



## BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ JR.

March 13, 2018

Dear Members of the Panel for Educational Policy:

The results of this year's Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) are extremely disheartening, and make it crystal clear that this city has a long way to go before it can claim it provides parity in accelerated education to all communities. The already low percentage of Black and Latino students accepted to the city's specialized high schools actually decreased this year. Once again, Black and Latino students are not accessing the specialized high schools at rates that are anywhere near representative of the public school population. Existing inequities are only magnified by this result.

A path to true excellence in education begins at the earliest levels and must be fostered throughout a student's career. All students, no matter where they live, must be provided equal access to gifted and talented education at the earliest levels.

Further, a single test must not be the only source of admission to our best public high schools. One's socio-economic background, race, neighborhood or borough must no longer determine the quality of a public education.

As you know, it is within New York City's sole power to change the admissions process for five of the specialized high schools that rely on the SHSAT (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). The time for action on this issue is now.

I have put forward the following proposals in a series of two reports on this issue, one of which was written with Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams:

- The DOE must move to using admissions methods that do not rely solely on the SHSAT. Access to high-quality high-level public high school education should not be based entirely on the results of a single test.
- Other admissions methods such as portfolio based admissions, including math and science portfolios, should be given serious consideration by the DOE.
- DOE should establish new procedures and standards for admission to the specialized high schools, including 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 NYCSHS to the mandatory 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.<sup>1</sup>

- 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 specialized high school. This will serve as an explicit incentive to students and drive performance.
- All students who need it should have access to free or reduced-cost test prep for the 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 DOE's DREAM Program must be expanded to capture additional students. Additionally, priorities for seat allocation should be given to those that demonstrate significant financial need though a more objective metric than Title I.
- The top 15 percent of each Bronx and Central Brooklyn's middle school's 5th and 6th grades should be given automatic offers into DREAM-Specialized High School Institute programming.

These alternate admissions schemes would go a long way towards changing the socio-economic and racial makeup of the specialized high schools to be more representative of NYC's public school population, and are worth DOE's consideration. The demographic makeup of the specialized high schools tells a story of inequality, and it is incumbent upon us to provide opportunities for all of New York City's students to excel.

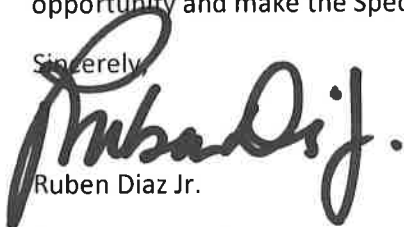
The following are the two links to my two reports that discuss these issues, copies of which are attached to this letter for your easy reference:

<http://on.nyc.gov/2I8COLb>

<http://on.nyc.gov/2sQkL84>

We must make high quality education accessible to all at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and the PEP must pass a resolution to eradicate the well documented disparities in educational opportunity and make the Specialized High School admissions process more fair.

Sincerely,



Ruben Diaz Jr.

Bronx Borough President

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<sup>1</sup> See 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: [http://58547.nexcesscdn.net/803F44A/images/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/SHS\\_proposal\\_Oct2015.pdf](http://58547.nexcesscdn.net/803F44A/images/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/SHS_proposal_Oct2015.pdf)