

# **POLICY STATEMENT FROM THE COALITION OF SPECIALIZED HIGH SCHOOLS ALUMNI ORGANIZATIONS**

**BRONX SCIENCE ALUMNI FOUNDATION  
BROOKLYN TECH ALUMNI FOUNDATION  
SITHS ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, INC.  
STUYVESANT HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

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The Bronx Science Alumni Foundation, Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation, Staten Island Technical High School Alumni Association and Stuyvesant High School Alumni Association believe in the importance of a specialized high school education and want to ensure that it is preserved for future generations. We also value diversity and strongly believe that much can – *and must* – be done to increase diversity in these schools. However, we do not believe that eliminating the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT) as the sole criteria for admissions and replacing it with alternative admissions mechanisms is the answer to the much larger problems facing New York City and its educational system. Furthermore, in a New York City public education system with 130 other options for high-achieving students from across the five boroughs, there is a valuable role for 8 specialized high schools to play.

As legislators and policy makers on the State and City levels convene a series of hearings, roundtables and discussions in the coming months, the members of the Coalition of Specialized High School Organizations look forward to participating in the dialogue and offering our input on both the root causes of this problematic lack of diversity and, more importantly, potential solutions.

## **THE REAL ISSUE**

The purpose of having the SHSAT is to permit every child an equal opportunity to gain admission to a specialized high school regardless of race or ethnicity and without favoritism. The city's failure to provide high quality educational opportunities in every community and neighborhood is the root cause of the demographic disparities revealed by the results of the test. The questions on the test are vetted to ensure that they are free of bias, and the test results have been determined to be reliable and valid predictors of performance in high school.

Short-term, admissions-criteria-based diversity proposals overlook the fundamental issue facing not only the specialized high schools, but the entire NYC public school system: The lack of resources and educational enrichment opportunities in public schools in many communities of color, from the earliest days of Pre-K onward. These imbalances create structural educational inequalities that are ultimately manifested in the lack of diversity at the specialized high schools, as well as many of the other “screened” public schools at both the middle school and high school levels. Therefore, to address diversity at the specialized high schools and throughout the system in a truly meaningful manner, narrowly-focused, politically-expedient solutions must be eschewed in favor of a long-term, systematic approach.

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

To assist our elected officials and policy makers in the development of a system-wide diversity initiative, we have identified several potential ideas, programs and solutions for consideration. While none of these alone are likely to be a “silver bullet” capable of addressing the issue overnight, we would suggest they be considered as possible components of a larger overall approach.

- Address disparities in educational opportunities from day one through accelerated/enhanced learning programs in every community.
  - Require every elementary school in New York City to offer some form of enhanced programming, with test score cut-offs determined locally on a district-by-district basis to ensure that high potential students are identified in every neighborhood. The enrichment resources provided to participants will begin to build a new “pipeline” of high achieving students from all communities.
- Provide accelerated/enhanced learning opportunities in 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grades to move high achieving students in every community into the middle school pipeline.
  - With many middle schools now playing an early role as “feeders” for high achieving students, we must focus additional resources immediately before middle school age.
  - Every middle school should provide an enhanced learning environment for the students capable of taking advantage of it. Algebra must be available to every middle school student in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Provide pre-SHSAT exam to further identify and support high achieving students in advance of middle and high schools.
  - A pre-SHSAT for 6<sup>th</sup> graders will not only identify students with strong academic potential, but as a diagnostic tool it will provide a map/action plan to address individual strengths and deficiencies for students in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Require every 8<sup>th</sup> grader in New York City public schools to take the SHSAT – and provide it on a school day in-class – and provide an opt-out option for parents if they choose not to have their child take the test.
  - Should the test not be made a requirement for every student, then we must continue to significantly expand outreach to students and families in underrepresented communities to grow the number of students in those communities taking the test.
- Make the SHSAT an untimed test, which would be beneficial to students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia.
- Reconfigure/expand the Dream Program to provide free test preparation to every student who wants it, especially those students from underrepresented communities. Today, the city has a waitlist for kids wanting to attend Dream.
- When the results of the city’s recent effort to expand the Discovery Program are released this fall, evaluate the criteria used to ensure that it is expanded diversity at the specialized high schools. Make additional changes should the City’s recently proposed amendments not work.

- Conduct a thorough and public review of the summer Discovery Programs offered by each specialized high school to ensure that students admitted through Discovery are properly prepared by their summer coursework to succeed.
- Double the size of the specialized high school system by creating 8 new specialized high schools focused on STEM education and given the labs and special resources to match the existing schools. Locate two of these new specialized schools in every outer borough. This will expand opportunities for additional high-achieving students because an additional 5,000 students taking the test would be admitted.
- Significantly expand enhanced educational opportunities at every high school in the city. 28,000 students take the SHSAT in part because they do not have good options in their neighborhood schools. Restore the ability of every student to get a high-quality education.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our coalition is committed to addressing diversity at New York City's specialized high schools. But we believe that proactive, long lasting solutions can be achieved without changing state law. Careful thought must be used to consider the underlying reasons for the disparities before changes are made to an admissions process that for generations has created the foundation for these exceptional schools. We look forward to working with City and State policy makers and elected officials to ensure that all New York City school children have access to the high-quality educational opportunities they deserve.

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