



**Booker T. Washington Middle School 54
Parent Teacher Association**

103 West 107th Street, New York, NY 10025
Tel#: 212-678-2861 Federal Tax ID#: 13-4098842

10 May 2019

State Assembly Education Chair Michael Benedetto
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Re: High School Admissions

Dear Chair Benedetto,

I'm Chris Giordano - PTA Co-President at MS54 Booker T Washington, a District 3 middle school in Manhattan Valley - and Secretary of the District 3 President's Council's Equity Team.

I'm here to tell you about what many families in our community are experiencing in the high school admissions process.

Each year, the majority of District 3's 1400 eighth graders apply to the Specialized High Schools. The fact is, they have no alternatives appropriate to their academic level. And, at the end of the process, about half of those applicants earn offers. But if the mayor's 7% quota proposal passes, that number would plummet to fewer than 100. At Booker T alone, the more than 150 who have typically taken seats would be reduced to 20.

Those District 3 students are in the only Manhattan district without admissions priority to any high schools and are restricted from many of the high-quality college prep schools outside of District 3 due to admissions priorities granted to other districts.

And by college prep high school I mean one of the 5% of New York City public schools that have at least 4 core STEM AP classes. That's 26 in a system of 489 schools of which 6 are SHS. Unfortunately, because of those district priorities, District 3 students have access to only about 21 of those college prep schools.

Everywhere we turn we see an incoherent system or policy that contradicts a position taken by the Mayor or Chancellor.

We hear talk of DA's and the stable marriage problem and top-down rankings and buckets or batches and randomized lotteries.

It makes your head spin if you don't speak the language (DA is Deferred Acceptance algorithm) and the complexity leads to inequities in the system.

We also learn the decision has been made that next year's high school information book will have less information making people rely more on internet searches. Another inequity.

And then we learned our district is strategically targeting 2nd graders with G&T programs as a marketing tool for certain schools.

How do we not conclude that the NYC DOE's byzantine system of choices, screens, preferences and priorities is designed to be a sort of educational redlining that helps those who are equipped to navigate the system?

So, it's no surprise that when admissions issues come up, like this year's at Lab in District 2, distrust for the DOE grows.

This distrust extends to concerns about favoritism and ways people could game the system when it relies on multiple measures like letters of recommendation and grades. The distrust is confirmed when you hear the Mayor's self-appointed School Diversity Advisory Group learned about the Mayor's high school admissions proposal after it had been made public.

You have to admit that there's some irony in the push to solve the education system by getting rid of a test that was proven by the DOE's own study – the Metis report – that the SHSAT directly correlates to strong high school performance.

The Mayor and Chancellor propose a multiple measures admissions system. I submit that unless the Mayor and Chancellor solve for the scarcity in the system and shift their focus to removing barriers those multiple measures will cause admission scandals that will rival what is currently being played out in the elite universities.

In District 3 our CEC unanimously passed a resolution demanding increased transparency, the removal of barriers, and an additional 5,000 college prep seats with a full slate of AP courses.

We are asking the state assembly to support its constituents in putting pressure on the DOE and Mayor to deliver on their promise of "meeting every student where they are, and providing the support, resources, and high expectations for them to achieve at consistently high rates."

Please help us to ensure issues in our education system are not solved with political opportunism.

We appreciate your attention to this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Jerome Kramer and Chris Giordano
MS54 Parent Teacher Association