

*The adoption of a diversity plan by the largest school district in the country is a significant accomplishment for pro-integration efforts and evidence of movement's potential at the local level when advocates are coordinated and tenacious.*

Earlier this month, the New York City (NYC) Department of Education (DOE) made headlines with the release of a new diversity plan – [Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in NYC Public Schools](#).

After launching Diversity in Admission pilots, increasing the number of dual language programs and expanding access for students with disabilities, the City's latest effort defines school diversity as "a priority for the DOE and part of [New York City's] Equity and Excellence for All agenda." While some specific aspects of the plan beg further refinement, there is much to celebrate. The plan's articulation of diverse schools as a goal for the City's DOE, and the statement of intent to engage in intensive, long-term community engagement are clear steps in the right direction of supporting all students. Both sustained, coordinated advocacy from civil rights advocacy organizations and the cultivation of grassroots political pressure were critical to generating NYC's school diversity plan.

The adoption of the plan is the culmination of years of pro-integration efforts from a range of advocates. At the local level, grassroots organizations such as IntegrateNYC4me and the [Alliance for School Integration and Desegregation \(ASID\)](#), which is lead by National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSd) member organizations New York Appleseed and the NYU Metro Center, have done much to raise the profile of school segregation as an important issue and bring political pressure to bear at City Hall and encourage local representatives to address the issues raised. Additionally, NCSd members IntegrateNYC4me and NY Appleseed played vital roles in local efforts to integrate the country's most segregated school district, [testifying](#) in support of a pro-diversity statement from DOE during a NYC City Council Education Committee meeting on school diversity in December 2014, meeting with NYC DOE officials, organizing youth advocacy projects, and hosting community events around integration, .

The NCSd also submitted [testimony](#) during the 2014 meeting calling upon the NYC DOE 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.

"New York City has taken a significant step in efforts to diversify schools with the release of the Equity and Excellence: Diversity in New York Schools plan," stated Matthew Gonzales, Director of New York Appleseed's School Diversity Project. "With a clear policy statement prioritizing and promoting diverse schools, and the creation of benchmarks for racial and economic diversity, New York City now has a framework for moving the needle on integration."

In addition to continuous federal, state, and local advocacy, federal guidance developed during the Obama Administration provided a needed boost to school diversity efforts in New York City and across the country.

In 2011, after *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* ("PICS") highlighted student diversity as a compelling government interest, the Department of Education and the Department of Justice issued joint [guidance](#) regarding the voluntary use of race to achieve diversity in elementary and secondary schools. Developed through the work of advocates, policymakers, and experts from across the nation working through the NCSD, the guidance undoubtedly played a foundational role in setting the stage for successful advocacy efforts like those ongoing in New York City.

As the advocacy community moves forward in a new political era with little hint of support for school diversity at the federal level, the PICS guidance and the City's commitment to diversity will serve as important touchstones to help anchor and guide future efforts to achieve integration.

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