



THE COUNCIL OF
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New York City Council Members aim to confront segregation and increase diversity in NYC schools

Trio of bills would call on DOE to prioritize, plan for, and measure progress toward more diverse schools. Resolution also joins Mayor, NAACP and others to call for changes to specialized high school admissions.

October 22, 2014 (NYC) – New York City Council Members stood with parents, educators, and civil rights advocates on Wednesday in support of policies to confront segregation and increase diversity in NYC public schools. Citing research that New York’s schools are amongst the most segregated in the nation, Council Members announced legislation to prioritize, plan for, and measure progress toward diversity in the city’s schools. Advocates also discussed innovative efforts to boost diversity at the school and district levels.

Diversity is one of NYC’s greatest strength. Evidence shows that students benefit from learning in settings with students from many different backgrounds. Unfortunately, 60 years after the Supreme Court rules in *Brown v. Board of Education*, that “separate but equal is inherently unequal,” New York’s schools are amongst the most segregated in the nation, according to a study earlier this year by The Civil Rights Project at UCLA.¹ Residential segregation, test-based admissions, and “choice” admissions processes that fail to prioritize diversity continue to take our schools in the wrong direction.

With the support of Education Committee Chair Danny Dromm, Council Members Brad Lander, Ritchie Torres, and Inez Barron are therefore introducing three bills today:

¹ “New York State’s Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future.” John Kucsera, Forword by Gary Orfield, March 26, 2014. <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/news/press-releases/2014-press-releases/new-york-schools-most-segregated-in-the-nation>.

- **Resolution calling on the NYC Department of Education to establish a policy that officially recognizes the importance and benefits of diversity**, to include it as one priority when making decisions about admissions, and to develop a strategy for promoting more diverse schools (prime sponsor: Council Member Ritchie Torres).
- **Bill requiring DOE to issue an annual report on school diversity**, including the release of demographic data by school, district, and citywide. The report would provide more detailed information needed to evaluate issues of segregation and diversity, identify the steps DOE is taking to address the issue, and report on year-over-year progress (prime sponsor: Council Member Brad Lander).
- **Resolution in support of State Legislation requiring specialized high schools (Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech) to use “multiple measures” for admissions.** State Legislation (S7738/A9979, sponsored by Assemblymember Karim Camara, and Senator Simcha Felder) would require the schools to use multiple measures (e.g. grades, attendance, state tests), instead of only the specialized high school entrance exam. The current single measure system is the basis of a civil rights complaint filed by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Latino Justice. Mayor de Blasio has expressed support for the proposed change (prime sponsor: Council Member Inez Barron).

The lead sponsors of the bills are joined by Council Members Ydanis Rodriguez, Mark Levine, and Alan Maisel, all former NYC teachers (as are Council Members Dromm and Barron), as co-sponsors. The Council Members – working with Education Committee Chair Danny Dromm – plan to hold a hearing on the topic of school segregation and diversity next month.

In addition to considering these bills, the hearing will look at proactive work in schools and districts around New York City to establish more diverse schools. Community leaders from Districts 1, 13, 14 and 15 joined the Council Members at today’s press conference. The elementary schools in District 1 (on the Lower East Side) are non-zoned, but the absence of priorities for diversity has undermined their efforts. The CEC has called for a model of “controlled choice” that would use constitutionally permissible measures to achieve more diverse schools. Advocates also cited PS 133 (in Park Slope), where the DOE agreed in 2013 to create a new, non-zoned school shared by Districts 13 and 15, with 35% of the seats prioritized for English Language Learners and students eligible for free or reduced price school lunch.

The Council legislation is aimed at supporting these efforts and encouraging their expansion, in order to help address long-standing, deeply-rooted segregation in the New York City school system as a whole.

“New York City’s remarkable diversity is one of our greatest strengths, but we are failing to bring that diversity into our schools,” said **Council Member Brad Lander**. “Sixty years after the Supreme Court ruled that ‘separate but equal is inherently unequal,’ it is shameful to have a school system that is among the most segregated in the country. Fortunately, parents, educators, and advocates are taking leadership on the ground, with innovative steps to confront segregation and increase diversity in New York City schools. When these efforts succeed, all students benefit – from inclusive schools, a wide range of experience and perspective, and a diverse environment more like the world we live in and the democracy we want. The legislation we are introducing today will support those efforts to combat inequality, promote inclusion, and advance justice.”

“To celebrate the spirit of *Brown v. Board of Education* on its 60th anniversary, I urge the Department of Education to officially recognize the importance of diversity in schools, and to set classroom diversity as a priority,” said **Council Member Ritchie Torres**. “It is no secret that students who learn in diverse environments are better equipped to become fully engaged members of our diverse democracy. New

York City has an obligation to provide our students with the tools, skills, and experiences they need to succeed in a pluralistic society.”

“I am pleased to introduce this resolution that supports the State legislation to use multiple measures to grant admission to the specialized high schools,” said **Council Member Inez Barron**. “Over the last two decades, there has been a steady decline in the number of Black and Latino students admitted to the so-called “elite” specialized high schools. While the NYC Black and Latino student population is presently approximately 70%, only 11% of those students are in the specialized high schools. The policy of using a single test, the Specialized High School Admission Test, is totally counter to scientific studies and New York is the only city with such a policy. The American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education have concluded that ‘a high-stakes decision with a major impact on a student’s educational opportunities, such as admission to a specialized or gifted/talented program, should not turn on the results of a single test.’ This admission test is a part of the testing industry that has historically been found to produce tests that have been racially and culturally biased. Thousands of academically talented African-American and Latino students are denied admission at rates far higher than those for other racial groups.”

“Our public schools need to be equalizers of opportunity, not perpetrators of inequality. To that end, we strongly support all of the three initiatives being presented here today and applaud the City Council for keeping an eye on the increasing segregation in our school system,” said **David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society**. “Diverse school environments are critical to the well-being of all our students. State legislation has been proposed to change the admissions procedures at the three oldest specialized high schools. We applaud the Council for supporting this measure. But there are five more specialized high schools, and the Council and the Mayor can change admissions at those schools today, with the stroke of a pen. We call on the Council and the Mayor, along with state legislators to make these changes.”

"New York City can not continue to rely on an outmoded multiple choice test for entrance to its top academic high schools," said **Michael Mulgrew, President of the United Federation of Teachers**. "One test on one day is not the best way to gauge a 13-year-old's ability. Our City Council members - many of them former teachers - know it is time for a change."

“As a CEC member from District 1 that has been asking DoE and City Hall for a more equitable admissions plan for 10 years we are grateful to Council Members Lander, Torres and Barron for their leadership on this issue,” said **Lisa Donlan, President of District 1 Community Education Council (CEC)**. “We support changes to the specialized high school admissions policy that will result in more equitable access for the best and brightest of NYC students of all races, socioeconomic statuses and neighborhoods. As a district that spends a lot of time, energy and financial resources gathering data and analyzing the disparities among our community schools, we strongly support a bill that will help community stakeholders to clearly see where inequities lie among their community schools and address them with better assignment policies. D1 parents, teachers community members and students want to see a strong commitment of support from this administration to collaborate with stakeholders in different districts (Task Forces, grass roots parent and community groups, and CECs), in different districts to design, implement and evaluate local proposals for addressing growing school segregation. NYC DoE can no longer ignore the fact that NY state, due in large part to our school assignment policies here in NYC, is home to the most segregated schools system in the US. We must do better and we can, together.”

“PLP works for educational justice in Community School District 3 and beyond,” said **Yasmin Secada of the Parent Leadership Project (PLP)**. “We are low-income parents of color and community members who have come together to make sure our schools reflect, serve, and respect all the families in our District, which is one of the districts in New York City that is one of the most racially and economically

diverse and yet is also one of the most segregated and unequal. We believe that the resolution recognizes the importance & benefits of diversity, and that includes it as a top priority when making decisions about admissions & new schools, and to develop a strategy for addressing segregation & promoting more diverse schools --- and the annual report on school diversity are important steps in the right direction. PLP and the District 3 Equity in Education Task Force are currently working for an alternative student assignment plan for our District that will desegregate our schools, increase equity, and create a system that works for all children. We have joined forces with parents and organizers in District 1 and District 13 who face similar exclusions in their public schools and who are also interested in an alternative and more equitable admissions policy.”

"We're thrilled that the City Council is taking the lead and asking the State to change the law to expand access to our city's Specialized High Schools to all New Yorkers. As we argued in our 2012 federal civil rights complaint challenging the current single-test admissions process, relying on a single test for admission while excluding multiple measures of student knowledge and potential is a distortion and subversion of the meaning of merit," said **Sherrilyn Ifill, President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund**. "We hope that, in addition to asking the State to change the law, the City also takes action to change the admissions policies at the five schools to which the current State law does not necessarily apply."

“The persistent problem of segregation throughout New York City’s educational system is open and notorious. This results in many pupils with limited socio-educational opportunities and lost benefits of true diversity. As a Latino civil rights law organization, we endorse the City Council’s resolutions to overcome barriers to diversity and to require that the City’s Education Department timely produce analysis and publicly report on pupil demographic data to help tackle the issues of diminished diversity in the K-12 public schools”, stated **Jose Perez, Deputy General Counsel of LATINOJUSTICE PRLDEF**. “We also support passage of pending state proposals to mandate the use of multiple factors, along with a special entrance examination, to determine annual admissions into the City’s specialized high schools. However, we note that any specialized admissions examination must also be properly validated for use.”

“AALDEF has consistently recognized the importance of the diversity of the student body and faculty in educational institutions and supported programs that promote that diversity,” said **Margaret Fung, Executive Director of the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)**. “The New York City Department of Education must do more to obtain diversity and end the high degree of segregation in its public schools, charters and magnet schools. AALDEF also supports the use of multiple measures for admission to specialized high schools. This would help students, including Asian American students, who are highly qualified but may not have done well on a single test or lacked access to formal test preparation courses.”