



Independent Democratic Conference

New York City Specialized High Schools Diversity Initiative and Gifted and Talented Program Expansion

March 2016



NYC Specialized High School Diversity Initiative & Gifted and Talented Program Expansion

New York City has a number of high-performing Specialized High Schools that provide their students with a world class education and prepare them for access to the best universities and colleges in the country. Entry into these coveted schools is determined by a student's performance on the high stakes Specialized High School Admission Test.

Unfortunately, enrollment at these schools is deeply unequal. While African American and Latino students make up the majority of pupils in the New York City Public School system, they are grossly underrepresented in these High Schools. While some have called for ending the reliance on a single high stakes exam for entry, the IDC believes that the way to correct this imbalance is by making sure that all students in the City have similar access to programs that prepare them to succeed on the exam.

Issue #1: A disproportionately low number of black and Latino students, compared to the total number who are eligible, take the Specialized High School Admissions Test and apply to a Specialized High School

The first hole in the Specialized High School "admission pipeline" is due to the number of black and Latino students that apply to Specialized High Schools (SPHS), compared to the number of white and Asian students. Of the 728,677 rising eighth graders from 2005 to 20013, 13.4 percent were white and 14.2 percent were Asian; meanwhile 31.9 percent were black and 39.7 percent were Latino. However, when looking at the number of students that applied to a SPHS, meaning the total students that sat for the Specialized High School Admission Test and selected a SPHS as one of their high schools of choice, the number of white and Asian students was disproportionately larger than the number of black and Latino students. To be precise, of SPHS applicants, 18 percent were white and 29.3 percent were Asian, meanwhile 27.2 percent were black and 24.8 percent were Latino. In a city with 71.6 percent of eighth grade students classified as black or Latino, it is an injustice that only 52 percent of test takers are black and Latino, while 27.6 percent of eligible eighth grade students are white and Asian yet 47.3 percent are test takers.

Solution: Increase student and family awareness of the Specialized High Schools admissions process among under-represented groups by providing outreach coordinators to Specialized High Schools

While information about SPHSs are available to the public, middle school administrators and teachers play a significant role in encouraging students and their families to engage in the process. In fact, a study conducted at the Institute for Education and Social Policy at New York University found that students of similar academic backgrounds attending different schools had meaningful differences in application rates. Just five percent of all middle schools in New York City accounted for 26 percent of applicants and 15 percent of feeder schools accounted for 53 percent of applications. The study concluded that attending one of the feeder schools did not have a statistical impact on SHSAT performance, but did impact a student's propensity to apply to a SPHS. In other words, there are feeder schools across New York City that attract students that would excel on the SHSAT regardless of the middle school they attend, but attending one of these feeder middle schools increases students' willingness to apply. As a result, the IDC proposes investing \$350,000 to fund an outreach

coordinator at each Specialized High School whose responsibility would be to conduct outreach to underrepresented middle schools and families to increase the number of applicants from those groups.

Issue #2: Elementary and middle schools that serve large populations of low-income students do not offer resources that adequately prepare students for the Specialized High School Admissions Test

The number of students that are offered admission to a SPHS highlights the second hole in the “admissions pipeline”. Tracking the rising eighth grade Asian population in New York City from 2005 to 2013 showed that while Asian-identified students made up 14.2 percent of the total student population, they composed a whopping 54.2 percent of students who received an offer to a SPHS. Similarly, while only 13.4 percent of the rising eighth grade class from 2005 to 2013 was white, 29.1 percent of students who received an admissions offer to a SPHS were white. On the contrary, 31.9 percent and 39.7 percent of rising eighth grade students were black and Latino respectively, yet a dismal 7.4 percent and 8.7 percent of students admitted to a SPHS were black and Latino respectively. In a city whose black and Latino eighth grade student population is approximately 71.9 percent, it is disappointing that only 16.1 percent of students admitted to a SPHS are black and Latino.

Solution #1: Provide test-preparatory programs across all 32 Community School Districts to ensure all students have access to opportunities that will prepare them for the Specialized High School Admissions Test

The second hole in the “admissions pipeline” is related to the admissions requirements students are expected meet, which is inextricably linked to how and where students are prepared to meet them. Students offered admission to a Specialized High School go through extensive test preparation prior to taking the exam, starting as early as 6th grade. According to the study, for many students who were offered admission to one of the SPHSs from 2005 to 2013, test preparation was the norm. In fact, among offers given to students enrolled in the top 30 middle schools that sent students to SPHSs (which make up 56 percent of all offers), 58 percent attended a Citywide or district-based Gifted and Talented (GT) program with a testing requirement, and 29 percent attended a middle school that screens applicants using an exam or other criteria. Only 12 percent of offers were made to students from schools that did not have any screening process in place. To that end, the IDC proposes appropriating \$1 million to the NYC Department of Education to establish test preparatory programs across the 32 Community School Districts.

Solution #2: Implement “Middle School Pipeline” programs at each of the Specialized High Schools

Just this past year, the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation/National Grid STEM program – which provided STEM instruction and test prep to students from underrepresented middle schools in Brooklyn – had significant success helping African-American and Latino students secure spots in NYC Specialized High Schools. This program could be replicated at the other Specialized High Schools. The budget would fund an instructional component as well as a test prep component at each school. Students would have classes during the summer and on Saturdays. The Brooklyn Tech program is for rising seventh graders and begins in the summer between the

sixth and seventh grades, running Monday through Thursday, for five hours per day for five weeks. Students are given breakfast and lunch. The second component is a Saturday test prep and instruction session during the school year for approximately 18 sessions at five hours per session. The cost per year is \$1,280,000, for a total cost over a two year period of \$2,560,000. Each of the Specialized High Schools would have the opportunity to develop its own curriculum streams and determine how their program is managed.

Issue #3: A dearth of Gifted and Talented programs at New York City's elementary and middle schools is contributing to the disproportionately low application and admission rates of Black and Latino students at Specialized High Schools

A close examination of 19 feeder middle schools reveals that all schools screen their applicants, and 42 percent have a middle school GT program. All 19 feeder middle schools are in neighborhoods with average household incomes of approximately \$72,000 and whose population is on average 19 percent black and Latino; strikingly, none are located in neighborhoods close to the federal poverty income level. There were no feeder middle schools from the list of 19 located in the Bronx, which has the highest concentration of students living in poverty.

As high schools feed from middle schools, middle schools feed from elementary schools. A thorough analysis performed looked at the access black and Latino students have to high performing elementary schools with GT programs. Of the 19 elementary schools in Manhattan, only 4 are located in Community School Districts 4, 5 and 6, which have the highest concentrations of black and Latino students on the island. The Bronx has a grand total of 7 GT programs with none located in Community School Districts 7 and 12, which have the highest concentration of poverty in the nation. Brooklyn boasts the largest number of elementary schools with GT programs at 33, but 19 are located in Community School Districts 20, 21, and 22 encompassing mid to high-income communities. A total of 31 GT programs operate in Queens with close to 40 percent located in Community School Districts 25 and 26, which include the neighborhoods of Flushing, Bayside, and Fresh Meadows.

Solution: Increase the number of Gifted and Talented programs available to New York City's elementary and middle school students

While we cannot go back in time to assist students in the current system, we can think of ways to improve the system for future high achieving black and Latino students that walk through the city's elementary and middle schools. It is clear that high performing elementary schools, particularly those with GT programs, serve as feeder schools to high-performing middle schools with rigorous admissions processes, which serve as the best preparation for the SPHS admissions process. New York City has a long way to go to ensure that all students in public schools have equal access to an elementary GT program and high performing middle schools that screen applicants.

In an effort to better serve all students equitably, the IDC proposes a \$2.55 million investment be directed to the New York City Department of Education to increase the number of elementary and middle school gifted and talented programs in low income neighborhoods across the city.