

# **Making the Grade II:**

**New Programs  
for Better Schools**

# Executive Committee

# School Diversity Advisory Group

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\*DOE staff did not have a formal vote on recommendations.

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# Letter from the Executive Committee

**As parents, as educators, as advocates, academics and students, we all want an exciting, challenging and relevant education that prepares students for the world and supports their ability to work together to solve big problems, serve their communities, get good jobs and participate in the very fabric of this country.**

Decades of research have found that economically and racially integrated schools can provide students with this kind of high-quality education they deserve. In our first report, *Making the Grade*, released in February, we laid out goals that all schools represent the socioeconomic and racial diversity of their community school district within the next three years, and by their borough in the first five years. Ultimately, we said that, in ten years, every school should be representative of the city as a whole. We defined integration goals to include racial and socio-economic integration, but also included multilingual learners, students with disabilities and students in temporary housing as students who should be represented in schools throughout the city.

We used a framework for “real integration” that recognizes schools need improved resources, relationships, representation and restorative justice to be integrated. We also stressed the importance of an engaged set of processes that enable all of us to participate in meeting these goals in ways that recognize we are a vast city with many diverse communities and with many different and changing needs.

In this report, we focus on New York City’s widespread and therefore unique use of “screened schools” and also its “Gifted and Talented” programs. Simply put, there are better ways to educate advanced learners than most of the current “Screened” and Gifted and Talented programs, which segregate students by race and socioeconomic status. Today they have become proxies for separating students who can and should have opportunities to learn together. Most “screened schools” and “Gifted and Talented” admissions processes are in tension with meeting the goals in *Making the Grade*, including and importantly, the goal of effective educational innovation that

takes advantage of existing research. These schools and programs often fail to serve disadvantaged students and Black and Latinx students and have often failed to take advantage of some of the research and innovations that have developed since their inception. Research has demonstrated the benefits of contemporary education models that serve all students and prepare them to participate in a diverse, global society. New York City has the opportunity to develop educational models to meet the needs of advanced learners and learners with interests in specific areas.

In this second report we focus on the tough issues and thoughtful balance needed on the use of screens and Gifted and Talented programs. On one hand, extensive evidence in this report suggests the existing use of screens and Gifted and Talented programs is unfair, unjust and not necessarily research-based. As a result, these programs segregate students by race, class, abilities and language and perpetuate stereotypes about student potential and achievement. This must change and it must change with deliberate action and clear-eyed commitment to excellent schools.

On the other hand, as we move away from unjust Gifted and Talented programs and school screens, it is imperative to resource the creation and development of new research-based programs that serve all children; recognizing that all children can learn, that learning together improves learning and that we have new models and opportunities to nurture, support, invest in and develop talent and motivation in all students, including those students whose talents and interests are often unrecognized and whose development has not received sufficient investment.

We also want to ensure that the New York City public schools continue to attract students from across the socioeconomic spectrum. If New York City loses students to private schools or families move to other locations, it will become even more difficult to create high-quality integrated schools that serve the interests of all students.

We believe our recommendations thread that needle in a bold and balanced way. We call for the resources necessary to support new models of effective and integrated learning based on interest and enrichment models, rather than arbitrary and often exclusionary admissions models. Exclusionary admissions models often unfairly sort students by their resources rather than interests and opportunities for developing their interests and abilities. They also miss the benefits of classrooms that are more diverse and allow more individualized education to students who are advanced learners.

We recommend eliminating exclusionary screens, replacing those programs with pro-integrative programs used in many school districts across the country to affirmatively attract students of all backgrounds and make sure that all students are challenged.

The Executive Committee of the School Diversity Advisory Group:

Amy Hsin, Queens College, CUNY

Hazel Dukes, NAACP

Jose Calderon, Hispanic Federation

Maya Wiley, New School

Richard Kahlenberg, The Century Foundation

# Executive Summary



**With the release of its first report, the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) committed to authoring a second report, with additional recommendations on school screens and Gifted and Talented (G&T) programs. The issue of selective enrollment at New York City public schools is a critically important conversation which focuses us on what a 21st Century education entails and how that relates to the creation of integrated and equitable learning environments for all students.**

The SDAG also acknowledges the urgency of this issue, as the application process to selective enrollment schools begins in the fall, and catalyzes an admissions process which in turn segregates city students.

Enrollment policies pose the very first barrier to entry to an enriching learning environment. Studies indicate that once made integrated, through equitable enrollment policies, New York City students will benefit from a host of educational benefits. Integrated classrooms yield higher academic outcomes, stronger critical thinking skills and increased creativity. All students in integrated classrooms demonstrate reduced implicit biases and enhanced social-emotional well-being. Many practices have to coincide to ensure that classrooms are not only diverse, but also well- prepared and well-resourced to accommodate diverse learning needs.

Enrollment is only one facet of a nuanced solution to school segregation. Selective enrollment often dictates admission into New York City's academic enrichment offerings. The SDAG believes that every student should have access to academic enrichment, especially because it is often enrichment programming that helps students set and achieve academic goals.

The SDAG strongly urges the DOE act swiftly in addressing the City's segregated schools. For this reason, the SDAG's recommendations are focused on the short-term (0-3 years) and medium-term (3-5 years). We recommend creating inclusionary enrichment models and eliminating exclusionary admissions practices in the short-term, and evaluating and expanding successful models and practices in the mid-term.

As set out in our first report, *Making the Grade*, in the short-term all elementary and middle schools should mirror their district's racial demographics and percentages of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and low income students, high schools would resemble their borough's demographics and respective percentages. In the mid-term

elementary, middle and high schools should resemble their boroughs, and in the long-term all schools should mirror the demographics of New York City. These goals should be supported with appropriate resources and tracked and progress made available to the public in an accessible way.

Our conversations have always reflected the spirit of our inclusivity driven work, and the shared set of principles adopted upon the SDAG's inception:

- Diversity means something different in each community and recommendations should speak to that broad definition.
- The Advisory group operates with respect, transparency and an inclusive process.
- Advisory group recommendations will: increase equity, be based on research-supported approaches, seek to understand unintended consequences, and be based on what the DOE can implement in the short term, with some longer-term recommendations.

The SDAG put together the following recommendations based on group discussion, community feedback, continued analysis and existing research. Our work built on our findings presented in Making the Grade, and engagement with New York City parents, students and educators and other community members. From December 2017 through the publication of this report, the SDAG and its subcommittees have collectively held over 40 meetings, including two day-long retreats, and town hall meetings with over 800 New Yorkers, and hosted two presentations from New York City youth activist groups, Teens Take Charge and IntegrateNYC.

## Recommendations

### 0-3 Years

#### Elementary Schools

- ▶ Because we believe all students deserve to be challenged, we recommend that the DOE resource community school districts to pilot creative, equitable enrichment alternatives to G&T, resource community engagement and implementation appropriately and measure, track and publicize impacts.
- ▶ Discontinue the use of the Gifted & Talented admissions test. Institute a moratorium on new Gifted & Talented programs, while phasing out existing programs.

- ▶ Allow existing Gifted & Talented programs to continue. Programs will be phased out as students age and will not receive new incoming classes.
- ▶ Eliminate rigid academic tracking in elementary school that results in economic and racial segregation of students.

## **Middle Schools**

- ▶ Expand and support the use of inclusionary admissions practices that promote integrated schools and ensure that all students are challenged.
- ▶ Provide resources for community school districts to develop district wide admissions priorities with community and stakeholder engagement. District wide admissions priorities must intend to achieve the integration goals adopted by the DOE.
- ▶ Eliminate the use of exclusionary admissions practices that create segregation by race, class, disability, home language, and academic ability. This includes the exclusionary use of school screens such as grades, test scores, auditions, performance in interviews, behavior, lateness, and attendance.
- ▶ Preserve the use of inclusionary admissions practices that are used to identify and serve vulnerable student populations (i.e. International Schools, dual language programs, Diversity in Admissions pilot).
- ▶ Eliminate the use of “Gifted and Talented” nomenclature in middle school programs, to ensure it matches the values and vision of real integration.

## **High Schools**

- ▶ Institute a moratorium on the creation of new screened high schools, unless the admissions process explicitly intends to meet the integration goals adopted by the DOE
- ▶ Implement new inclusionary admissions practices which ensure all high schools are reflective of their boroughs’ racial and socio-economic demographics.
- ▶ Prioritize high performing selective high schools that have an opportunity to serve a more racially representative

student population. Require identified high schools to adopt an inclusionary admissions practice that intends to increase racial and socio-economic diversity.

- ▶ Eliminate lateness, attendance, and geographic zones as a criteria for high school admissions and enrollment.
- ▶ Preserve the use of inclusionary admissions practices that are used to identify and serve vulnerable student populations (i.e. International and Transfer High Schools, and Diversity in Admissions).
- ▶ Ensure that all high school admissions criteria are transparent and designed to reduce the racial and socio-economic isolation currently prevalent in most high schools.

## **Systemwide**

- ▶ In accordance with New York State law, the DOE should redraft district lines to support the long-term goal of having all schools reflect the city population and meet the goals accepted in Making the Grade.
- ▶ Commission group to study academic diversity strategies based on research and best practices and resources needed. Develop a strategy to support students who enter the school system during the school year to ensure diversity & appropriate placement.
- ▶ Develop a strategy to support students who enter school outside of the standard admissions process (over the counter, off-season admissions) that improves real integration goals (system wide) and pairs students with schools and programs that meet their specific needs.
- ▶ Provide students with disabilities in Community School Districts 1-32 and District 75 schools who receive busing pursuant to their IEPs with transportation support they need to be able to participate in after-school programs at their schools.
- ▶ Convene a committee that includes students with disabilities, along with their parents, educators, and advocates, to develop strategies to promote integration of students with disabilities throughout the school system.



## District 75

- ▶ Prioritize enrollment of District 75 students in their school district of residence.
- ▶ Require the DOE to report annually on the number of District 75 students enrolled outside their school district of residence.

## 3-5 Years

### Elementary Schools

- ▶ Evaluate the ways enrichment alternatives are helping or getting in the way of real integration and expand anything that is working.
- ▶ Require districts to develop new strategies to increase participation from underrepresented groups if the enrichment alternatives are found to have a segregating effect.

### Middle Schools

- ▶ Evaluate the integrative impact of inclusionary admissions methods and expand anything that is working.
- ▶ Monitor academic tracking within middle schools. Implement the best practices developed by the academic diversity commission to ensure diverse classrooms within schools.

### High Schools

- ▶ Assess and publicly report on the impacts of the inclusionary admissions practices adopted in years 0 - 3.
- ▶ Redesign the high school admissions process to ensure all high schools are reflective of citywide racial and socio-economic demographics.

# Background

## School Diversity Advisory Group

**In June 2017, as part of the Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools plan, the DOE established a School Diversity Advisory Group to make formal policy recommendations to the Mayor and Chancellor.**

The SDAG is led by three Co-chairs - José Calderón, President of the Hispanic Federation, Hazel Dukes, President of the NAACP New York State Conference and Maya Wiley, Senior Vice President for Social Justice and Henry Cohen Professor of Urban Policy and Management at the New School. The three co-chairs and two additional members - Amy Hsin, Associate Professor of Sociology at Queens College and Richard Kahlenberg, Senior Fellow at The Century Foundation - make up the group's Executive Committee.

The SDAG includes over 40 members, who bring a range of personal and professional perspectives to the group. Members include students, parents, local and national experts on education, including integration, educators, advocates, and other community leaders. The SDAG members were identified by the City and the Executive Committee and began meeting in December 2017.

Over the course of 2018 the SDAG met as a full group and in sub-committees to advance discussions and engaged in town halls in every borough. These public sessions and town halls served as an opportunity for community members to share their perspectives on issues related to school diversity and informed the SDAG's eventual recommendations. In February of 2019 the SDAG published its first report, *Making the Grade*, encompassing an analysis of New York City's public schools, an explanation for the system's current segregation, and the group's recommendations for creating integrated public education. Upon its formation, the SDAG defined a set of shared principles to govern its work. These principles serve as the lens through which all recommendations, past, current and future, are developed:

- Diversity means something different in each community and recommendations should speak to that broad definition.
- The Advisory group operates with respect, transparency and inclusivity.
- Advisory group recommendations will: increase equity, be based on research supported approaches, seek to understand unintended consequences, and be based on what DOE can implement in the short-term, with some longer-term recommendations.

## Summary of Recommendations

The SDAG's first report *Making the Grade* utilized the student advocacy group, IntegrateNYC's 5Rs framework to organize and develop its recommendations. The 5Rs are Race & Enrollment, Resources, Relationships, Restorative Justice and Representation. The SDAG's second report expands on *Making the Grade*'s Race and Enrollment section and specifically addresses New York City's exclusionary admissions practices and G&T programs.

*Making the Grade* included a wide range of over 60 recommendations. The Chancellor of the Department of Education and the Mayor have accepted and agreed to implement the vast majority of the *Making the Grade* recommendations. These include diversity goals in 3, 5 and 10 years, guidelines for new curricula, enrichment programming and possible parent/student empowerment mechanisms.

In the short term, elementary and middle schools would be measured against their district's racial, economic, Multilingual Learner (MLL), and Students with Disabilities (SWD) percentages. Upon hitting these targets, individual schools would work towards reaching their borough percentages in the mid-term. In the long term, the DOE would aim for all schools to look more like the city.

We also included as a part of our Goals, Metrics and Accountability section, a recommendation that the Chancellor require nine districts with sufficient demographic diversity of population to develop diversity and integration plans (Districts 1, 2, 3, 13, 15, 22, 27, 28, and 31) now, and that they analyze their admissions policies and limited enrollment programs to meet recommended integration goals. One third of these districts, (1, 3, and 15) have already developed community driven diversity plans. Districts 13, 28, and 31 recently received funding through the DOE's Diversity grant program and districts 2, 22, and 27 have received funding through the New York State Integration Program. Additionally, we recommended the institution of a School Diversity Grant Program, which would provide grant funding to other districts interested in organizing their own diversity plans.

The SDAG also recommended creating three new metrics of quality review for public schools, including how diverse a school is, under our Goals, Metrics and Accountability section, how amenable the school climate is to students of all backgrounds, under the 3rd R, Relationships, and how integrated the school's workforce is, reporting diversity by position (e.g., teacher, administrator, para, and other staff), as a part of the R of Representation.

The SDAG endorsed two sets of recommendations submitted to the DOE by the Youth-Adult Student Working Group and by the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline. The Youth-Adult Working Group



offered potential mechanisms for facilitating students attempting to hold the system accountable to school policy goals, an effort which would further more equitable Relationships. The Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline assessed the roles and responsibilities of School Safety Agents in school communities and the disciplinary practices of school administrators [in their report to Mayor De Blasio](#), emphasizing the need for Restorative Justice and Practices.

We also recommended the launch of two separate task forces, one within the framework of Resources, which would be responsible for researching equitable PTA funding strategies and the other within the framework of Representation, which would be responsible for investigating the current state of the DOE's workforce in greater detail, with regard to improving diverse representation among teachers and other school officials.

The SDAG included recommendations that specifically touched on the deficiencies in the school system for serving students with disabilities (SWD) and multilingual learners (MLL). The student populations of these groups are underrepresented in 38% and 56% of all schools, respectively. Our recommendation, in our Goals, Metrics and Accountability section, was to implement a target student population for these groups in all schools. The SDAG believes that all schools should serve within five percentage points of SWD and MLL student city-wide demographics.

We encourage readers to explore the rest of our 67 recommendations to the DOE, and consider how they might complement the more specific topic of school screens and G&T programs addressed by this report.

The SDAG's second report expands on Making the Grade's Race and Enrollment section and specifically addresses New York City's screened schools and G&T programs. These programs have long been the subject of public criticism because they are not representative of the diversity of the city, with regard to a number of different measures, including race, socioeconomic status and disability.

The recommendations presented by this report should be read as a part of the recommendations in Making the Grade. All recommendations in both reports are intended to work in tandem to reach our shared goals of an excellent education. Revising admissions policies in order to create more diverse schools also involves making schools more welcoming to more diverse student bodies. The SDAG wishes to emphasize that once students enroll, their schools are accountable to providing them with an equitable education and environment, the resources and curriculum that advances the goals and the monitoring and transparency necessary for accountability.

# **History of Screens and G&T Programs**

**The schools of New York City are as segregated as the schools of Mississippi and Alabama.<sup>1</sup> The question is why. Exclusionary admissions practices, such as selective school screens, and enrollment processes associated with G&T programs, are a part of New York City's legacy of opposition to school integration.**

Research has demonstrated that in addition to segregating schools, these admissions practices don't necessarily result in fair access for low income students who, under a more intentionally equitable system, would otherwise qualify.<sup>2</sup> As such, the use of exclusionary admissions practices in our education system, which exacerbate inequitable enrollment in more than 1 in every 5 New York City middle and high schools,<sup>3</sup> warrant a critical reevaluation. The SDAG recommendations include the development of district and school based alternatives, 21st Century inclusive enrichment programs and the elimination of exclusionary admissions practices.

## **Educational Option Admission Process**

New York City has piloted new admissions processes. Educational Option (Ed Opt) schools represent one of the first iterations of an inclusionary high school admissions method. Ed Opt schools selected at least some portion of their students based on attaining an appropriate mix of high, medium and low academic achieving students, rather than simply admitting the highest academic achievers. This admissions method was inaugurated in the late 1960s, with the opening of John Dewey High School in South Brooklyn and included schools like Edward R. Murrow. The admissions method thrived through the late 90s in New York; by 2000, nearly half of New York City schools used Ed Opt to admit their students.<sup>4</sup>

These schools were successful at cultivating academic growth, but they also often suffered from under enrollment of high achievers, and under resourcing;<sup>5</sup> Ed Opt programs were ultimately at a disadvantage in recruiting high achievers, because high achievers were predominantly attracted to selective screened high schools instead. Between 2000 and 2012 many Ed Opt programs were closed, while others rebranded their admissions methods. Over the past three years, New York City has seen a resurgence of Ed Opt schools; this fall the number of schools designated Ed Opt schools will be as high as it has ever been.<sup>6</sup> This resurgence is associated with efforts to integrate New York City schools which otherwise concentrate economic, racial and academic privilege in highly selective and exclusionary screened schools.

## School Choice Policies of the 21st Century

In the early 2000s the Office of the Mayor gained control of New York City's public school system, the largest in the country. Previously, schools had been governed by the boards of community school districts, with limited central oversight. As a result, New York City mayoral administrations have the opportunity to enact drastic school reforms during their tenure in office and to profoundly shape the function and composition of our schools.

The education policies enacted by mayoral administrations of the 1990s and 2000s gradually transformed school zoning, which dictates school admissions based on geographic proximity (and enabled residential segregation to be reflected within public schools), into a school choice model, in which families are able to rank their preferred schools. In addition to implementing school choice, mayoral administrations expanded school programs that used exclusionary admissions methods to select their students. These exclusionary admissions evaluate students according to standards of:

- State tests
- Course Grades
- Interviews
- Behavior
- Attendance & Punctuality
- Auditions
- Demonstrated Interest

These educational reforms hinged on the ability to attract middle class families to New York City public schools. These reforms had a complex goal, given considerable evidence that school systems are stronger when they are economically mixed. However, these reforms were implemented without much consideration for equity. The City's new school choice model allowed families to choose schools they perceived as the best for their children, instead of having them automatically enrolled into their neighborhood middle and high schools. Allowing families to choose schools while simultaneously allowing schools to choose students through screened admissions methods led NYC's schools to be highly segregated.<sup>7</sup>

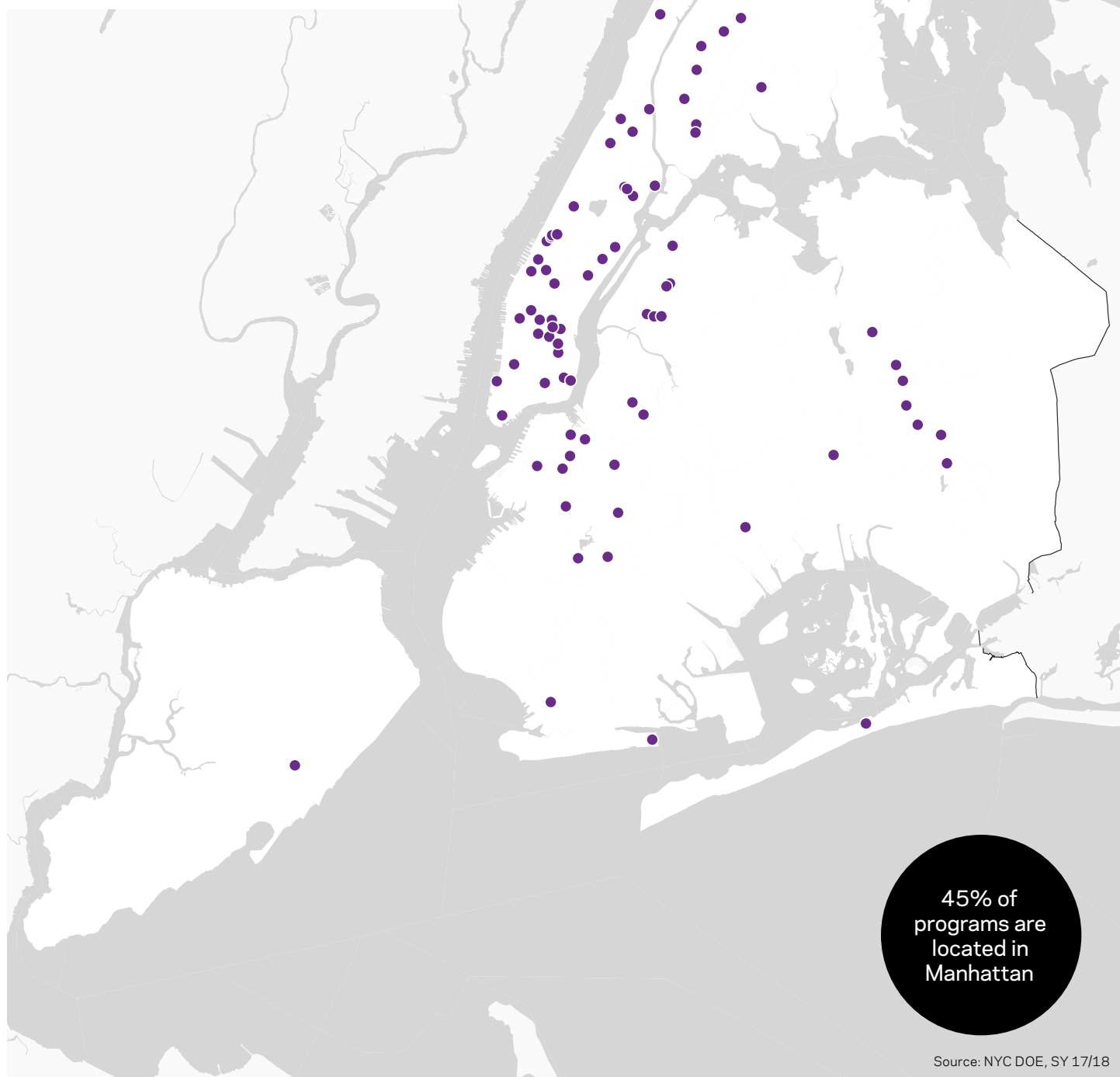
While school choice has proliferated nationwide, no other city within the choice system has as many schools that use exclusionary admissions methods as New York City.<sup>8</sup> Since the 1970s, the number of these schools has nearly tripled. Many of the educational option schools of the 1980s and 1990s have transitioned to using exclusionary screens. Schools with exclusionary screens continually outperform the city mean for academic achievement and graduation rate, due to their selection policies.<sup>9</sup> For several reasons, including school choice, as well as demographic shifts, school closings, and lifting of desegregation consent decrees, schools nationwide have been re-segregating.<sup>10</sup>



## Figure 1: Screened High School Programs Citywide

This map visualizes screened High School programs across New York City. Screened programs consider students' grades, test scores, attendance, and/or other factors in their admissions process.

● Program Locations



## Increasing Segregation in Screened Schools

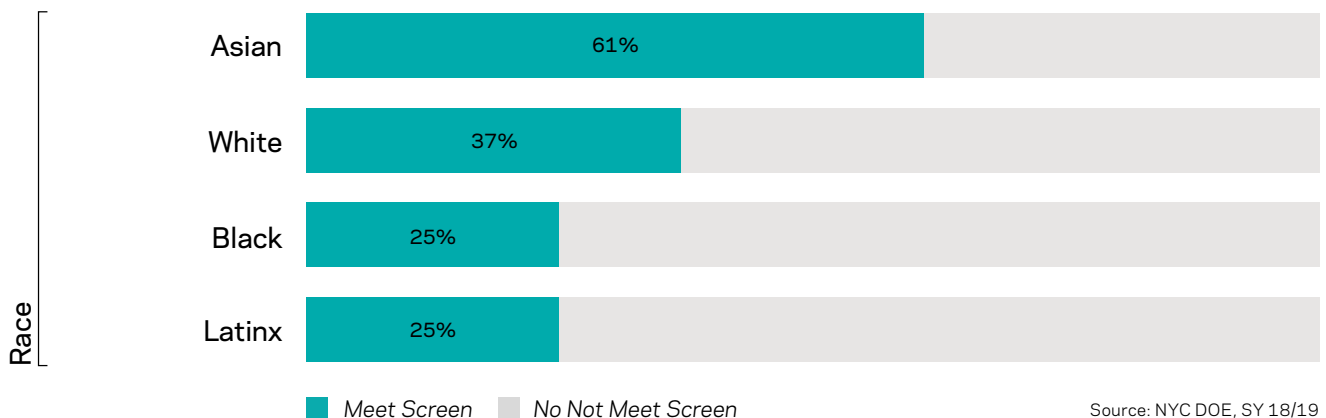
A school choice model with exclusionary admissions practices favors schools with high academic performance and school quality reports. Schools that use exclusionary screens, for example, are incredibly popular under a school choice model, because they select students specifically for their ability to test well and get good grades. Perhaps predictably, test proficiency and class performance do not simply reflect innate abilities, rather they are also reflective of opportunities associated with students' socioeconomic backgrounds.

Families who have the means to invest in extra educational resources are often able to advance their children's academic development. As a result, the children of middle class families are more likely to enroll and excel in schools with exclusionary screening processes. This cycle of academic privilege is often referred to as the Achievement Gap. There are low-income communities, especially in New York City, where families make significant sacrifices to fund test prep and children spend large amounts of time preparing and sacrificing other developmentally appropriate activities to gain admission and do so at an unnecessary cost. This is not equitable even if it is effective for some.

Our data shows that today New York City's schools with exclusionary admissions practices are among the most homogeneous middle and high schools.<sup>11</sup> These schools disproportionately under-serve the city's Black students, Latinx students, students with disabilities and multilingual learners compared to the makeup of the entire student population.<sup>12</sup> And while some exclusionary schools have high percentages of Asian students, there are others where Asians are under-represented.

### Figure 2: Applicants Meeting Attendance Screen

The share of applicants meeting a screen of fewer than 5 absences and fewer than 5 tardies is not equal across demographic groups. Black and Latinx applicants are less likely to meet an attendance screen than White and Asian applicants.



## Chicago Public Schools (CPS):

Chicago Public Schools has adopted a far more inclusive method of admitting students to selective high schools than has New York City. While New York City relies on a single test to admit students to several specialized high schools, Chicago uses multiple measures to identify talent and the school system recognizes that academic excellence should be considered in the context of obstacles that a student has overcome. Under Chicago's system, students are identified as coming from one of four socioeconomic groups (by residential neighborhood) and student academic records are considered in light of their grouping.

A 2019 Brookings Institution study found that racial and socioeconomic representation in Chicago's selective enrollment high schools is far more reflective of the student population as a whole than is the case in New York City's specialized high schools. In Chicago, 39 percent of students in selective high schools were black in 2015, compared with 42 percent of public school students citywide, a difference of 3 percentage points. By contrast, in New York City, just 6 percent of students in selective high schools were black, compared with 25 percent of public school students citywide, a difference of 19 percentage points. For Hispanic students the same

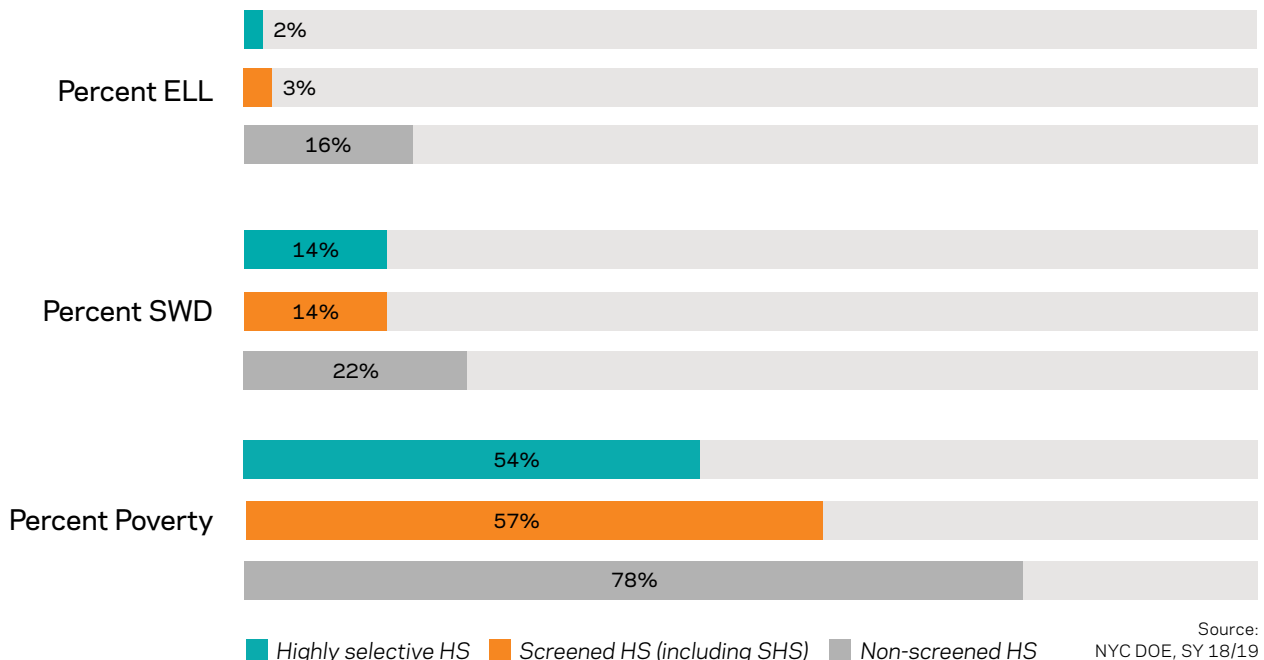
pattern holds: just 10 percent of students in New York City's specialized high schools were Hispanic, compared with 41 percent of public school students citywide, a gap of 31 percentage points. In Chicago, the gap was much smaller: 30 percent of students in the selective enrollment schools were Hispanic, compared with 46 percent of public school students citywide, a 16-percentage point difference.

The socioeconomic gap was much larger in New York City than in Chicago, as well. In New York, 70 percent of public school students were economically disadvantaged, compared with 48 percent a students in selective high schools, a gap of 22 percentage points. By contrast, in Chicago, the gap was 11 percentage points (68 percent of students in selective high schools were economically disadvantaged, compared with 79 percent at public schools citywide.)

Chicago and New York are different cities, with different residential patterns, so New York would need to tailor its program to its particular needs. Nevertheless, Chicago shows that far more inclusive admissions policies are possible than those currently in use.<sup>13</sup>

### Figure 3: Share of Students Attending Screened School

English language learners, students with disabilities, and students qualifying for free & reduced lunch represent a disproportionately small share of students in screened schools.



While many of these schools have high graduation rates and/or high standardized test scores, these statistics are not necessarily reflective of the quality of the school since many of these schools are populated by students who are considered “high achieving.” Accelerated academic opportunities are beneficial to all students. They are especially beneficial to low-income students lacking access to curricular challenges at their neighborhood schools, and lacking the financial resources required to branch out; however, schools that use exclusionary admission models must be reformed if their enrollment policies continue to enact inequity.

## **Pedagogy of G&T Schools**

G&T education has been on the rise in public schools since the late 19th century. It is based on the principle that children who exhibit one or more types of “gifts” require more educational support and intensive curricula. “Gifts” encompass a range of different disciplines, from the arts and sciences, to sensitized social awareness. Admission practices of G&T programs (e.g. G&T exam, interviews, teacher recommendations etc.) have been shown to discriminate against low-income students, despite their gifts.

Contemporary experts of gifted education encourage the shift to a school wide enrichment model of G&T education. In a schoolwide enrichment model, more advanced students learn alongside their peers of all academic abilities, and each student learns through an individualized program of study. A number of studies have shown that mixed-ability classrooms, which cater to the needs of both general education students and advanced students are beneficial to students with lower proficiency levels, and do not harm students

### **Montgomery, MD:**

In the fall of 2017, following an evaluation of the county's Gifted and Talented programs, Montgomery County Schools District (MCSD), reformed its elementary school enrichment programming. The district runs 11 Centers for Enriched Studies. Admission to these centers is based on multiple measures, including class performance, answers to a non-graded student questionnaire and test performance on an exam administered to all 3rd grade students. Test performance is based on a student's percentile rank, measured against both national test takers, and local test takers, to produce two different percentile scores. Local percentile ranks are determined by comparing students to their peers in one of three designated groups. Students are assigned their locally comparative groups depending on the poverty level of their elementary schools. The number of seats open for admission was also increased as a part of these reforms,

broadening access for all to enriched education. Several elementary schools, beyond the 10 or so Centers for Enriched Studies have also begun to offer Enriched Literary Curricula, which integrate advanced English curricula into general education classrooms.

Previously admission to Montgomery County Gifted and Talented programs was oriented more heavily around teacher recommendations and grades. Test scores were still observed, but testing was not compulsory, and had to be sought out by students' families. Montgomery County's Centers for Enriched Studies were called Centers for the Highly Gifted. In just one year Black and Hispanic enrollment at Centers for Enriched Studies has increased by almost ten percentage points, and the schools now service double the number of low-income students it had previously serviced.

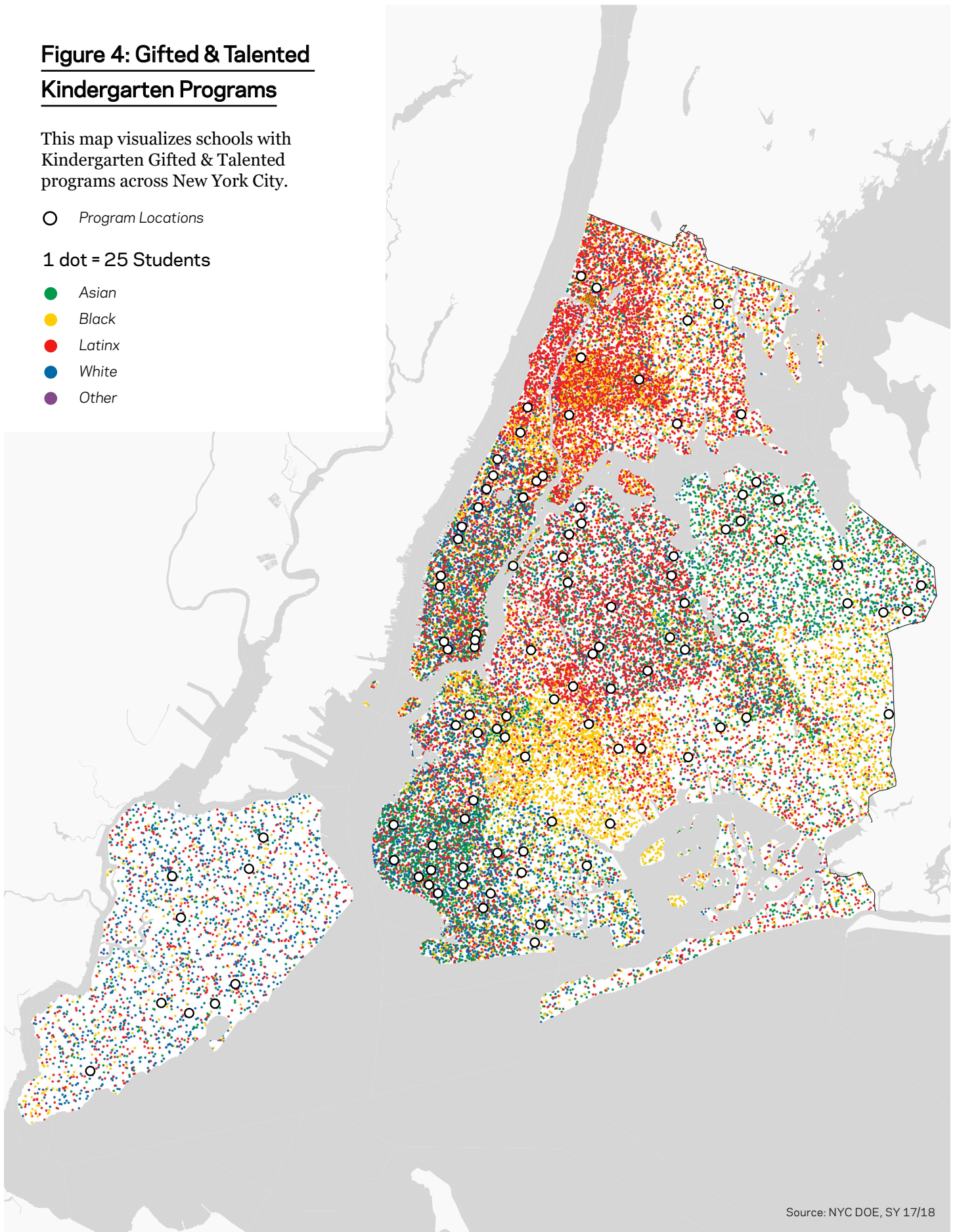
## Figure 4: Gifted & Talented Kindergarten Programs

This map visualizes schools with Kindergarten Gifted & Talented programs across New York City.

○ Program Locations

1 dot = 25 Students

- Asian
- Black
- Latinx
- White
- Other



Source: NYC DOE, SY 17/18



learning above proficiency level.<sup>14,15,16,17</sup> In classrooms that also serve students with disabilities, all students report feeling a heightened sense of inclusion and community.<sup>18</sup>

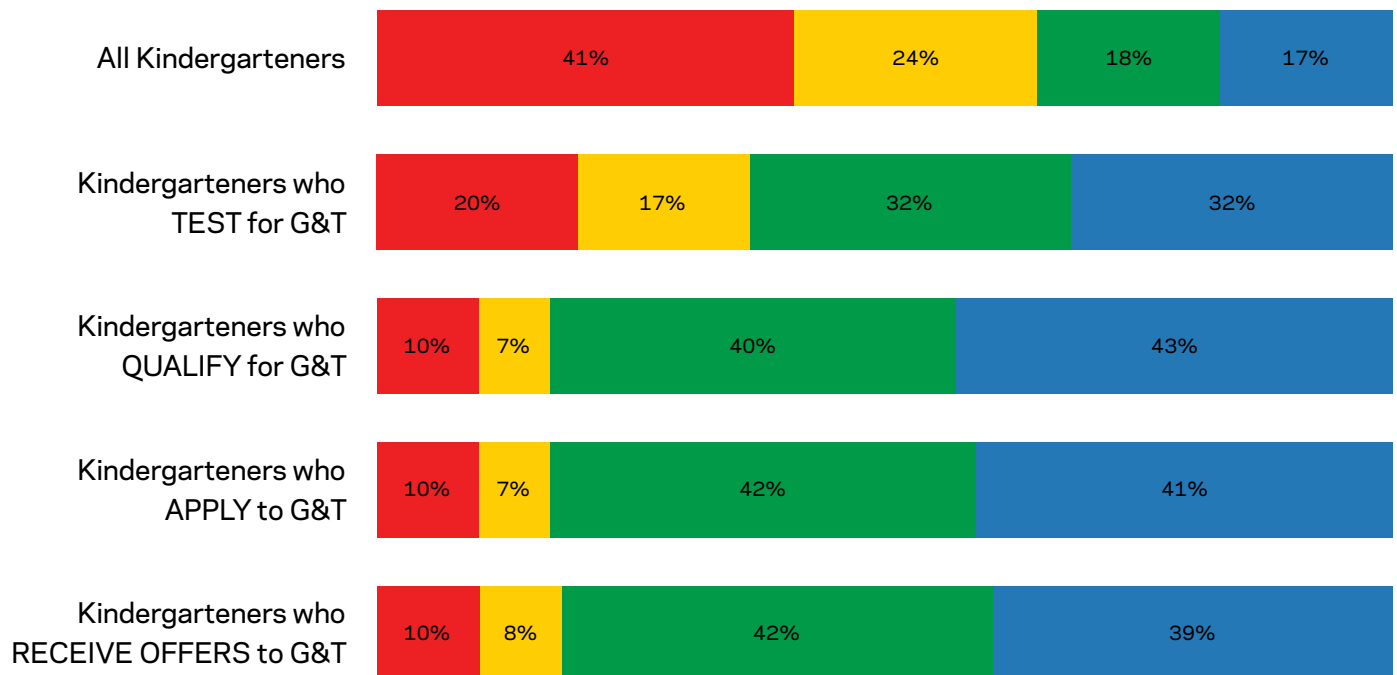
## Implementation of G&T Programs

The first G&T classroom was founded by a New York City educator, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, in the early 1920s. From Hollingworth’s first attempt at educating exceptional children, the demand for G&T education has grown. The development of a national G&T Education platform can, in part, be attributed to the Cold War. In 1958, one year after the Soviet Union sent Sputnik into space, the United States federal government passed its first piece of legislation that addressed “Gifted Education”, The National Defense Education Act, with a cold war mindset built into its title. G&T programs grew as a competition driven response to the threat of a highly educated Soviet population.

Gifted education has always had controversial effects on integration and school diversity. While Brown vs. Board of Education mandated school

### Figure 5: Kindergarten G&T Program Demographics

The racial demographics of kindergarten G&T programs are not representative of the racial demographics of kindergarteners as a whole. Black and Latinx students are underrepresented while Asian and White students are overrepresented in kindergarten G&T programs.



Source: NYC DOE, SY 17/18

Asian Black Latinx White Other

## San Antonio Independent School District:

In response to declining enrollment in San Antonio public schools, the district's superintendent and Chief Innovation Officer began instituting specialized programs at select public schools, in an effort to draw students back from charter and private schools. Admission to these programs utilizes a controlled choice model, in which families submit applications listing their preferred programs and are offered spots based on a lottery, with guard rails for socioeconomic and racial diversity. These programs were developed in schools which were previously low-performing and at risk of being closed. The official mission statement of the choice schools and magnet programs department of SAISD includes the following excerpt, "All children should have access to a variety of school options regardless of their academic ability or where they live."

San Antonio is a highly segregated city, with regards to socioeconomic status. In an effort to diversify schools, the school district has expanded the state definition of poverty, under which 91% of students were defined as low-income, to provide a more robust picture, and more feasible path towards socioeconomic integration. Students are now divided into four different blocks of socioeconomic standing. The district has also implemented, "network principles" which work to replicate success at proximal schools, by managing both a high performing and low performing school. Most of these changes are the product of the Office of Innovation, headed by Mohammed Choudhury. The role of this office to implement bold and creative system wide changes intended to improve education for all San Antonio students.

integration in 1954, gifted programs were used as a method of avoiding required integration.<sup>19</sup> A wave of new gifted programs were founded in the 1970s, upon the publishing of the Marland Report, which outlined a federal definition for giftedness.<sup>20</sup> This wave also coincided with a number of national resegregation efforts, which used anti-school busing legislation and other tactics to clandestinely reinstitute separated schools. In the 1990s black families brought a lawsuit against the city of Louisville, alleging their inability to provide equitable education to black students, and protesting their intention to close down a predominantly black high school. Their findings included data that indicated black students were less likely to be admitted to gifted programs, regardless of their class performance.<sup>21</sup>

In 1983 President Ronald Reagan's administration published a report on the state of American education, entitled *A Nation at Risk*. This report used apocalyptic and militaristic language to sound an alarm over the American student's declining standardized test scores as well as their relatively low literacy levels and academic performance when compared with students of other industrialized nations. The report concealed the fact that the test scores, against which current American students were measured, were taken from a decade during which only a small group of mostly white, and well-heeled students took standardized tests. When test scores were measured against data from intervening years, and broken down according to socioeconomic status, gender and race, the performance of each demographic group, had in fact, improved.

The reality of academic growth, especially among students of color and low income students was ignored, along with the role of segregation and racial discrimination in the depressed assessment scores of American students, compared to students in other countries. The committee that authored *A Nation at Risk* was criticized for being dominated by administrators, had only

one participating practicing teacher, and no participating education experts. The report additionally ignored data pertaining to increased graduation rates and college matriculation. Despite the report's gross misgivings, *A Nation at Risk* ushered in federal, state and local changes to education policy, and enhanced the presence of G&T programs, by stirring up misplaced concern over the "gifted" children, whose talents were painted as atrophying in the ill-equipped American school system.

In New York, the same mayoral reforms that brought school choice and exclusionary admissions practices also standardized and expanded G&T offerings. The city recognized the inequality perpetuated by varied and unclear enrollment policies, so the DOE sought to streamline the admissions process for G&T schools by implementing one system-wide exam. City-wide programs would require receiving a score of at least 97 on the newly implemented test, and district programs would accept students scoring at least 90. These reforms intended to broaden access to advanced students of color and low-income students, whose talents were undermined by biased admissions processes, like teacher recommendations.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, the standardization of G&T programs has only led to more inequity in G&T programs, through the rise of test tutoring companies specifically targeting the G&T exam. Data shows that G&T schools have become less diverse since the shifting of admissions policies.<sup>23</sup> Enrollment demographics indicate that many G&T programs are lacking the contributions of low-income students, students of color, multilingual learners and students with disabilities.<sup>24</sup> Even the National Association of Gifted Children opposes the use of a single test to admit students to G&T programs, recognizing the ensuing inequity caused by such measures.<sup>25</sup> They do not endorse the current form taken by New York City's G&T classrooms.

The reforms of the early 2000s brought over 20 new G&T programs meant to cater to underserved communities, in further hopes of expanded enrichment opportunities for a more diverse group of children. Three years later, most of these new programs were unable to fill a single spot in their incoming classes, because the majority of students in these neighborhoods and districts were low-income and not able to invest in equitable test-prep resources.<sup>26</sup> Since the mid-2000s the number of G&T programs has nearly halved, with most surviving offerings operating in affluent white neighborhoods.

The SDAG believes that high achieving students deserve to be challenged and supported; however G&T enrichment is not designed to advance equity, and often excludes those low-income students, without supplemental financial or academic support, who would have otherwise been entitled to admission,<sup>27,28,29,30,31,32,33</sup> suggesting that G&T caters to the economically privileged instead of the intellectually privileged. The SDAG also believes that it is imperative to encourage research of enrichment curricula which cater to learners at varying levels of proficiency.

## Washington D.C.

As of 2015 the District of Columbia Public Schools offer schoolwide enrichment programming (schoolwide enrichment model, SEM) in select elementary and middle schools. Students gain admission to SEM-designated schools through the D.C. lottery based enrollment system. Preference to these schools is assigned to siblings of current students, and students who live within a half mile of these schools, and have been otherwise zoned to a further school. Middle school assignment is also influenced by what elementary school a student is matriculating from, as all schools fit into feeder patterns, based on zone boundaries. SEM-designated middle and elementary schools are equipped with either an SEM-resource teacher or SEM-committee, responsible for designing and implementing SEM curricula for all students. SEM curricula are designed based on the results of a teacher administered assessment which identifies students' academic and creative affinities and aptitudes.

Previously, the District of Columbia lacked a centralized office for gifted education. The School's Chancellor, Kaya Henderson, established an office of advanced and enriched study in 2012. The office has supported the rise of exclusionary admissions methods in D.C. high schools, but at the elementary and middle school levels promotes the implementation of the schoolwide enrichment model.

The D.C. school system looks fairly different from New York City's. Firstly it services only around 4% of the amount of students serviced by NYC. D.C.'s individual schools, including SEM-designated schools are relatively homogeneous, reflective of the segregating residential patterns of D.C. neighborhoods. Elementary schools may still offer G&T programs, not necessarily recognized as advanced academic programming by the centralized D.C. district office.

## Increasing Segregation in G&T Programs

Admission to New York City G&T programs is based on a composite exam. Testing begins before the beginning of kindergarten, when students are four years old. Because G&T programs are seen as a pipeline to the city's best middle and high schools, the stakes of the admissions processes appear very high. Families who can afford to enroll their four and five year-old children in test prep programs have an important and often consequential advantage in G&T admissions. It requires robust resources, investments of both time and energy to research, prepare and apply to G&T programs. As a result, economically disadvantaged families are less likely to have children enrolled.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, programs in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods often suffer from under-enrollment, whereas the opposite is true of economically advantaged areas.<sup>35</sup> The number of White and Asian students in G&T programs far exceeds the number of Black and Latinx students, and is proportionally dissimilar from citywide White and Asian student enrollment, mimicking national G&T enrollment trends.<sup>36,37</sup>

G&T programs are just one form of educational enrichment. Other forms of educational enrichment have proven to provide more pathways to racial and socioeconomic integration. Dual language programs, for example, are often seen as places where second generation students can learn about their families' respective cultures, and they even actively attract students of color and low-income families. However, the current form taken by G&T programs rewards students who can afford to prepare, instead of students who might definitionally qualify as G&T; that definition is expansive and diverse, and it should encompass students of all races, ethnicities and abilities.

# Recommendations

**We recommend the DOE resource the creation of new programs -- non-selective magnet schools based on student needs and interests and school wide enrichment programs -- that have been widely employed in other districts across the country to ensure that all students are challenged and that New York City continues to attract a broad section of students. If New York City's student population becomes too homogeneous, high-quality integrated schools will be even harder to create.**

We also recommend the phase out of G&T programs and exclusionary admissions practices that do not serve a 21st century educational mission and unfairly block educational opportunities for students who are Black, Latinx, low-income and who face other challenges, including learning differences, students who are multi-language learners, in temporary housing or face other structural barriers to the educational opportunities they deserve.

These recommendations seek to build on existing research and encourage effective models of quality education that meet the changing and demanding needs of society. Our focus is on supporting and encouraging interest-based and enrichment models of educating diverse classrooms and schools and recognizing the role students play in fostering vibrant and challenging learning opportunities.

## **0-3 Years**

Within the first 0-3 years of implementation we recommend the introduction of pilots which would provide otherwise underserved communities with enriched educational opportunities with sufficient support to schools to implement them well. We also recommend the elimination of specific exclusionary admissions policies which perpetuate segregation and inequity.

## **Elementary Schools**

Elementary schools serve some of our city's youngest residents. The SDAG has not found research that can justify or support gifted and talented programs for young children in their current form. G&T programs currently present the only opportunity for elementary school enrichment; many students are not afforded this opportunity, and purposefully excluded from G&T. 5, 6, and 7 year olds should not feel as though their path to academic achievement is stifled or predetermined. In addition to the emotional and social risks posed



by the existence of G&T, these programs have been repeatedly proven to enact inequity and have failed to embrace students of all backgrounds. As such, we think elementary school enrichment requires creative alternatives.

G&T programs may refer to citywide G&T schools, district based G&T schools, or rigid tracking that occurs within elementary schools which separates students by “academic ability” into different classrooms (i.e. an elementary school honors program). Citywide and district G&T programs use a standardized test to determine admissions offers, however, district programs also apply admissions priority to those applicants residing in the relevant district. Many schools also offer unofficial G&T classes; they may use the G&T label, or call themselves honors classes or advanced academics classes. These school based programs may use a test, teacher recommendations, or class performance as qualifying measures for their admissions.

- ▶ Because we believe all students deserve to be challenged, we recommend that the DOE resource community school districts to pilot creative, equitable enrichment alternatives to G&T.
  - ▶ Provide resources for community school districts to develop enrichment alternatives with community and stakeholder engagement.
  - ▶ Provide adequate resources for community school districts to implement enrichment alternatives.
  - ▶ Ensure recruitment to enrichment alternatives is inclusive of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students who qualify for free and reduced lunch pricing, and students living in temporary housing.
  - ▶ Measure alternative enrichment program demographics against district demographics.
  - ▶ Track and share publicly the impacts on integrative enrollment of enrichment alternatives.
- ▶ Discontinue the use of the Gifted & Talented admissions test. Institute a moratorium on new Gifted & Talented programs.
- ▶ Allow existing Gifted & Talented programs to continue. Programs will be phased out as students age and will not receive new incoming classes.

- ▶ Eliminate rigid academic tracking in elementary school that results in economic or racial segregation.

## Middle Schools

- ▶ Expand and support the use of inclusionary admissions practices that promote integrated schools and ensure that all students are challenged.
- ▶ Provide resources for community school districts to develop district wide admissions priorities with community and stakeholder engagement. District wide admissions priorities must intend to achieve the integration goals adopted by the DOE.
- ▶ Eliminate the use of exclusionary admissions practices that create segregation by race, class, disability, home language, and academic ability. This includes the exclusionary use of school screens such as grades, test scores, auditions, performance in interviews, behavior, lateness, and attendance.
- ▶ Preserve the use of inclusionary admissions practices that are used to identify and serve vulnerable student populations (i.e. International Schools, dual language programs, Diversity in Admissions).
- ▶ Eliminate the use of “Gifted and Talented” nomenclature in middle school programs, to ensure it matches the values and vision of real integration.

## High Schools

The SDAG strongly asserts the DOE should take swift action to ensure the goals adopted in Making the Grade are met, including the goals set for NYC’s high schools. The SDAG welcomes further engagement with DOE on how to define, measure, create best practices and see measurable progress as it relates to academic diversity.

The SDAG discussed several high school policy solutions, including Teens Take Charge’s Enrollment Equity Plan, which focuses on establishing minimum academic diversity thresholds in the high school matching process. The SDAG encourages the DOE to give the proposal full and serious consideration and to conduct analysis and modeling to fully understand its impact. If the policy is found to be consistent with SDAG’s goals, we support its adoption and implementation.

- ▶ Institute a moratorium on the creation of new screened high schools, unless the admissions process explicitly intends to meet the integration goals adopted by the DOE.
- ▶ Implement new inclusionary admissions practices which ensure all high schools are reflective of their boroughs' racial and socio-economic demographics.
- ▶ Prioritize high performing selective high schools that have an opportunity to serve a more racially representative student population. Require identified high schools to adopt an inclusionary admissions practice that intends to increase racial and socio-economic diversity.
- ▶ Eliminate lateness, attendance, and geographic zones as a criteria for high school admissions and enrollment.
- ▶ Preserve the use of inclusionary admissions practices that are used to identify and serve vulnerable student populations (i.e. International and Transfer High Schools, and Diversity in Admissions).
- ▶ Ensure that all high school admissions criteria are transparent and designed to reduce the racial and socio-economic isolation currently prevalent in most high schools.

## **Systemwide**

- ▶ In accordance with New York State law, the DOE should redraft district lines to support the long-term goal of having all schools reflect the city population and meet the goals accepted in Making the Grade.
- ▶ Commission group to study academic diversity. Develop best practices and identify the supports required for classrooms serving students with diverse levels of academic ability. Build information on how to best support teachers in these classrooms, and prevent tracking within schools. Share the results of the study publicly.
- ▶ Develop a strategy to support students who enter school outside of the standard admissions process (over the counter, off-season admissions) that improves real

integration goals (system wide) and pairs students with schools and programs that meet their specific needs.

- ▶ Provide students with disabilities in Community School Districts 1-32 and District 75 schools who receive busing pursuant to their IEPs with transportation support they need to be able to participate in after-school programs at their schools.
- ▶ Convene a DOE or SDAG sub-committee that includes students with disabilities, along with their parents, educators, and advocates, to develop strategies to promote integration of students with disabilities throughout the school system.

## **District 75**

- ▶ Promote community integration for students with disabilities by prioritizing enrollment of District 75 students in their school district of residence, rather than enrolling by borough.
- ▶ Require the DOE to report annually on the number of District 75 students enrolled outside their school district of residence.

## **3-5 Years**

Within 3-5 years we recommend evaluating system changes against substantive integration measures, and designating accountable structures for creating revisions.

## **Elementary Schools**

- ▶ Evaluate the ways enrichment alternatives are helping or getting in the way of real integration and expand anything that is working.
- ▶ Require districts to develop new strategies to increase participation from underrepresented groups if the enrichment alternatives are found to have a segregating effect.

## Middle Schools

- ▶ Evaluate the integrative impact of inclusionary admissions methods and expand anything that is working.
- ▶ Monitor academic tracking within middle schools. Implement the best practices developed by the academic diversity commission to ensure diverse classrooms within schools.

## High Schools

- ▶ Assess and publicly report on the impacts of the inclusionary admissions practices adopted in years 0 - 3.
- ▶ Redesign the high school admissions process to ensure all high schools are reflective of citywide racial and socio-economic demographics.

### **NYC - High-Performing Non-Screened Schools:**

These schools have relatively high graduation rates, above average college readiness rates, and serve a racially diverse population.

- High School of Economics and Finance
- Harvest Collegiate High School
- Collegiate Institute for Math and Science
- New World High School
- Civic Leadership Academy
- High School for Community Leadership
- Energy Tech High School
- Academy for Careers in Television and Film

Source: NYC DOE, SY 18/19

## Conclusion

*Making the Grade II: New Programs for Better Schools* lays out a roadmap for equitable, integrated, high quality schools. This plan, along with *Making the Grade: The Path to Real Integration and Equity for NYC Public School Students* recognizes schools need improved resources, relationships, representation and restorative justice to achieve real integration. It is essential, therefore, that recommendations across these topic areas are adopted and implemented.

We believe strongly that building a diverse and equitable public education system in New York City requires listening to the voices of the people and communities who have been historically left out of the policy-making process. The School Diversity Advisory Group is proud to have worked with stakeholders across the city to ensure all New York City children receive a quality education.



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