

THE SHSAT – DISPARITIES IMPACTING DIVERSITY, OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT IN NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A COMPREHENSIVE ACTION PLAN FOR CHANGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Of the 775 programs in New York City’s 439 public high schools,¹ only nine are categorized as “specialized” schools, of which eight have admissions based solely on students’ scores on the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test or the SHSAT, seat availability, and student preference.² These specialized schools produce exceptional academic outcomes and are recognized as among the finest high schools in the entire country and our state. (See Table 1.) They provide a free, first-rate education that would otherwise be unattainable to thousands of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

| Ranking of 1,263 high schools in NY State | School |
|---|---|
| #2 | High School of American Studies at Lehman College |
| #3 | High School for Mathematics, Science, and Engineering at City College |
| #4 | Staten Island Technical High School |
| #5 | Brooklyn Latin School |
| #8 | Bronx High School of Science |
| #9 | Queens High School for the Sciences at York College |
| #10 | Stuyvesant High School |
| #11 | Brooklyn Technical High School |

Despite the success of these schools, serious questions have been raised about the underrepresentation of Black and Latino students at the specialized schools, and about the use of a single test to determine admissions. Indeed, while nearly 1,700 Black and Latino students attended these schools in the 2016-2017 school year,⁴ at some of them, Black and Latino enrollment is very low. Black or Latino test-takers only receive about 9 percent of the offers to attend, when they constitute most of the students in the public schools. Most test-takers receiving offers are Asian while the second highest percentage are white.⁵

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza wish to eliminate the SHSAT, which requires State legislation. In its place, the mayor's latest proposal would reserve guaranteed admission to the top 7 percent of students from each public middle school, as determined through a mix of grades, state exam scores, and other unspecified criteria. Any remaining seats would be filled by lottery for Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and other private school students. (For details see section below "What is wrong with the new bill?")

The mayor's latest plan has met with great opposition from students and alumni, and especially from the City's Asian community who make up a majority of the student body of the specialized high schools. Some have voiced concerns that the bill is intended to unfairly discriminate against Asians or that eliminating the test would lower academic standards and thereby erase the very characteristic that makes the schools so highly ranked. Others, like the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation, believe the proposal is fundamentally flawed as it fails to address the bigger picture and long-term issues that would ensure both diversity at the specialized schools and that all New York City high school students are prepared to achieve at the highest level.

We also believe that there should be room in the City's public high school system to have less than 2 percent of the high schools select their students using the SHSAT. By contrast, nearly 25 percent of the City's high schools use multiple criteria similar to what could be used under the mayor's proposal.

We also believe that diversity in our schools is important and positive. The City's school system should provide equality of opportunity to receive the very best education possible for all students. As described below, this has not been the case for students in schools serving the

Black and Latino communities of our City. For 30 years the trend has been to deny accelerated learning opportunities to the students with high potential in these communities. That must end, and we need to rebuild opportunity in these schools. This brief seeks to inform the debate over the SHSAT and to point out what must be done to improve diversity in the specialized schools as well as in other high achieving high schools in the City by providing current information answering three key questions:

- Why do disparities in admission and enrollment exist?
- What is in the bill and why is it wrong?
- What should be done now? A bold vision for the future of NYC schools.

Students who attend the specialized schools do well in every measure of academic accomplishment and are well prepared for university. Mayor de Blasio, when recently addressing a graduating class at Brooklyn Tech, told the students, “There is no college you are not ready for because you went to Brooklyn Tech.”⁶ The four-year graduation rates at the eight high schools that use the SHSAT range from 98.4 percent to 100 percent. Similarly, the four-year college readiness index ranks from 97.3 percent to 100 percent. Every specialized high school requires college-level coursework. Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech—with the help of only three other schools—produce 25 percent of the college ready graduates of the entire City high school system with only 7 percent of the total enrollment.⁷

II. THE SHSAT PREDICTS HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS

Critics of the SHSAT have long and repeatedly complained about the test not being statistically validated as a reliable predictor of student performance in high school, which, in educational circles, is a prerequisite for considering an exam to be a fair and valid evaluation tool. In fact, Chancellor Carranza continues to claim the SHSAT is not valid or reliable, even in the face of the study recently released by the DOE, which he heads.⁸

In August 2018, the NYC Department of Education belatedly,⁹ and under pressure, released a 2013 study it commissioned to analyze the relationship between the SHSAT and student performance in the first two years of high school. The analysis “pointed to a strong

positive predictive relationship between the SHSAT and high school achievement” in the 9th and 10th grades when measured using GPA, and performance on Regents and Advanced Placement (AP) examinations.¹⁰ The relationship was particularly strong in math and science as well as AP history.¹¹ Furthermore, these results were consistent over the five-year period measured, suggesting that “the results were not spurious and accurately reflected the true nature of the relationship between the SHSAT and subsequent high school achievement.”¹² Looking just at GPAs, for example, students accepted to specialized high schools had almost a full point difference on average aggregate two-year GPAs when compared to those not accepted,¹³ which means using the SHSAT is fair and valid for selecting students for admission to the specialized schools.

The study looked at the years beginning in 2005 and ending in 2009.¹⁴ The SHSAT was revised by the City in 2017. While the new test retained many core features, the revisions—which were made ostensibly to better align the test to what is taught in the schools and mitigate against a test prep advantage—may have impacted the validity of the test, which means a new study over the next five years should be undertaken. What is clear, however, is that the new test’s results lowered the numbers of white and Asian students receiving offers. This was particularly striking in the face of 450 more test-takers from the Asian American community.¹⁵ The City has again changed the test to now include poetry, a subject not usually examined for deciding admissions to advanced science and mathematics programs.

III. WHY DO DISPARITIES IN ADMISSIONS EXIST?

The academic achievements of the specialized schools notwithstanding, disparities in admission and enrollment do exist. The underrepresentation of Black and Latino students at the specialized schools is an important concern. For the eight specialized schools, in the 2016–17 school year, just 10 percent of students at the specialized schools were Latino or Black, while 62 percent were Asian and 24 percent white.¹⁶ By comparison (though individual schools in New York City *don’t* reflect the ethnic breakdown of the system as a whole), the total NYC public student population of 1.1 million is 40 percent Latino, 26 percent Black, 16 percent Asian, and

15 percent white.¹⁷ (Another 242,000 students in the City are educated in religious and independent schools. More than 60 percent of these students are white.¹⁸)

It is important to note that the enrollment picture looks quite different across the specialized schools. Media attention has focused on the schools where Black and Latino enrollment is lowest—for example, Stuyvesant, where just 4 percent of students are Black or Latino.¹⁹ Other specialized schools, however, are more diverse. At Brooklyn Tech, by far the largest of the specialized schools, about 15 percent of the school's 6,000 students are Black or Latino. At Brooklyn Latin (724 students) about 33 percent of the students are Black or Latino.²⁰

Black and Latino students are underrepresented in the specialized schools because they are less likely to sit for the test and because they are less likely to receive an offer of admission when compared to other groups. Over an eight-year period, while Black and Latino students constituted about 66 percent of the student population, only 27 percent and 25 percent, respectively, sat for the test and only 7 percent and 9 percent, respectively, were given offers of admission. By contrast, Asian students, who make up about 16 percent of the public-school population account for 29 percent of the test-takers and 54 percent of admissions offers. White students, who make up 15 percent of the public-school population, account for 18 percent of the test-takers and 29 percent of offers.²¹

While it is problematic that specialized high schools, overall, are not more representative of all NYC students, this does not mean these students are all highly privileged. To the contrary, 45 percent of those attending specialized schools are eligible for free or subsidized lunch—meaning they are from families near or below the poverty line.²² The number of students attending specialized high schools who are in such low-income families ranges from about 62 percent at Brooklyn Latin, and about 61 percent at both Brooklyn Tech and Queens High School for the Sciences, to approximately 44 percent at both Stuyvesant and Bronx Science.²³

NYC's specialized high schools serve thousands of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds every year, providing an education of unparalleled quality and serving as a ladder up and out of poverty for countless young people. This unique character is recognized. Brooklyn Tech is ranked number 2 in the nation in the Niche 2019 Best Schools

survey rankings for academic achievement while having a disadvantaged majority of its student body.²⁴ (Notably, after nearly 100 years, Brooklyn Tech has remained true to its founding purpose to help create a better trained technical work force.²⁵) Indeed, among the nation's schools doing an outstanding academic job with a disadvantaged majority of students, four of the top 10 schools are specialized high schools.²⁶

To understand the demographic data of the specialized high schools in its proper context, it should be noted that these schools are not the only high-achieving academic high schools in the City with a demographic disparity. New York City has 103 "screened" high schools that to varying degrees and in different combinations, use multiple subjective criteria for selecting students for admission to their school. Most use grades and state test scores and some use essays, interviews, attendance records, or other criteria to select students for admission. Some have geographic priorities that effectively exclude children from outside the school's neighborhood despite being technically open to all City students. The latter rubric is an especially powerful barrier preventing desegregation of the school.

When compared to the specialized schools, the demographic picture at the highest academically performing "screened" high schools do not differ significantly, and in some instances the student body is mostly white. For example, the three screened high schools included on U.S. News's top 10 list for New York State—the Baccalaureate School for Global Education, ranked 1st in the state, is 2 percent Black, 15 percent Latino, 31 percent white and 49 percent Asian.²⁷ The High School for Dual Language and Asian Studies, ranked 6th in the state, is 4 percent Black, 7 percent Latino, 2 percent white, and 85 percent Asian,²⁸ and Townsend Harris High School—which is ranked 7th in the state, is 6 percent Black, 12 percent Latino, 22 percent white, and 58 percent Asian²⁹.

Other screened schools in the City have white student majorities or pluralities. For example, Eleanor Roosevelt High School, which is on Manhattan's Upper East Side, while technically open to students from the entire City, has a geographic priority for students residing or attending school in its school district. As a practical matter, this means it is all but closed to students from outside the borough of Manhattan. The student body of Eleanor Roosevelt, which is ranked 19th in the state, is 4 percent Black, 8 percent Latino, 62 percent white, and 21

percent Asian.³⁰ New Explorations into Science, Technology, and Math High School is also located in Manhattan. To be admitted to its kindergarten, a child must score in the 99th percentile on the gifted and talented test. Its high school is ranked 13th in the state. The student body is 9 percent Black, 11 percent Latino, 42 percent white, and 33 percent Asian.³¹ Beacon High School is another example of a screened school with a high percentage of white students. Ranked 138th in the state, its student body is 14 percent Black, 22 percent Latino, 53 percent white, and 8 percent Asian. Notably, only 25 percent of Beacon's student body qualifies as poor, i.e., eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.³²

While students are admitted to specialized high schools without regard to their class, race, religion, neighborhood, or their family's political connections, the same guarantee cannot be claimed for students seeking admission to the City's screened high schools for the screening process lacks transparency. Each year, to be admitted to any of the other 430 high schools and 775 programs, students on their high school applications rank 12 schools or programs they prefer to attend, and then each of the 103 screened institutions on their list (according to their own special criteria) rank the students in the order they would like to see them admitted. Neither the students nor the institutions know how the other has ranked them. During two rounds, a computer algorithm then matches students with a school. Not every student is matched to a school they wish to attend.

Because there is no transparency to the high school ranking process, there is no accountability to parents and students who do not know whether the high school's stated criteria were properly applied when ranking the students. A number of years ago, the City comptroller audited the "black box" admissions system of the screened high schools and concluded "we do not have reasonable assurance that the possibility of inappropriate manipulation of the student rankings, favoritism, or fraud is being adequately controlled."³³ No subsequent report has been issued by the comptroller or the Department of Education, showing that the practice now has integrity. The current proposal, as explained herein, turns the eight specialized schools into eight more "screened" schools.

IV. WHAT CAUSES THE DEMOGRAPHIC DISPARITIES?

Demographic disparities do not suddenly appear when a student takes the SHSAT. In New York City these disparities in academic outcomes start very early and become worse as students advance from grade to grade. To be sure, given the educational needs of the 21st Century workforce, the overall performance of the City's school system is inadequate. Overall, only 30 percent of students in grades 3 to 8 meet proficiency standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and only 35 percent for math.³⁴ The performance is worse for Black and Latino students. Only 19 percent of Black students score at least proficient in the ELA and math tests.³⁵ For Latino students, just 20 percent score at least proficient for ELA and only 24 percent scored as well in math.³⁶

The gaps in performance by Black and white students in the system was 32 percentage points for ELA and 38 percentage points for math.³⁷ The Latino-white student gaps were 31.5 percentage points for ELA and 33 percentage points for math.³⁸ The gaps are even wider when measured against Asian students. The gap between Black and Asian students was 33 percentage points for ELA; 48 percentage points for math.³⁹ The Latino-Asian student gaps were 33 percentage points for ELA and 43 percentage points for math.⁴⁰ These gaps persist and presage disparities in high school performance and graduation rates. In 2015, the Black-white graduation gap was 16.6 points; the Latino-white gap was 18.0 points.⁴¹

DOE data by school also show that Black and Latino students are concentrated in failing primary schools, while at the other end of the spectrum white and Asian students are concentrated in high performing primary schools. Of the 1,129 elementary and middle schools where students took the state assessment tests, 543 schools saw fewer than 20 percent of their students meeting the standard on the reading test. Of the 266,000 students attending these failing schools there were 99,000 and 145,000 Black and Latino students, respectively, and only 7,000 and 11,000 white and Asian students, respectively. At the same time, there were 436 schools where fewer than 20 percent of the students meeting the standard on the math assessment test. In these schools, 85,000 and 98,000 Black and Latino students, respectively, were in attendance, compared with a combined total of only 11,000 white and Asian students.

At the other end of the spectrum, by comparison, there were only 16 schools where 80 percent or better of the students met the standard on the reading exam. At these schools there were 4,600 white students, 3,800 Asian students, 1,000 Black students, and 1,400 Latino students. In the 40 schools where 80 percent or better of the students met the standard on the math assessment test, 11,800 of the students were white, 10,300 were Asian, 1,300 were Black, and 3,500 were Latino.⁴²

As the SHSAT is administered in the 8th grade, the results of the 7th-grade assessment tests show how prepared or ill prepared different ethnic groups are for doing well on the exam. For example, on the 2017 math test, less than 4 percent of Black 7th-graders and 6 percent of Latino 7th-graders scored above grade level while 40 percent of Asian 7th-graders and 28 percent of white 7th-graders did.⁴³

The middle school a student attends also strongly correlates with admission to a specialized school; the demographics of their student bodies directly impact the demographics of the specialized high schools. A disproportionately large number of students attending the specialized schools come from a small number of middle schools. Some 15 middle schools had half or more of their test-takers accepted into a specialized high school, while 480 charter and middle schools had fewer than five students accepted.⁴⁴

The impact of these middle schools on the racial make-up of the specialized high schools should not be underestimated. In 2017, for example, at Christa McAuliffe Intermediate School, 82 percent of SHSAT takers were accepted to a specialized high school.⁴⁵ Only 8 percent of its students are Black or Latino. See Table 2. The ten middle schools listed on the table account for 25 percent of the admissions offers, and these 10 schools have fewer Black and Latino students than the entire system.⁴⁶ And only about 80 middle schools account for 85 percent of the students at the specialized schools.⁴⁷

Table 2: Ten NYC middle schools with the highest performance on the SHSAT⁴⁸

| School | Number of students taking test | Number of students who received offer | Percentage of 8 th -graders who received an offer | Percentage of Latino and Black students at school |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Intermediate School 187 The Christa McAuliffe School Brooklyn | 251 | 205 | 75% | 8% |
| Intermediate School 239 The Mark Twain Intermediate School for the Gifted and Talented Brooklyn | 336 | 196 | 46% | 13% |
| Junior High School 54 The Booker T. Washington School Manhattan | 257 | 150 | 53% | 23% |
| Middle School 51 The William Alexander School Brooklyn | 280 | 122 | 33% | 28% |
| New York City Lab Middle School for Collaborative Studies Manhattan | 163 | 113 | 62% | 8% |
| Intermediate School 98 The Bay Academy School Brooklyn | 372 | 104 | 21% | 12% |
| Junior High School 201 The Dyker Heights School Brooklyn | 338 | 99 | 19% | 16% |
| Junior High School 74 The Nathaniel Hawthorne School Queens | 233 | 95 | 23% | 15% |
| Junior High School 216 The George J. Ryan School Queens | 304 | 95 | 19% | 18% |
| Junior High School 185 The Edward Bleeker School Queens | 250 | 93 | 17% | 32% |

Not listed in Table 2 is The Anderson School, aka P.S. 334, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. It is the very archetypal class and racially segregated screened pipeline to the specialized schools. Anderson is a K-8 Citywide gifted and talented school. “While about three quarters of New York City student are considered low income, only 8 percent of students at the Anderson School, which saw 77 percent of test takers offered a specialized high school seat, are.”⁴⁹ Anderson is 51 percent white, 27 percent Asian, 3 percent Black, and 9 percent Latino.⁵⁰

While Anderson is technically open to children from all over the City, students from Manhattan living more than a half mile away receive Yellow Bus service to the school, while families in the other boroughs must make their own arrangements for getting their children to and from school. Admission to the school is through the gifted and talented (G&T) test. Of 15,000 4-year-olds that take the City’s G&T test, only 1,500 score high enough to qualify for Anderson and the other four Citywide G&T programs, and only 50 are accepted by Anderson to its kindergarten.⁵¹ A few others are admitted to first through third grades. “Officially, students must score in the 97th percentile on the G&T tests to qualify for Anderson and other Citywide G&T schools, but Anderson rarely admits children who score below the 99th percentile (except for younger siblings of Anderson students who qualify with a 97).”⁵²

Admission to Anderson again becomes available in the seventh grade because one-third of the class leaves to go to Hunter College High School, which is run by the City University of New York and not New York City. Located in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, with admissions determined through a test of the school’s own design, 6 percent of Hunter High School students are Latino; 2 percent are Black. Only 3 percent of its elementary students and 9 percent of its high school students are low income, compared with about 75 percent of the City’s students overall.⁵³ For the students that graduate Anderson in the 8th grade, it is publicly identified as a feeder school to specialized high schools like Stuyvesant and Bronx Science and elite private schools like Trinity.⁵⁴

It should be noted that the City establishes the admissions criteria for all its schools except the three specialized high schools named in the Hecht–Calandra state law. While the City is in the midst of discussing desegregation efforts to promote diversity, it also should be noted that the solution to the demographic disparities at the specialized and screened high

schools requires not only improved diversity in the City's elementary and middle schools but also improved accelerated learning opportunities at every elementary and middle school to level the playing field for all Black and Latino students not attending the highest performing middle schools.

The City's private schools also have had an impact on the demographic picture at the specialized high schools. About 20 percent of the students who sit for the SHSAT each year are enrolled in private middle schools.⁵⁵ Among them are students from the Catholic schools which have a long tradition of serving low-income and minority communities and doing a superior academic job. Still, today, half of the Catholic school population is Black and Latino.⁵⁶ In the past, significant numbers of students from these schools went to specialized high schools, and anecdotally many went to Brooklyn Tech. Over the past decade these schools have lost tens of thousands of students.⁵⁷ As a result, today, Catholic schools send fewer students, and thereby fewer Black and Latino students, to the specialized schools than they did in the past. By contrast, as explained herein, the bill discriminates against Catholic School students, which risks even fewer Black and Latino students being admitted from these schools.

The private independent schools, like Trinity, Collegiate, Horace Mann, and Dalton, to name a few, over the past twenty years have also contributed to the decline of Black and Latino enrollment at the specialized schools because they have made significant efforts over the past 20 years to diversify. While remaining majority white,⁵⁸ Black and Latino students at these four schools are 16 percent (Trinity),⁵⁹ 9 percent (Collegiate)⁶⁰, 9 percent (Horace Mann),⁶¹ and 13 percent (Dalton School),⁶² of the student body⁶³

Some 1,500 talented minority children, many of whom are actively recruited, attend private independent schools where the yearly tuition approaches \$50,000. Frequently, the recruitment programs identify high-performing Black and Latino children as early as the 5th grade.⁶⁴ They are then put through rigorous academic programs—on weekends and during the summer with outside classes, private teachers, and extra homework—all while still in public school. This prepares them for acceptance, and in many cases a scholarship, in the 9th grade to these schools as well as to boarding schools. Were they attending, it would nearly double the percentage of Black and Latino students in the specialized schools.

So, while Black and Latino students comprise 67 percent of New York's public school students, at Stuyvesant, which is considered the most sought after of the specialized schools, many factors other than the existence of a test contribute to the 2018 freshman class being made up of 10 Black, 27 Latino, 151 white, and 613 Asian students (as well as 26 multiracial and 67 "unknown" ethnicity).⁶⁵

V. WHY ARE ASIAN STUDENTS NOW IN THE MAJORITY?

The Asian population has grown considerably since discrimination against them in the nation's immigration laws was eliminated about 50 years ago. But even so, today Asian American students number only about 15 percent of the City's school-age population. So, rhetorically, "Why are the specialized schools so heavily weighted to Asians?" And there are answers. As previously described, Asian American students are better performing on the state's standardized assessment tests than any other group and they sit for the test in larger numbers than other groups. In one commentator's view, the answer to the question is: "Simple. They study. They study hard. ... [They] take the test. Score high. Get in. Nothing could be fairer."⁶⁶

Others argue it is because the Asian community takes advantage of expensive test prep. While many rest this explanation on a racist view that all Asians are rich, in fact the City's Asian community is mainly immigrant and poor. The Asian community in New York City has the highest percentage of poverty of any ethnic group.⁶⁷ Since the specialized schools have student bodies with large numbers of Asian students and large numbers of students qualifying for free or subsidized lunch, the idea that rich Asians are gaming the system through test prep is belied by the facts. While both poor and middle class Asian families have embraced test prep, it must be recognized that test prep can only help a student so much; it cannot overcome huge learning deficits.

Drs. Syed Ali and Margaret M. Chin, two sociology professors, have studied Department of Education data to examine why Asian students are being admitted out of proportion to their general population in the school system. They looked at the demographic history of admissions to the specialized schools. They concluded that over the past 30 years academic preparation of Black and Latino students became more and more inadequate. "[T]hree decades ago, there

were sizable numbers of Black and Latino students at Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech—in the 1989–90 school year, Black and Latino students made up about 10 percent, 22 percent, and 51 percent, respectively, of these schools’ attendees.”⁶⁸ They point to the City phasing out honors programs in the Black and Latino communities beginning in the 1990s: “As a result, the top students at many of today’s segregated schools aren’t getting the kinds of opportunities that could launch them into a specialized high school.”⁶⁹

Another factor in this equation is the almost total elimination of gifted and talented (G&T) and accelerated learning programs in the primary grades in the schools serving the Black and Latino communities over this period. G&T programs date back to the 1920s, but they were nearly wiped out in these communities ostensibly because, in the City’s view, there were not enough students qualifying for such programs after they mandated a test requiring all students to score at the 90th percentile to be eligible. Today, after recent efforts to restore G&T programs to some but not all communities, only one third of the 16,000 G&T students are Black or Latino.⁷⁰ Others have also pointed to the actions taken in the late 1990s by schools to steer Black and Latino children away from the accelerated learning opportunities which existed at the time. The beginnings of the problem were described 30 years ago in a series of reports called, *Secret Apartheid*, issued in the mid and late 1990s by New York ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.⁷¹ In ACORN’s view, the “question [was] not whether the entrance exam is unfair. The question [was] why [Black and Latino] students who attend public elementary and middle schools for eight or nine years are so unprepared to do well when they take it?”⁷²

The answer was found in efforts by individual school administrators to impede admission of Black and Latino students to enriched learning programs. Based on the use of testers – people with different racial or ethnic profiles – who visited schools pretending to want information about enrolling their children in the school’s G&T program, ACORN discovered that white parents were far more likely to be helped than Black or Latino parents.⁷³ For example, the report cited an instance where “ten days after an assistant principal told a black parent there would be no room in the school’s kindergarten for her child because the classes were already filled to capacity, the [assistant principal] told a white parent that she should register soon because classes would be filling up.”⁷⁴

When combined with the lack of Black and Latino enrollment in SP (“Special Progress”) middle school programs, where algebra was taught in the 7th grade, ACORN condemned the City for “the continued refusal of the school system to correct the widespread denial of rigorous, challenging course work to low income [B]lack and Latino children.”⁷⁵

By contrast, during this period there were significant and successful efforts made by school leaders in some of these communities to prepare their children to do well on the SHSAT. For example, District 13, a predominately Black and Latino district which ran from Brooklyn Heights to Bedford Stuyvesant, is a case on point. In 1973 less than one in five pupils in the district's 22 elementary and intermediate schools were reading at grade level. By 1986 two-thirds were reading at grade level. Black students made up 78 percent of the schools' enrollment, and Latino students 19 percent.⁷⁶

According to Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr., its superintendent from 1992 to 2003, “District 13 [had] a long history of attempting to create an educational strategy for *all* students”. Dr. Young explains:

When I became superintendent, we continued [a former superintendent's] tradition [of reporting how many district students received an offer of admission on the specialized high school admissions test] with one caveat. We not only reported on how the district performed, but we reported publicly how each school performed. We made it clear to the principals of all the elementary schools and middle schools that one of their targets would be to ensure that students in their schools would have access to the best high schools in the City. So, we had an expectation that it really didn't matter what middle school you attended, we had an expectation that students from your school would participate in the Specialized High School assessments. You had to ensure that youngsters were being exposed to an instructional program that would lead to young people being successful in those assessments, and in fact, we were going to hold you accountable and report out to the community on how your school performed. There were years that we had as many as 250–300 students going to Specialized High Schools. We were in the school district that housed Brooklyn Tech, so a lot of our students would choose Tech because it was an easy transport for them, and we had as many as 60 students in one year being accepted to Tech.”⁷⁷

Since Dr. Young, who is today serving his third term as Regent At Large for the University of the State of New York, ceased to be District 13's superintendent, there has been much change in its neighborhoods, especially in Ft. Greene and Bedford Stuyvesant, which have seen

“gentrification” and population growth. So, any direct comparison between then and now is difficult, but it can be noted that in 2017 only 20 of the District’s students enrolled at Brooklyn Tech.

We agree with Dr. Young who believes the solution to the demographic disparities at the specialized high schools is not the fault of having a test: “I think this idea that Black and Latino kids can’t pass the test is just wrongheaded. I think what we [have to] look at is, ‘If the goal is that young people have access to high-quality programs, then what are we doing to prepare them?’”⁷⁸

Today, the City’s school system is deeply segregated by race, although, as it happens, the most diverse high school in the City is the High School for Mathematics, Science and Engineering at the City College, a specialized high school.⁷⁹ At the same time, the City’s current segregated pipeline of G&T programs, accelerated learning opportunities in the elementary grades, and highly selective middle schools create an almost perfect storm of disparate demographic results on the SHSAT.

If we are going to improve Black and Latino student enrollment at the specialized high schools, change must come to the middle schools in New York City, and a long-term and sustained effort must be undertaken to improve the rigor of the elementary and middle schools in these underrepresented communities, indeed in every community. That requires leadership with a vision and an understanding that the problem is not solved simply by integrating these schools, but also by creating enhanced learning opportunities.

Graduation rates and college readiness rates in the City’s school system display the cumulative impact of the demographic disparity in preparation pervading the system.

In February, Mayor Bill de Blasio extolled the progress being made in New York City’s four-year high school graduation rate as being the highest on record—74.3 percent for 2017. Despite such good news, the statistic covers up the significant demographic disparities pointing to the inadequate education provided students in predominantly Black and Latino communities. Black and Latino students graduate in much smaller percentages compared to white and Asian students. According to the City, in 2017 only 70 and 68 percent of Black and Latino students, respectively, graduate compared with 88 and 83 percent of Asian and white students, respectively.⁸⁰ Because Black and Latino students make up the majority of the City’s

student body, the disparity in graduation rates shows the City is not doing a proper job with respect to most of its student population.

The mayor also extolled that the City had the highest college readiness rate in its history, 64 percent of graduates in the class of 2017.⁸¹ But this statistic is questionable, and like the overall graduation rate, it hides significant demographic differences. According to an analysis released only a year earlier by City Comptroller Scott Stringer, the demographic “graduation gap in City high schools actually widened in recent years.” While the highest performing high schools saw students graduate in greater numbers, an increase from 93 percent to 97 percent, since 2010 “those in the lowest quintile experienced an 11 [percent] drop, from 61 percent to 50 percent.”⁸² These schools serve 20 percent of the City’s students. Eighty-eight percent of the students at these schools are Black and Latino, a much higher proportion than in the systems’ total population.⁸³ According to the comptroller’s report, “during the last nine years, 33 percent of black students in public high schools in [the comptroller’s] analysis attended a high school that has experienced an overall decline in graduation rates since 2011. The same is true for only 12 percent of white students.”⁸⁴

To graduate from high school “college ready” a student should be able to perform at a college level at the beginning of their first year. While the mayor’s recent press release claimed that 64 percent of the City’s graduates were college ready, only two years earlier the City reported it was much lower, either only 43 percent or 49 percent depending on which metric was used.⁸⁵ Independent analysis shows that because 80 percent of the City’s graduates enrolling in the City University of New York must take one or more remedial courses, only about 37 percent of the City’s graduates are really “college ready.”⁸⁶

According to the Comptroller’s report, demographic differences also exist with respect to college readiness. Citing a report from GraduateNYC, the City’s school system is graduating Black and Latino students who are college ready at a rate that is at least 30 percentage points below Asian and white graduates.⁸⁷ (As of 2012, only about 1 in 10 Black and Latino males are graduating college ready from the City’s schools.⁸⁸) Much of the magnitude in this gap is directly attributed to the City’s failure to provide Black and Latino students with the same educational opportunities before they arrive at high school as it does to other groups through

gifted and talented and enrichment classes in the primary grades. The demographic results on the SHSAT exam exist for the same reasons.

VI. THE DOE'S FAILURE TO PUBLICLY ANALYZE ITS SPECIAL INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE DIVERSITY LEAVES THE PUBLIC AND POLICY MAKERS IN THE DARK – THAT SHOULD CHANGE

The City has taken and continues to institute special initiatives to improve the demographic diversity of the specialized high schools. To date, diversity is not much improved, although it should be recognized that after failing to provide accelerated learning opportunities in the Black and Latino communities for so long, short term quick fixes can only go so far. On the other hand, without information being made available to the public it is impossible to evaluate whether the DOE's poor implementation of these efforts account for their seemingly poor results.

The Department of Education recently received \$1.75 million from the state for increasing outreach efforts intended to improve the diversity of these schools. Since fewer Black and Latino students register for the test than what they are in the general school population, special outreach to these communities could move the needle. To date, no information has been released on the results of the additional state support for these efforts, despite written requests for information from state legislators. What we do know is despite whatever effort was made by the City with these monies, at the 2017 administration of the SHSAT, Black student participation dropped.⁸⁹

For 2018, the City changed its registration process for the exam by instituting online registration. Once this cycle of high school admissions is finished, the City should release the number of registrants by race and ethnicity and economic disadvantage and reveal the full impact of this change on the demographic results of the SHSAT. It should be noted that millions of New Yorkers do not have computers or internet service and that "27 and 26 percent of Black and Hispanic households, respectively, lack broadband at home, compared to 21 percent of White households and 15 percent of Asian households".⁹⁰

DREAM is the City's free preparation program to help students prepare for the SHSAT and the rigors of high school. Unfortunately, while the City was increasing its efforts around

test-prep, it also changed the content of the exam, intended to mitigate against a so-called test prep advantage. With these two efforts apparently working at cross purposes it may be difficult to evaluate the success of either effort, but the City has remained silent about any evaluation it may have made.

Most recently, Mayor de Blasio announced that he was directing the DOE to set aside 20 percent of the seats at each specialized school for the Discovery Program. Discovery, as mentioned, is an alternative pathway for admission of “disadvantaged” students to the specialized schools which is permitted by Hecht–Calandra, the law mandating the use of the test. A “disadvantaged” student scoring just below the cutoff score is permitted to gain admission by successfully attending an intensive summer program designed to prepare them for the rigor of the first year’s coursework.

For several years the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation has publicly advocated for an expansion of Discovery and a redefinition of what “disadvantaged” can mean. We believe that a definition of disadvantaged should include the underperformance of the child’s middle school or district, which can be measured in several ways, for example, either by low performance on standardized state tests or low numbers of students being admitted to a specialized high school, or another suitable metric. We advocate that because of segregated housing patterns, there are likely many children of great potential living in underrepresented communities who may not qualify for free or subsidized lunch, but as their schools are not giving them an adequate education they are disadvantaged. By reconfiguring the definition of disadvantaged to include educationally disadvantaged by the schools they attend, we believe that significant increases in Black and Latino enrollment could be achieved thorough Discovery.

The City is expanding Discovery and adopting a new definition of disadvantaged to include the extreme poverty of the school. That may not work since it appears the redefinition of disadvantaged is still limited to the economic poverty of test takers. Mayor de Blasio predicts the change to Discovery will double the number of Black and Latino children in the specialized schools and we hope he is correct. We must wait to see the impact of this effort.

The Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation has supported and will continue to support every effort by the City to improve the diversity at Brooklyn Tech and the other specialized schools. We have been working for the last four years to improve the diversity of our school. For

example, every year we invite many thousands of parents and their children to Brooklyn Tech to attend free information sessions and learn about the SHSAT and the schools. We have alumni who graduated from now-underrepresented middle schools visit these schools to speak to parents, teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and students about the value of a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education and how to get into Brooklyn Tech.

With the help of the school and corporate financial support from National Grid, we sponsor a pilot pipeline program directed at underrepresented middle schools in Brooklyn. These were schools that once sent hundreds of children to Brooklyn Tech but today send few or none. We identify promising 6th-graders and give them a free two-year program where Brooklyn Tech's teachers give them enrichment intended to excite them about studying STEM subjects. We also provide free test prep. In the four years we have run the program we have had great success. Sixty percent of participants received an offer of admission to a specialized high school, and most students receiving an offer to Tech were Black, Latino, and/or female. Our efforts have been recognized by the state which gave the Foundation a grant of \$250,000 in 2016 for the pipeline program. We are grateful for this public support.

VII. WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE BILL (A-10427 and S-8503)

While we are not advocating their removal from the specialized system, before discussing the inadequacies of the current proposal, the "elephant in the room" that must be mentioned is the City's irrationality in seeking legislation that is not needed to change the admissions system of five of the eight specialized high schools. Only Brooklyn Tech, Stuyvesant and Bronx Science are specifically named in the Hecht-Calandra law requiring a rank-ordered performance on a competitive and academically rigorous test as the sole metric used for admitting students. The other five schools were subsequently added by then Chancellors Harold Levy and Joel Klein to increase the number of seats in the specialized high schools. Some say the five additional schools should be removed but the mayor claims that his lawyers have advised him that state law might not allow it.⁹¹ On the other hand, the chancellor claims he has the legal authority to remove them but chooses not to because the principals of these eight schools are adamant about being treated as a group.⁹²

On the third hand, so to speak, the proposed legislation is also irrational. As discussed below, it guarantees admission to students failing the state's proficiency exams while discriminating against students scoring well above grade level on these tests. The 30th Avenue School is a good example of this irrationality. 30th Avenue is one of the City's five City-wide gifted and talented programs where students must score in the 97th percentile to be admitted. Had the bill already been in effect, because the 7 percent solution acts as a cap, it would have received 23 fewer offers to a specialized school even though this school is dedicated to the very brightest students in the entire City.⁹³

On April 20, 2018, Assemblyman Charles Barron sponsored A-10427 (introduced as S-8503 in the state Senate) which called for elimination of the SHSAT and the substitution of an admissions system based on "multiple measures of student merit including the grade point averages of applicants, culminated student portfolio, teacher recommendations and such other factors as the City board shall determine to be necessary."⁹⁴

His proposal went further than others that have called for keeping the SHSAT while adding multiple criteria for selecting students for admission. While it is probably impossible to establish a system requiring the fair comparison and rank ordering of over 28,000 cumulated student portfolios and teacher recommendations, in addition to other criteria, research has shown that adding multiple criteria to the SHSAT runs the risk of lowering Black student enrollment at the specialized schools. According to NYU's Research Alliance for New York City Schools, the use of multiple criteria like state assessment tests, grades, and other criteria risks lowering the numbers of Black students currently being admitted through sole use of the test.⁹⁵

On June 2, 2018, at 10 pm, a Friday, Assemblyman Barron suddenly and dramatically amended his bill with a vote scheduled in the Assembly Education Committee for that coming Wednesday morning, only two working days later. At the same time, the mayor's office issued a press release supporting the new bill and scheduling a large press conference that weekend to support passage of the bill. Clearly, these coordinated efforts were intended to deprive debate about the merits of the amended bill. The bill was voted out of committee but was not placed on the floor before the Assembly's session ended. It remains available for action when the Assembly reconvenes in January. The same amendments have been made to the Senate version of the bill.

Assemblyman Barron's amended bill continues to eliminate the test and again substitutes any criteria the City wants to use, although it requires that grades and state assessment test scores be used. Under the new bill the City can weight each element of the criteria it uses and can change the supplemental criteria and weights each year if it wishes. It uses these criteria to create a rank order in each public middle school. Admission is initially guaranteed to the top 3 percent and by 2021 to the top 7 percent of each middle school. To be guaranteed admission the student must also be in the top 25% of the City.

When discussing this proposal, NYC Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza recently said, "We're not about improving the system," and this bill certainly reflects his attitude.⁹⁶ The proposal does nothing to improve the specialized schools or the schools in underrepresented communities, or any other school. Its deficiencies, however, are numerous.

The amended bill exempts religious schools from the pool of students guaranteed admission, and instead permits these students having a 3.7 grade point average to register for a lottery to back-fill any seats left unfilled after the guaranteed admission of the public-school students. As 7 percent of the public middle school class exceeds the total number of available seats, there may not be any seats left for Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and independent school middle school students.⁹⁷ (Today, by comparison, about 5,000 such students take the SHSAT.)

The proposal may well be unconstitutional because it discriminates against the top 7 percent of the children in these schools by not guaranteeing them admission. There are about 240,000 children attending private schools in New York City. According to New York City's Independent Budget Office more than 60 percent of nonpublic school students are white compared to 15 percent in traditional public schools and 3 percent in charter schools.⁹⁸ The City's overt discrimination, if the bill becomes law, likely will result in years of litigation where the federal courts will wind up deciding admissions to what once were the specialized schools.

The City's stated purpose of the amended bill is to dramatically and quickly increase the number of Black and Latino students attending the specialized schools. While the SHSAT is completely eliminated by the bill, the City claims the change will not have any negative impact on the rigor of these schools.⁹⁹ Reserving slots for top middle school students from each school may make for a good sound bite on television, but it is far too simplistic an approach to solving

the real problem—the City’s failure to properly prepare Black and Latino students in the lower and middle grades to excel academically.

Contrary to the City’s view, according to a *New York Times* editorial, remedial classes will be needed under the bill’s proposed admissions system. “For the plan to succeed, the City will surely need to increase remedial and enrichment programs at the specialized high schools, to serve students who were at the top of their classes but whose middle schools may not have prepared them for the rigor of a Stuyvesant.”¹⁰⁰ Remarkably, there is no need for these programs at any of the specialized high schools, so the *Times* is really calling for the introduction of remedial programs should the bill pass.

A few years ago, NYU’s Research Alliance for New York City Schools studied the issue of admitting students based on their class rank at middle schools and concluded that it would reduce “the average achievement of incoming students, particularly in math,”¹⁰¹ which is significant for schools with a math and science curriculum. The City acknowledges that under its proposal, that some students being admitted will be performing below grade level on the state’s standardized tests, but the City’s slide show being presented to the City’s Community Education Councils does so in such a subtle way that most people will not notice it.¹⁰² At the same time, because guaranteed admissions at high-performing middle schools will be capped at 7 percent, many students with proficient and higher scores on state assessment tests will be foreclosed from admission.

The *Wall Street Journal* analyzed DOE data and compared what would have happened this year had the proposal been in place to what did happen under the SHSAT. The *WSJ* reported that, under the bill, hundreds of children failing the state’s proficiency exam would have been admitted and 1,000 of the highest performing children who were admitted under the SHSAT would have been excluded.¹⁰³ Guaranteeing admission to children scoring below grade level on the state assessment tests, sets-up these children for failure. College-level coursework is required beginning the first day in these schools and a child with math and/or reading skills below the seventh grade is at a significant disadvantage. At the same time, because it excludes 1,000 of the highest performing students it will have unintended consequences on other schools which is discussed in detail below.

Using the state assessment test scores is also controversial because of the “opt-out” movement and the frequent changes that take place on its content and the scoring of the exams. Twenty percent of parents across the state opt out of having their children take the state assessment tests. While the opt-out rate in the City is only about 3 percent, there are schools, like P.S. 321 in Park Slope, Brooklyn, where it is as high as 35 percent. Obviously, by tying state test performance to the possibility of admission to a specialized high school, parents will be forced to have their children take the tests,¹⁰⁴ even though the state says participation is voluntary.

While there is also no guarantee that the state will continue to administer these tests, the content and scoring frequently changes to the point that it has been likened to being on a roller coaster: “One year they’re riding high, with test results that show a vast percentage of students skilled in reading and math. The next year, scores nose-dived across the board.”¹⁰⁵ And, major changes are planned again for the state assessment tests in 2021, the year the SHSAT is to be eliminated. That year, the assessment exams will be based on something called the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards, which are not in effect at this time.¹⁰⁶ The foundation for the bill’s selection process is therefore not comparable from year to year and puts in the hands of the state the indirect ability to change admission standards for these schools. This will cause some students in one year to be guaranteed admission and deny it to others the next.

Basing the admissions process for the specialized schools on academic grades introduces subjectivity to the process. Most people can remember a teacher who gave them an unfair grade. In fact, in one social science experiment, 10,000 teachers were asked to give a final grade for the same set of test scores and missed assignments. The semester’s grade ranged from A to F because different teachers grade differently: “Some average letter grades. Others consider effort . . . and attendance.”¹⁰⁷ Because it cannot be said that grading policies are the same for all middle schools there cannot be a true comparison among schools using this rubric to construct the top 7 percent of each middle school’s students. Grades are subject to manipulation for a variety of reasons and making them the metric for guaranteeing admission to a specialized high school will likely encourage more manipulation. Unfortunately,

improper grading practices are also so prevalent in the City's schools that a few years ago the DOE established a task force to help root out grade manipulation.¹⁰⁸

While the DOE is repeatedly saying that admission will be based solely on grades and state scores, this is misleading because the bill allows "[t]he chancellor [to] determine the multiple measures of student achievement as referenced in this section, and the weight of each such measure, provided that such measures shall include academic course grades and standardized test scores."¹⁰⁹ And he or she is free not only to add to the criteria each year but to decide how important each criterion will be. While the DOE is currently planning to weight grades at 55 percent of the composite score with state tests constituting the other 45 percent of the composite score,¹¹⁰ that could change. The bill may even override state legislation passed in 2014 regarding not using state assessment tests as the primary criteria for admission to a school¹¹¹ since the language of the proposed bill grants the City the right to decide what weight to give the criteria it uses. We also don't know whether the DOE is weighting the four academic grades relative to each other or the two state assessment test scores relative to each other. The point is that the bill will give the City near *carte blanche* to do what it wants in a quest each year to engineer the demographics of enrollment to formerly specialized schools without regard to whether all students are fairly and equally being considered."¹¹²

There are other practical matters that warrant consideration in assessing whether the current admissions process should be eliminated and replaced by the top 7 percent of students at each middle school. Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan are presently over represented in the specialized schools while Bronx and Staten Island are underrepresented. This creates significant issues if the test is eliminated.

Nearly 2,000 students from Queens are admitted each year to a specialized school.¹¹³ Because of the 7 percent admissions cap imposed on a school by the bill, many of these students will be excluded from the specialized schools with no comparable place to go. Queens high schools are already bursting at the seams even with the exodus to the specialized schools. For example, Bayside High School operates at 161 percent capacity and Francis Lewis High School operates at 199 percent capacity.¹¹⁴ Big losers under the proposed bill will be JHS 216, which will lose 61 offers. MS 158 will lose 57. JHS 74 will lose 66. JHS 67 will lose 60. JHS 185

will lose 55. IS 119 will lose 44. JHS 194 will lose 26. JHS 190 will lose 29. PS 122 will lose 44. Baccalaureate School for Global Education will lose 54.¹¹⁵

In Brooklyn, under the proposal, many students from high-performing middle schools who currently gain admission to the specialized schools through the test will be excluded by the 7 percent cap. While Brooklyn receives nearly 1700 offers of admission each year,¹¹⁶ just five of the middle schools currently sending the most children to specialized high schools will see nearly 600 children excluded each year from getting an offer. Because they will not be part of the guaranteed pool they will have to find other schools to attend, should the bill be passed. Each year I.S. 187 Christa McAuliffe will lose 186 offers to a specialized school. I.S. 239 Mark Twain will lose 166 offers. M.S. 51 William Alexander will lose 96. I.S. 98 Bay Academy will lose 69. J.H.S. 201 Dyker Heights will lose 64. Other schools in Brooklyn losing seats in the specialized schools will be J.H.S. 259, P.S. 229, Seeall Academy for Math and Science Inquiry, P.S. 235, Hellenic Charter, P.S. 163, P.S. 8, P.S. 206, and New Voices.¹¹⁷

Manhattan also sends a significant number of students to the specialized schools. It accounts for 22 percent of the offers¹¹⁸ and 22 of its schools send more than 7 percent of their students to specialized high schools. The big losses will be at J.H.S. 54, Lab Middle School, NEST, East Side Middle, M.S. 255, Anderson, and TAG, most of which send more than half or nearly half of their student bodies to specialized schools.¹¹⁹

When the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation staff met recently with the Deputy Chancellor of Early Education and Student Enrollment, we asked what the plan was to accommodate the high performing students displaced under the proposed new admissions process. The reply was they could apply to the many high-performing screened schools and programs that exist. This short reply suggested to us that the DOE is not thinking about the unintended consequences of its proposal. That is unfortunate, as there will be a domino effect causing significant disruption potentially affecting the City's entire high school system. As 1,000 of the highest performing students will no longer be admitted to a specialized high school, they will apply to other screened schools and displace those who ordinarily would have received offers to those schools. The children displaced at these screened schools will have to seek admission at lesser performing screened schools.

While there are 103 screened high schools and numerous screened programs, not all are considered academically high performing. In a study conducted to examine the most academically selective high schools in the nation, of the 75 schools in New York City then identified by the researchers as being screened, most were omitted from the study because they set the academic bar for admission too low to warrant inclusion.¹²⁰

Only 15 screened high schools made the cut.¹²¹ These schools were Leon M. Goldstein High School for the Sciences (Bk); Bard High School Early College (M); Baruch College Campus High School (M, P); Beacon High School (M); Eleanor Roosevelt High School (M, P); Frederick Douglass Academy (M, P); Hunter College High School;¹²² Millennium High School (M, P); New Explorations into Science, Technology, and Math School (M, P); NYC Lab School for Collaborative Studies (M, P); School of the Future High School (M, P); Young Woman's Leadership School (M, P); Baccalaureate School for Global Education (Q, P); Bard High School Early College 2 (Q); and Townsend Harris High School (Q, P).¹²³ Clearly, there will be increased pressure on every one of these schools as 1,000 very high performing middle school children are blocked from admission to a specialized high school because of the admissions cap built into the bill. (Note: Bk stands for Brooklyn, M for Manhattan, and Q for Queens, and P denotes a priority which limits the number of students who live outside of the geographic area to compete for admission on a level playing field.)

Of the 15, one is not a DOE high school, three are in Queens which is already "over-subscribed" and one is in Brooklyn. None is in the Bronx or Staten Island. The 10 remaining schools, all of which are in Manhattan, would likely receive many more applications than they do now because of the displacement at the specialized schools. Since eight of them give priority to students who live in or go to school in their district, the displaced students from Brooklyn and Queens will not be admitted, unless the DOE eliminates admissions priorities. The only two high schools without a geographic or district priority, Bard and Beacon, are already fully subscribed and much too small to handle such a large influx of highly qualified students. Last year Bard admitted only 124 general education (i.e., nondisabled) students for its entering class and had 35 applicants for each seat. Beacon admitted 290 general education students last year and had 21 applicants for each seat.¹²⁴ Exactly where the pool of displaced high performing middle schoolers blocked by the admissions cap will go, is, at this time, anybody's guess.

Presently, the DOE makes more offers to the specialized high schools than there are available seats, expecting that 15 to 20 percent of the offers will be declined. The schools normally selected by students opting not to accept a specialized high school offer, will see even more students seeking admission at these schools. According to research, in rank order of those most preferred, they are Townsend Harris (Q), LaGuardia (M), Beacon High School (M), Bard High School Early College (M), Midwood High School (Bk), Benjamin H. Cardozo High School (Q), Eleanor Roosevelt High School (M), Leon M. Goldstein High School for the Sciences (Bk), Bard High School Early College Queens, NYC Lab School for Collaborative Studies (M), New Explorations into Science, Technology and Math High School (M), Millennium High School (M), Edward R. Murrow High School (Bk), Baruch College Campus High School (M), and Francis Lewis High School (Q).¹²⁵

Since the DOE is supporting this proposal, it should publicly explain the spillover effects. Chancellor Carranza has repeatedly condemned “selectivity” in the school system and he may possibly ban selectivity from all the City’s high schools by the time the proposal becomes fully implemented in 2021. He should explain what the landscape will look like if this occurs. Because of term limits the current administration will not be responsible for dealing with whatever unintended problems this proposal creates, so there will be little accountability if the proposed changes do not work well.

The DOE’s proposal also pits poor members of the Black, Latino, and Asian communities against each other. After demonstrations protesting the bill immediately emerged from the Asian-American community, the chancellor chastised the Asian community and accused it of thinking it “owned” the classrooms in the specialized schools.¹²⁶ But worse, the chancellor told the Asian community over the radio that his proposal to sharply reduce their enrollment in the specialized schools “should be very good news for you” because “[y]ou’re not going to have to spend thousands of dollars to prep for a test.”¹²⁷

The chancellor has also resorted to outrageous mischaracterizations of the students at the specialized schools for supporting his position. He describes the specialized schools as ““the epicenter of privilege” for people like Supreme Court justices — “the ones who don’t like beer,””¹²⁸ whatever that is supposed to mean. And, he continues to mislead the public about the value of the SHSAT, long after the *New York Times* published the DOE’s study on August 3, 2018.¹²⁹ Over a month later, Chancellor Carranza is claiming the SHSAT is “neither reliable nor

valid to measure talent.”¹³⁰ As previously described, the chancellor’s view is contrary to the conclusions of the study.¹³¹

In sum and substance, the proposed bill is terrible and should be opposed.

VIII. WHAT IS TO BE DONE? – A COMPREHENSIVE ACTION PLAN FOR PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND SUPPORTING OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT IN NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation recognizes the importance of a specialized high school education and wants to ensure that it is preserved for future generations. At the same time, we strongly value diversity and believe that much can—and must—be done to increase diversity in these schools. We also believe, however, that simply replacing the SHSAT with alternative admissions mechanisms is not the answer to a much larger problem facing New York City.

Short-term, admissions-criteria-based 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 underrepresented communities—from the earliest days of Pre-K onward—which create structural educational inequalities that are ultimately manifested in the lack of diversity at the specialized high schools (as well as countless other “screened” public schools at both the middle and high school levels).

To address diversity at the specialized high schools and throughout the public-school system in a truly meaningful manner, short-term, narrowly focused, politically expedient solutions must be eschewed in favor of a comprehensive, long-term approach. And while the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation has supported important interim steps—such as improved outreach to underrepresented communities about the SHSAT, expansion of the Dream Program, a revised definition of “disadvantaged” that would include more Black and Latino students in the Discovery Program, and a proven underrepresented middle schools STEM Pipeline program—in light of recent shortsighted legislative proposals it is now time to finally consider the honest, multi-pronged, multi-year approach our children deserve. At the end of the day, this issue is not about something as simple as test prep. It is about strong leadership,

great teaching, excellent resources and tools provided across all communities. It's about "life prep" for the children of New York City and "education prep" for achieving in every elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and beyond.

1. Address disparities in educational opportunities from day one through gifted and talented/accelerated learning programs in every community.

First and foremost, we believe that the City must do more to prepare students in underrepresented communities from day one of their educational journeys to gain admittance to—and succeed in—not only the specialized high schools, but any high-performing public middle school or high school. This should include:

- Mandatory gifted and talented/accelerated learning screening at the earliest levels, with an "opt-out" option rather than a requirement for parents to "opt-in."
- A requirement that every elementary school in New York City offer some form of gifted and talented/accelerated learning 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 G&T/accelerated learning participants will absolutely begin to build a new "pipeline" of high-achieving students from all communities.
- These G&T/accelerated learning programs must run from Kindergarten through the 3rd grade, as disparities in performance have strongly emerged on the 3rd-grade state assessment tests.

2. Create new "middle school achievement academies" to build on G&T/accelerated learning and move high-achieving students into the middle school pipeline.

While it is true that middle schools play a key role in preparing students for specialized or selective/screened high schools, 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 as well. We propose identifying the top 7 percent of 4th-graders across New York City—through a combination of state test scores and grades—and providing them with additional enrichment opportunities at "Middle School Achievement Academies" across the public-school system. These

“academies” need not be physical structures—it could simply be additional enriched classroom work, pull-out programs or after-school programming—but the key is again identifying and nurturing the abilities of students in every community at numerous stages throughout their educational life. As students in subsequent grades show promise on the state tests and in their course grades, they would be admitted to the Academy to enhance their coursework. (And, for example, at every middle school in the City there must be the opportunity to take algebra and an enriched English class in the 7th grade.)

3. Provide a pre-SHSAT exam to further identify and support high-achieving students in advance of middle and high school.

As those on both sides of the admissions conversation rightly point out, there are high-achieving students across New York City who can succeed in the specialized high schools. However, identifying these students at an early age and providing them with the targeted support and enrichment they need is key. Therefore, we propose offering 6th-graders the opportunity to take a “Pre-SHSAT” exam—like the PSAT—with results that can serve as a clear diagnostic tool for students in middle school. It will not only identify students with strong academic potential, but it will literally provide a map/action plan of individual strengths and deficiencies for students to address in the 7th and 8th grades.

4. Additional immediate diversity initiatives should continue.

While the longer-term goals of better preparing students from underrepresented communities is key, there are still shorter-term actions that can be undertaken by the City of New York. These include:

- Continued evaluation of the fairness and efficacy of the SHSAT itself and changes if necessary.
- Expanded outreach to students and families in underrepresented middle schools and communities to ensure that there is an understanding and knowledge of the specialized high schools and the SHSAT.

- Expansion of the Dream Program to provide free test preparation to every student who wants it, especially those students from underrepresented communities.
- Continued evaluation of the criteria for the Discovery Program and additional changes should be made if the City's recently proposed amendments do not work.
- Administer the SHSAT during the school day at every middle school, with voluntary opt-out from the exam.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Department of Education acknowledges that the real solution to improving diversity at the specialized high schools is to improve the education of students in the Black and Latino communities. A DOE spokesperson recently said that to make “our specialized high schools more reflective of New York City” it means “giving students the foundation in elementary and middle school that they need to successfully apply to a specialized high school ...”¹³² That is precisely what District 13 did so many years ago, and which the City can do again.

This paper outlines not only the extent of the problem but offers workable solutions. Changing State law concerning admissions to the specialized schools is not the answer. Instead of supporting a bill that does nothing to improve the school system, the chancellor should work on making our schools good for every student, including those with high potential.

We believe that proactive, long lasting solutions can be achieved by the City and the Department of Education. 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 policymakers and elected officials on our above-detailed action plan to ensure that all New York City school children have access to the high-quality educational opportunities they deserve.

For more information, please contact the
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For additional copies: www.savethesat.com

10. Endnotes

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² A ninth specialized school, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, uses an audition and review of student work instead of the SHSAT to determine admission.

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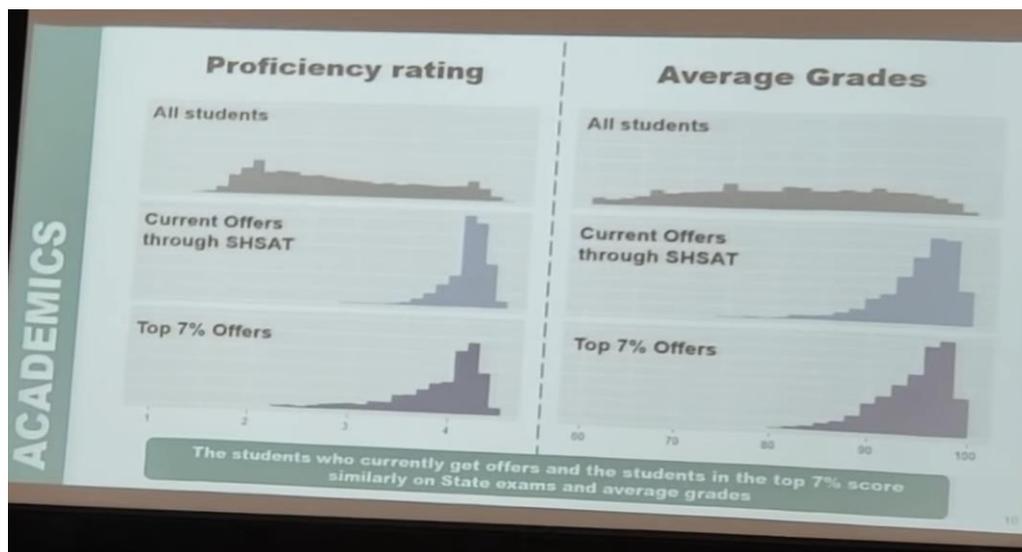
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¹¹² Office of the Bronx Borough President, City of New York, *An Action Plan for Fixing the Specialized High School Admissions Process*, p. 18, (May 2012), available at <http://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/bxbp-action-plan-shsat.pdf> (last accessed Oct. 25, 2018).

¹¹³ Id.

¹¹⁴ Semple K. Plan to build a new high school in queens collides with local sentiment. *New York Times*, November 3, 2015. Accessed October 7, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/04/nyregion/plan-to-build-a-new-high-school-in-queens-collides-with-local-sentiment.html>

¹¹⁵ Lee, J. "See where New York City's elite high schools get their students," *New York Times* (June 29, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/29/nyregion/nyc-high-schools-middle-schools-shsat-students.html> (last accessed Oct. 25, 2018).

¹¹⁶ Office of the Bronx Borough President, City of New York, *An Action Plan for Fixing the Specialized High School Admissions Process*, p. 18, (May 2012), available at <http://bronxboropres.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/bxbp-action-plan-shsat.pdf> (last accessed Oct. 25, 2018).

¹¹⁷ Lee, J. "See where New York City's elite high schools get their students," *New York Times* (June 29, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/29/nyregion/nyc-high-schools-middle-schools-shsat-students.html> (last accessed Oct. 25, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Hu W & Harris EA. Who wins, and who loses, in the proposed plan for elite schools? *New York Times*. June 29, 2018. Accessed October 8, 2018 from, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/nyregion/specialized-school-exam-losers-winners.html>

¹¹⁹ Lee, J. "See where New York City's elite high schools get their students" *New York Times*. (June 29, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/29/nyregion/nyc-high-schools-middle-schools-shsat-students.html> (last accessed Oct. 25, 2018).

¹²⁰ Finn, Jr., C.E. and Hockett, J.A., "Exam High Schools, Inside America's Most Selective Public High Schools," Princeton and Oxford, (Princeton University Press 2012) at 13.

¹²¹ Id. at 25-26.

¹²² Hunter College High School is not run by the NYC DOE, but rather by CUNY. This school should not be confused with Hunter Science High School, which the complaint holds out as an example of what it wishes to achieve.

¹²³ Bk–Brooklyn, M–Manhattan, Q–Queens, P–Priority. The priority for all schools except Townsend Harris is either applicants from with the local school district, or those rising-up from an 8th-grade middle school class at the school, or both. Townsend Harris is open to all NYC students but for students residing in Queens they are required to select a class that is representative of the borough. *2019 NYC High School Directory* published by the NYC DOE.

¹²⁴ Id.

¹²⁵ See Table A-4. Corcoran, S.P., Pathways to an Elite Education, available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57b20ecbe6f2e157a74c4a3a/t/5abe48cc758d46a7b6292304/1522419916388/Corcoran+%26+Baker-Smith.pdf> (last accessed October 26, 2018).

¹²⁶ Chancellor Carranza to desegregation plan foes: You don't own these classrooms. *New York Daily News*. June 5, 2018. Accessed October 8, 2018, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/ny-school-desegregation-plan-20180605-story.html>

¹²⁷ Carranza to Asian Americans opposed to admissions reform: "This should be good news." Political NY, June 5, 2018, reporting on comments he made on WNYC's Brian Lehrer Show. Accessed October 8, 2018, from https://www.politico.com/search?adv=true&userInitiated=true&s=&q=carranza+&pv=&c=&r=&start=06%2F05%2F2018&start_submit=06%2F05%2F2018&end=&end_submit=

¹²⁸ 12 Surprising Quotes From New York City Schools Chief Richard Carranza, From Gifted & Talented to His Union Boss Best Buddy, *The 74*, Accessed October 19, 2018 from <https://www.the74million.org/article/12-surprising-quotes-from-new-york-city-schools-chief-richard-carranza-from-gifted-talented-to-his-union-boss-best-buddy/>.

¹²⁹ Pager T. SHSAT predicts whether students will succeed in school, study finds. *New York Times*. August 3, 2018. Accessed October 8, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/03/nyregion/admissions-test-shsat-high-school-study.html>

¹³⁰ Edelman S. Carranza says schools aren't serving black and Latino students. *New York Post*. September 15, 2018. Accessed October 8, 2018, from <https://nypost.com/2018/09/15/carranza-says-schools-arent-serving-black-and-latino-students/>

¹³¹ *The Specialized High School Admission Test and High School Academic Achievement*. Metis Associates. Available at <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/132-metis-study/6859861348a3d12d9368/optimized/full.pdf#page=1> (last accessed October 27, 2018).

¹³² For the Smartest Students, a Tale of Two Cities: What Enrollment Numbers Reveal About How NYC's Top Boys & Girls Are Sorting Themselves Into Different Schools, *The 74*, May 2, 2018. Accessed October 24, 2018 from <https://www.the74million.org/article/nyc-specialized-schools-girls/>.