

**Testimony in Support of New York City School Diversity Bills**

New York City Council, Education Committee  
Hearing on Diversity in New York City Schools  
Thursday, December 11, 2014

The National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD) is a network of national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions working to expand support for government policies that promote school diversity and reduce racial isolation. We also support the work of the state and local school diversity practitioners. Our work is informed by an advisory panel of scholars and academic researchers whose work relates to issues of equity, diversity, and desegregation/integration. See [www.school-diversity.org](http://www.school-diversity.org).

The National Coalition on School Diversity respectfully submits this written testimony in support of the following agenda items:

1. Resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to officially recognize the importance and benefits of school diversity and to set it as a priority when making decisions regarding student assignment, admissions policies and practices, creation of new schools, school rezoning and other pertinent decisions and commit to having a strategy in each district for overcoming impediments to school diversity.
2. Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign S.7738/ A.9979, to change the admissions criteria for New York City's Specialized High Schools.
3. A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring the department of education report annually on progress and efforts toward increasing diversity within schools, including but not limited to, disparities within charter schools and special programs.

Benefits of Diversity in Education

The resegregation of U.S. schools in recent years has resulted in an unequal distribution of educational opportunity throughout the nation, with the academic performance of low-income and minority students suffering as a result. Taking steps to understand and increase racial and economic diversity in schools can be an effective method of countering this disturbing trend. The U.S. Department of Education has observed that “[t]he benefits of a diverse school environment cannot be overstated.”<sup>1</sup> A significant body of academic research supports this statement, indicating that low-income and minority students exhibit better academic performance in diverse, rather than segregated, school settings.<sup>2</sup> Economically diverse schools may also have

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<sup>1</sup> *Promoting Diversity and Desegregation*, 3(4) The Magnet Compass 1, p. 1, available at [http://www.msapcenter.com/doc/MagnetCompass\\_July2014.pdf](http://www.msapcenter.com/doc/MagnetCompass_July2014.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Racially and socioeconomically integrated schools have higher rates of graduation than high-poverty, segregated schools. See “Who Graduates? Who Doesn’t?: A Statistical Portrait of Public High School Graduation, Class of

greater access to fundraising resources, as well as a greater distribution of political influence, which can potentially result in a more equitable distribution of educational resources and greater gains for students.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the benefits of diversity in schools are not restricted to minority students, research shows a diverse educational setting can lead to improved critical thinking skills and better academic performance in non-minority students.<sup>4</sup>

### Diversity Deficit in New York City Schools

Nationwide, racial isolation and poverty concentration in schools have been on the rise, with the average student experiencing a greater degree of racial isolation than was seen as far back as 1970.<sup>5</sup> In particular, public schools in New York state have recently been recognized as the most segregated in the country.<sup>6</sup> These high rates of segregation are present in New York City schools, which is particularly troubling given the City's exceptionally diverse population.<sup>7</sup>

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2001," Christopher B. Swanson, Education Policy Center and The Urban Institute, at 35, *available at* [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410934\\_WhoGraduates.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410934_WhoGraduates.pdf), ("there is a strong and very detrimental linkage between graduation rates and the environmental conditions that go along with factors like poverty and segregation."); Brief of 553 Social Scientists as *Amici Curiae* in Support of Respondents, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School Dist. No. 1*, 127 S. Ct. 2738 (2007), at App. 39, ("An examination of over 13,000 public high schools across the country in 2004 showed that schools with a higher concentration of blacks and Latinos tend to have lower "promoting power," which indicates the percentage of students who stay in school and are promoted each year from grades 9 to 12.") citing Robert Balfanz and Thomas C. West, "Racial Isolation and High School Promoting Power," in Graduation Gap Policy Brief (Baltimore: Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University, 2006). *See also* Robert Balfanz & Thomas C. West, "Racial Isolation and High School Promoting Power," *Graduation Gap Policy Brief*, CENTER FOR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS, Johns Hopkins Univ. (2006). 8; Jonathan Guryan, *Desegregation and Black Dropout Rates*, AM. ECON. REV. 94, no. 4 (2004), at 919-43. Racially integrated schools also result in better reading scores for minority students and smaller achievement gaps than racially isolated schools. *See* "The Race Gap in High School Reading Achievement: Why School Racial Composition Still Matters," Shelly Brown-Jeffy, (2006), 13 *Race, Gender & Class* 3/4, pp. 268-294, at 290 *available at* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675185>, ("These study results reveal that the Black-White gap in reading achievement in schools with less than 10% Black, Hispanic, or Native American students enrolled is substantial. On the contrary, results show that schools with 25-55% Black, Hispanic, and/or Native American students have average reading achievement scores that are on average almost two points higher than in schools with 55% [or] more Black, Hispanic, and/or native American Students. While these schools do have a Black-White achievement gap, the gap is not as large as in schools where less [than] 10% of the population is Black, Hispanic, and/or Native American.") .For a comprehensive survey of recent research, *see* the website of the National Coalition on School Diversity, *available at* <http://school-diversity.org>; *see also* NY Applesseed, "KEY RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS: HOW DIVERSITY PROMOTES BETTER EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES," *available at* <https://www.applesseednetwork.org/promoting-diversity-in-new-york-city-schools/>.

<sup>3</sup> *See generally* Richard Kahlenberg, *Turnaround Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal* (2009), *available at* <https://tcf.org/assets/downloads/tcf-turnaround.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, *Research Brief 8: How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools*, National Coalition on School Diversity (2012), *available at* <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo8.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Gary Orfield, John Kucsera & Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, *E Pluribus... Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students*, Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (2012), 21, *available at* [http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students/orfield\\_epluribus\\_revised\\_complete\\_2012.pdf](http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/mlk-national/e-pluribus...separation-deepening-double-segregation-for-more-students/orfield_epluribus_revised_complete_2012.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Gary Orfield & John Kucsera, *New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future*, Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (2014), *available at* <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/ny-norflot-report-placeholder/Kucsera-New-York-Extreme-Segregation-2014.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *State & County QuickFacts: New York (city)*, New York, United States Census Bureau, *available at* <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/3651000.html>; Nancy Foner, *How exceptional is New York? Migration and multiculturalism in the empire city*, 30(6) *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 999 (2007), *available at*

Fortunately New York City has an enormously diverse population which could be leveraged, along with other educational investments, to bring significant educational gains.<sup>8</sup>

### How Proposed Agenda Items Support Diversity in New York City Schools

The proposed resolutions and bill support diversity in NYC schools in multiple ways. First, by calling on the NYC Department of Education to recognize the importance of diversity and integration in education and set diversity as a priority for education policy in the city, the City Council can put public pressure on the Department to expand innovative, popular, and effective diversity plans such as the plan in place at PS 133 in Park Slope. Second, the City Council resolution calling on the Governor to approved changes the admissions policy for NYC's specialized high school programs has the potential to result in admissions policy changes that can diversify these elite, racially isolated schools, resulting in an environment that more closely resembles the City as a whole, preparing NYC's top-tier students to function at a high level in an increasingly diverse America. Finally, amending the administrative code of NYC to require annual reporting on progress and efforts towards creating diversity in schools will not only place additional pressure on the Department to implement diversity strategies by creating a public record, but will provide a wealth of information for advocates and policy makers nationwide regarding the success or failure of certain strategies.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to comment. We would be glad to meet with the City Council Education Committee and further discuss the proposed items, as well as the benefits of diversity in education more generally.

Sincerely,

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<http://macaulay.cuny.edu/eportfolios/peoplingnyc2012wednesday/files/2012/01/Foner-how-exceptional-new-york.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *Supra* note 2.