1347.

One recurring issue the Task Force heard at hearings was the existence of an information gap between parents who were “in the know” about G&T programs and those who were not. Both Borough President Adams and Borough President Diaz took immediate action on this issue by providing testimony to the City Council in support of Intro 1347, which would require DOE to include materials about the G&T exam and programs in Pre-K for All information packets. At the time of this writing, the legislation has not been adopted; the Task Force urges the City Council to pass, and Mayor de Blasio to sign, the bill into law.

EXCERPTS FROM BOROUGH PRESIDENTS' TESTIMONY ON INTRO 1347:

Testimony of Borough President Adams:

The City's gifted and talented programs are often the gateway to New York City's specialized high schools, which, in turn, are gateways to Ivy League colleges for New York City students. We cannot allow lack of awareness to be the reason why a student is not tested and is ultimately left behind on the pathway to the Ivy League...There is a comprehensive solution to this problem, and passing this legislation is a step toward that solution.

Testimony of Borough President Diaz:

...We need to increase the numbers of students taking the test in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, and the first critical step is through better communication about the programs and testing. We should ensure appropriate materials are widely disseminated, and in multiple languages....The low numbers for Black and Latino students in gifted programs ... may be explained in part due to the communication issue that parents have articulated to the task force...No parent should be deprived of information about gifted and talented programs.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ New York City Department of Education, Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools (June 2017), available at: schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D0799D8E-D4CD-45EF-A0D5-8F1DB246C2BA/0/diversity_final.pdf.
- ⁱⁱ New York City Department of Education, 2017 Specialized High School Offers (pdf file).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Christina Veiga, Among New York City's Deeply Segregated Gifted Programs, One Brooklyn School Aims for Greater Diversity (Nov. 18, 2016), Chalkbeat.org, available at: chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2016/11/18/among-new-york-citys-deeply-segregated-gifted-programs-one-brooklyn-school-aims-for-greater-diversity.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Pamela Wheaton, 8th-Graders Get High School Admissions Results (Mar. 4, 2016), InsideSchools.org, available at: insideschools.org/news-&-views/8th-graders-get-high-school-admissions-results.
- ^{vi} New York City Department of Education, *supra*, n. ii.
- ^{vii} Ibid.
- ^{viii} Citywide G&T programs are programs that accept students from all boroughs and typically go from kindergarten through eighth grade (with the exception of one program that goes through high school). Students must score a 97 or above on the placement test to gain admission.
- ^{ix} See National Association for Gifted Children, Position Statement: Early Childhood (Nov. 2006), available at: [nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement/Early%20Childhood%20Position%20Statement.pdf](https://nagc.org/sites/default/files/Position%20Statement%20Early%20Childhood%20Position%20Statement.pdf).
- ^x Elissa Gootman, Gifted Schools, Beyond Manhattan (Oct. 23, 2008), New York Times, available at: cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/10/23/gifted-classes-beyond-manhattan/?rref=collection/byline/elissa-gootman&action=click&contentCollection=undefined®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=203&pgtype=collection&r=1.
- ^{xi} Source: Research Interviews Conducted with G&T Personnel in D11:
- G&T Testing & Admissions Coordinator, Director for Special Ed in D11, veteran gifted teacher and administrator, had oversight of District 11x153 G&T students and pipeline program from 1994 to 2002. As per the citywide Anderson protocol, coordinated the written test and psychological evaluations for all G&T student applicants in the district/borough.
- MS181 Principal, C. Warnock – lead the district G&T middle school program until 2012-2013 academic year; with introduction of the School Choice initiative, principals lost the discretion to populate G&T and/or screened classes to a centralized DOE process based on state tests and grades; [Data provided – 2016 and 2017 Rubrics for NYC Honors Program Admission]
- Parent Coordinator – long-term PC at MS181 (now at MS180) with administrator of enrichment programs, 8th grade Regents and SHSAT prep programs ~20 years.
- PS Principal – currently supervises the legacy district G&T program for grades K-5; a G&T Parent Advisory Board supports the community of accelerated learners in her school.
- ^{xii} Beth Spence, Long School Bus Rides: Their Effect on School Budgets, Family Life, and Student Achievement (2000) Rural Education Issue Digest, Retrieved from eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED448955.
- ^{xiii} Michael Fox, Rural School Transportation as a Daily Constraint in Students' Lives (1996), *Rural Educator* 17(2):22, as cited in Spence, *supra*, n. xii.
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, Race Influences Teachers' Referrals to Special and Gifted Education, Finds Steinhardt Study (Oct. 18, 2016), available at: steinhardt.nyu.edu/site/ata glance/2016/10/race-influences-special-ed-referrals.html.
- ^{xvi} See Susan Dynarski, Why Talented Black and Hispanic Students Can Go Undiscovered (Apr. 8, 2016), New York Times, available at: nytimes.com/2016/04/10/up-shot/why-talented-black-and-hispanic-students-can-go-undiscovered.html?_r=0; see also Max Nisen, Tackling Inequality in Gifted-and-Talented Programs (Sept. 15, 2015), *The Atlantic*, available at: theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/inequality-gifted-programs-schools-testing/405013.
- ^{xvii} Elissa Gootman and Robert Gebeloff, Gifted Programs in the City Are Less Diverse (June 19, 2008), New York Times, available at: nytimes.com/2008/06/19/nyregion/19gifted.html.
- ^{xviii} New York City Department of Education, Demographic Snapshot 2012-13 to 2016-17, available at: schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm.
- ^{xix} Monica Disare, Only 10 Percent of Offers at New York City's Specialized High Schools Went to Black and Hispanic Students (Mar. 8, 2017) Chalkbeat.org, available at: chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2017/03/08/only-10-percent-of-offers-at-new-york-citys-specialized-high-schools-went-to-black-and-hispanic-students/.
- ^{xx} Eliza Shapiro, Racial Segregation Persists in City's Most Competitive High Schools (Mar. 8, 2017) Politico, available at: politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2017/03/racial-segregation-persists-in-citys-top-high-schools-110210.
- ^{xxi} New York City Department of Education, Specialized High Schools Admissions Test – FAQ on Redesigned Test, available at: schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/701100A4-918F-4F2B-B592-860996626CA6/0/SHSAT_FAQ_SAMPLE_ITEMS_FINAL11317.pdf.
- ^{xxii} Ibid.
- ^{xxiii} New York Consolidated Laws, Education Law - EDN § 2590-h, available at: codes.findlaw.com/ny/education-law/edn-sect-2590-h.html.
- ^{xxiv} Elizabeth A. Harris and Ford Fessenden, The Broken Promises of Choice in New York City Schools (May 5, 2017), New York Times, available at: nytimes.com/2017/05/05/nyregion/school-choice-new-york-city-high-school-admissions.html?_r=0.
- ^{xxv} David Cruz, Lack of Elite Screened High Schools, A Tough Call for Bronx Parents (May 10, 2017) Norwood News, available at: norwoodnews.org/id=23341&story=lack-elite-screened-high-schools-tough-call-bronx-parents.
- ^{xxvi} Ibid.
- ^{xxvii} Ruben Diaz Jr. and Eric L. Adams, Put Kids on a Path to Stuyvesant, and Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech Early: Test All Pre-K Students for Gifted and Talented Programs (Mar. 13, 2016), New York Daily News, available at: nydailynews.com/opinion/diaz-adams-put-kids-path-stuyvesant-early-article-1.2561799.
- ^{xxviii} The Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. has previously put forth plans for changing the admissions process in the Specialized High Schools to promote equity. See The Office of Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., An Action Plan for Fixing the Specialized High School Admissions Process (May 2012), available at: bronxboropres.nyc.gov/pdf/bxbp-action-plan-shsat.pdf.
- ^{xxix} Lazar Treschan, The Specialized High School Admissions Debate: Moving From Rhetoric to a Research –Based Solution (Oct. 2015) Community Service Society of New York, available at: lghttp.58547.nexcesscdn.net/803F44A/images/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/SHS_proposal_Oct2015.pdf.
- ^{xxx} Amy Zimmer, 35 Percent of Eligible Kindergarteners Shut Out of City's Gifted Programs (June 1, 2017), DNAInfo, available at: dnainfo.com/new-york/20170601/boerum-hill/gifted-talented-programs-nyc-admissions.
- ^{xxxi} See New York City Department of Education, Office of Pupil Transportation, Information for Parents and Families, available at: optnyc.org/resources/Information-forParentsandFamiliesGETransportation.pdf; see also New York City Department of Education, Office of Pupil Transportation, General Education Transportation, available at: optnyc.org/ServicesAndEligibility/getransportation.htm.