



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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| **Ilene Altschul**
District 3 Community Superintendent

May 14, 2018

The Honorable Richard Carranza
New York City Department of Education
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, N.Y. 10007

Dear Chancellor Carranza,

Two years ago, CEC3 voted on an historical 11-schools rezoning to begin the process to desegregate our schools in District 3. During that process, we stated that the next step was to start a similar effort at our Middle Schools. To truly change our district's inequalities, we must also solve the problems Middle Schools inherit from their elementary peers. We anticipate a holistic district-wide plan, of which the current Middle School Diversity Initiative will be just one part.

The CEC3 Middle School Committee has been working on this issue since the Spring of 2016 when the idea was raised to implement priorities for students with low economic status for our middle schools. However, when Chancellor Farina announced the Department of Education's city-wide Diversity Plan last spring, the discourse increased as we prepared to migrate from our revealed ranking enrollment system to blind ranking for the 2019 school year.

Talking out the implementation of blind admissions led committee members and other stakeholders to the conclusion that blind admissions alone would not go far enough to desegregate our middle schools. It became clear that a district-level filter would be needed to couple with blind ranking in order to ensure that meaningful desegregation would take place.

The CEC3 supports the idea and the goals of the exercise to:

1. Offer a high quality, equitable middle school education via enrollment controls
2. Strive to better match the demographics (academic, economic, and racial) of the district in each middle school
3. Increase the number of high performing middle schools

CEC3 has held twenty-two meetings over the last five months meeting individually with parents, hosting committee meetings, attending individual PTA meetings, and covering the topic at CEC3 meetings to discuss the mechanical specifics. These meetings have looked at mechanisms to increase academic, economic and racial diversity. Much of it has focused specifically on using “floors” for academic diversity to in turn increase economic and racial diversity. Through feedback and discussion, we continue to look at other potential mechanisms to increase diversity.

We have three main concerns about the process:

1. The DOE mandate to change middle school admissions protocols by 2019 has forced our district to develop a plan to best suit our district within this imposed timeframe without having sufficient time to consider a broader and more holistic district-wide diversity plan.
2. To date “the plan” has still not been presented or submitted to the District 3 community in writing. Aside from a couple of spreadsheets and a single simulation, documentation outlining the background and basis for the change, its goals, the details, and implementation plans are completely absent from this nationally reported integration exercise. Unfortunately, the lack of documentation means many families distrust the process and the intended result.
3. After months of discussions, we just learned that the legal department of the DOE had reservations about the use of state test scores as the sole criteria for control in admissions. This has led to an adjustment in the criteria to achieve the consistent goals of more equitable access to middle schools that better reflect D3 demographics. We are extremely concerned about the timing of this last-minute change, and that such an important consideration was only brought up at such a late date. We strive to continue to work with the DOE to develop the best plan to increase diversity in our middle schools.

We believe that the work that we have undertaken in District 3 will have broad implications for the roll out of myriad integration changes.

CEC3 asks for your support in the following ways, so that the execution of our middle school admissions changes will have the greatest chance to succeed:

1. Structure the new admissions portal in a way that requires applicants to rank a minimum of five middle schools. This feature contributes to the goal of increasing the number of high performing middle schools by influencing families to learn about multiple middle schools in District 3. In conjunction with a transparent appeals process that is open to all students, regardless of their first-round match, all District 3 students will have increased opportunity to enroll in one of their top three middle school choices.
2. Take proactive steps to ensure that families without reliable internet access have the means and knowledge to use the online application system.
3. Offer 3-K to D3 Harlem schools for the 2019-2020 school year. One of the main impediments for support of the D3 middle school plan is that students of color from Harlem may select schools lower in the district, exacerbating already dwindling enrollment.
4. Require that District 3 Superintendent unveil a long-term plan for Harlem schools before December 31, 2018. We can no longer continue to react to the forces that continue to drain our Harlem public schools. Harlem D3 schools have lost a full third of their enrollments just in the last 10 years. For a district-wide diversity effort to really work, Harlem middle school options must improve. As you know, improvements at Wadleigh Secondary School are underway, and Wadleigh will be an important

factor in our long-term vision for District 3 middle schools. We also need a stand-alone middle school in Harlem. CEC3 asks for immediate action.

5. Support a moratorium on charter schools in District 3, on new charters, expansions of grades, and other changes, particularly those that take place without the legal scrutiny of a public process, which has become the norm for Success Academy in District 3.
6. Provide District 3 with the resources that are needed to implement this integration plan. The DOE announced an investment of \$23 million for culturally responsive education. We ask that District 3 be provided with an allocation that will assist each of our schools with transitioning student populations. In addition, we ask that District 3 be provided with an allocation for the promotion of its middle schools.
7. District 3 schools need to be provided with specific academic supports (For example: reading intervention specialists, academic coaches, counselors, social workers, guidance personnel, paraprofessionals, librarian/media specialists, fully certified special education teachers, ESL and bilingual instructors) and ongoing professional development in best practices (For example: culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative justice, integration of ELLs into the classroom, etc.) to best serve a wider range of students. This will entail working directly with middle school principals to identify their needs and connecting them to available DOE resources. CEC3 asks for a three-year commitment of the above additional resources to ensure that they have sufficient academic coaching and staff to handle the differentiated academic needs of their student populations. This goes above and beyond the standard financial supports that come from FSF, AIS, and C4E.

Parent leaders, community stakeholders, and elected officials have expressed support for the District 3 Middle Schools Integration effort. CEC3 does not play a statutory role in the decision to implement the controls for the admissions cycle. However, our council has demonstrated its willingness and ability to play a leading role as this exercise takes shape on the ground.

We ask that you begin to dive deeply into the structural configuration of decision making that has generated a 15-year legacy of insufficient community engagement in our school districts. There is much work to do if we are to achieve a delicate balance of centralized control with local governance. Whether it's the limited timeline connected to A-185 zoning changes, the utter disregard for support demonstrated via A-190 proposals, or in this case, the regulation-free but equally important effort to desegregate our schools, we must work together to support public education in New York City. We applaud your initial platform and actions to support District 3 and look forward to working with you and your team on all of the above.

Sincerely,

Community Education Council, District 3

CC:

DOE District 3 Superintendent Ilene Altschul
DOE Deputy Chancellor Elizabeth Rose
DOE Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack
DOE Office of Student Enrollment, Sarah Kleinhandler
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Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A Rosa
NYC Public Advocate Letitia James
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NYS Regents Member, 1st District, Nan Eileen Mead
Panel for Educational Policy Member, Michael Kraft
City Council Member Helen Rosenthal
City Council Member Bill Perkins
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State Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal
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State Assembly Member Inez Dickens
State Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
State Assembly Member Robert J. Rodriguez
State Senator Brian Benjamin
State Senator Marisol Alcantara
State Senator Brad Hoylman
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