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Resolution #126
Calling for the DOE to Allow for Formal Parent Feedback to School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) recommendations

Co-sponsored by: Vincent Hom, Edward Irizarry, Maud Maron, Leonard Silverman
7 in favor. 4 against. Passed 9/11/19

Whereas:

1. Meaningful parent participation in the development and implementation of education policy in NYC is a vital component of successful public school education;
2. On August 28th, the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG), a panel created by the Mayor, released its second report *Making the Grade II*¹ recommending elimination of screened schools and programs and the phasing out Gifted and Talented (G&T) Programs in all schools in service of the important goal of increased integration in NYC public schools. The proposed policies, if implemented, would have significant impacts on the schools and students of District 2 and run the very real risk (as SDAG acknowledges) of decreasing the possibilities of integration in all NYC public schools;
3. Both the teachers' union² and the principals' union³ oppose the SDAG recommendations regarding the elimination of screened schools and G&T;

¹ https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1c478c_1d5659bd05494f6d8cb2bbf03fcc95dd.pdf. An earlier report was released in February: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/1c478c_4de7a85cae884c53a8d48750e0858172.pdf

² <https://nypost.com/2019/08/27/city-teachers-union-slams-proposal-to-cut-gifted-school-programs/>

³ [CSA Statement on the School Diversity Advisory Group's Recommendations:](#)

The work of the School Diversity Advisory Group is critically important, and CSA was proud to collaborate with its members and share the priorities and concerns of our city's school leaders. While we agree with some of the group's recommendations and believe that we must examine and improve access to our screened programs, we do not endorse phasing them out. We must all work together to ensure that these and other high-quality programs are available in every community and every school so that all children are guaranteed the opportunity and supports needed to excel.

4. District 2 has 49 schools and 10 pre-K sites. The schools include screened Middle Schools, Middle schools with Academic Progress (AP) and Special Progress (SP) programs, and multiple G&T programs;;
5. The composition of SDAG, determined entirely by the Mayor, did not include significant representation from principals, administrators or teachers from the screened and exam schools of NYC, G&T parents and teachers, advocates for the accelerated learning programs which the group ultimately recommended phasing out of NYC public schools, or STEM educators and professionals who could speak to the necessity of STEM education building blocks in Middle and High School years;
6. The reliance on SDAG by the Department of Education (DOE) to develop and set policy is problematic because the composition of SDAG was imbalanced. SDAG excluded significant stakeholders in NYC’s public schools including, but not limited to, democratically elected parent leaders;
7. The process by which the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) was assembled and by which it reached its conclusions disenfranchised parents from meaningful participation in the vital discussions about how to maintain or improve academic excellence while at the same time addressing equity concerns in our schools;
8. SDAG relied on two members from the Education Council Consortium (ECC) and Chancellor’s Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) for “parent representation.” Neither of these organizations is open to parent participation. These parent representatives purported to speak for all NYC parents in a letter entitled “Letter from NYC Parents” in the first SDAG report in which they write:

“Behind most (if not every) failed education policy lies the absence of parent involvement at the creation stage of the policy. In order to create positive and supportive policies we need parents’ voices – not the formal parent engagement that rubber stamps decisions already made by others, but true involvement in *the planning and the making*. Yet parents have often been left out of the development and implementation of new policies, even those that affect them directly.” (emphasis added)
9. The ECC is a self-established group⁴ which operates without any democratic oversight, in violation of Open Meeting Laws⁵;

Furthermore, it has been our consistent belief that Community Education Councils and all relevant stakeholders should always maintain a prominent say, along with school leaders, in what will work best for their specific communities. We remain willing and ready to partner with all stakeholders for the benefit of our students.

⁴ The ECC is made up of a voluntary assembly of Community Education Council (CEC) members, but unlike CEC members is not governed by State Law and its “elections” are not managed or verified by the DOE.

⁵ ECC regularly meets at the DOE Tweed building with DOE Family and Community Engagement (FACE) staff members in attendance to facilitate and support the ECC agenda. The ECC regularly meets with the NYC School’s Chancellor (every other month) and high-ranking members of his team, such as Linda Chen, Chief Academic Officer and Hydra Mendoza, First Deputy Chancellor, yet parents are never allowed to hear what is said by the Chancellor or his deputies at these closed door meetings

10. The ECC is not mentioned anywhere on the DOE website and a google search of “Education Council Consortium” does not lead to any ECC website at which the average NYC public school parent could learn about the organization or its members who wrote the letter from “NYC Parents” in the SDAG report;
11. By failing to include elected parents from the CECs and other traditional parent leadership bodies which invite parent participation, conduct transparent meetings with public sessions where actual parents are allowed to attend and welcome to speak, and are regulated by the DOE and State Law, SDAG deprived public school parents of a meaningful participation in *the planning and the making* of the policy proposals which they seek to impose on over a million public school families;
12. Community Education Councils (CECs), established in consultation with the Justice Department and governed by State Law and Chancellor’s regulations since 2003, exist to formally include parents in the promotion of student achievement, solicit parent advice on educational policies, approve zoning lines, evaluate superintendents and provide input to the chancellor and Panel for Education Policy (PEP).⁶ CEC elections are conducted by the DOE and all results are public. All CECs are subject to Open Meetings Laws and NYC public school parents are invited to speak at monthly calendar meetings. In addition to the 32 District CECs, there is a Citywide Council for High Schools (CCHS) in each borough, a Citywide Council on English Language Learners (CCELL), a Citywide Council on Special Education (CCSE) and the District 75 Council all of which are subject to Open Meetings Laws and at which parents can be heard on any matter being discussed;
13. CECs consist of 9 elected parents and 2 parents appointed by the Borough President. All 11 members are voting members. Elected CEC members are elected by the relevant district’s PA/PTA President, Secretary and Treasurer who have been elected by their school’s parent body in an open, public, school wide election. The Chancellor meets with each CEC once every two years;
14. In addition to the CECs there are several other parent-involved educational bodies including:

because parents and press are barred and the ECC forbids recording of its meetings. Additionally, ECC advocacy aims to, and successfully impacts State Legislation. For example, the ECC successfully lobbied this year for a change in State law to remove term limits for Borough President appointed CEC members (despite the public voting overwhelmingly in favor of term limits for community boards just last year). Because the ECC conducts closed door meetings public school parents were never notified of the proposed change in law and never had an opportunity to be heard on the proposed change. Because Borough president appointees are not required to be public school parents (in contrast to elected members) the change in State law paves the way for non-parents to be appointed in perpetuity to the councils meant to be a vehicle for parent participation.

⁶ NYS Education Law Section 2590-e and Section 2590-b.

- a. School Leadership Teams (SLTs) at every school. Members consist of parents, teachers and the School Principal. The parents and teachers are elected by their constituent groups. SLTs are subject to Open Meeting Law⁷.
 - b. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)/Parent Associations (PAs) at local schools which are subject to Open Meetings Law.
 - c. Presidents' Council is the District wide council of all elementary and middle school PTA presidents.
 - d. Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) which is the President or one of the Co-Presidents of each District's Presidents' Council and HS Presidents' Council or designee. There is no public session for parents to provide input at CPAC meetings.
 - e. District Leadership Teams (DLTs) which consists of the Community Superintendent or designee, High school superintendent(s) responsible for high schools that are geographically located within the district or designee(s), CSA Representative, UFT Representative, DC 37 Representative. President of the District's Presidents' Council or designee, President of the Borough High School Presidents' Council or designee and Chairperson of the Title I District Parent Advisory Council or designee.
15. District CECs, CCHS, CCELL, CCSE, D75 Council, SLTs, PTAs and PAs, Presidents' Council, and DLTs were not consulted or invited to participate in any way in the development of SDAG's policy recommendations. SDAG held "forums" in each borough that were open to public but the proposals to eliminate screened schools and phase out G&T were never noticed or advertised, nor discussed at the forums;
16. The lack of consultation with the elected Parent Leaders who serve in open, transparent, established DOE parent bodies, where parents are invited to speak and present their concerns, to steer policy direction and develop diversity initiatives subverts the goal of transparent, democratic parent participation and input into education policy;
17. The failure to include and consult important stakeholders in an open transparent process necessitates corrective action⁸. Parents should have an opportunity to be heard and to be meaningfully involved in the planning and making of any policy changes as significant as the ones proposed by SDAG.

Therefore be it Resolved that CECD2 urges the DOE to submit the SDAG recommendations to all District CECs, CCHS, CCELL, CCSE, D75 Council, SLTs, DLTs, PTAs and PAs, Presidents' Council and CPAC and ask for formal parent feedback before accepting or rejecting any further recommendations. All such feedback should be delivered to the DOE after the appropriate parent bodies schedule multiple open sessions at which NYC public school parents

⁷<https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2016/10/25/appeals-court-unanimously-orders-new-york-city-to-open-school-leadership-meetings-to-the-public/>

⁸ A student member on SDAG stepped down because "the process did feel like it was transparent or democratic <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2019/08/27/eliminate-gifted-scrap-middle-school-screening-but-only-study-high-school-admissions-a-gap-in-diversity-recommendations-draws-attention/>

will be notified that the SDAG report and its recommendations are on the agenda and given an opportunity to be heard;

Therefore be it further resolved that CECD2 urges the Mayor reconstitute the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) to reflect the full range and diversity of administrator, teacher and parent viewpoints, in order to develop recommendations that represent the broad coalition of voices needed to effect real change and obtain sustainable Equity and Excellence in our schools.

Therefore be it further resolved that CECD2 urges the New York State Legislature and Governor to establish a citywide CEC akin to the Presidents' Council, in lieu of the ECC, which would bring together CEC leaders and function in an open, transparent manner, be accountable to all parents, and be subject to Open Meetings Law.