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Resolution In Support of Revised Proposals to Increase Diversity at Specialized High Schools and Other Public Schools and the Disclosure of Data Relating to All Proposed Changes to Specialized High School Admissions

Co-Sponsors: Amy Cheung, Maud Maron, John Keller

Whereas:

1. The Mayor's sudden roll out of the plan to change the admissions process for New York City's specialized high schools¹ by amending the section of the New York State Education Law (§2590G, Subdivision 12) that is commonly referred to as the "Hecht-Calandra Act" has resulted in many communities, including many families in District 2, feeling unheard and disregarded;
2. Community Education Council District 2 (CECD2) recognizes and respects the strongly held opinions that accompany this debate on all sides of the discussion;
3. CECD2 acknowledges that New York State has the most racially segregated public schools in the nation based on a report by the UCLA Civil Rights Project²;
4. CECD2 is deeply concerned about the inadequacy and inequality of education in public schools throughout New York City and supports the goal of greater participation by Black and Hispanic students at Specialized High Schools, as well as other, screened high schools;

¹ The New York State Hecht-Calandra Act of 1971 requires that Specialized High School (SHS) admissions are based on ranked-order results from a single admissions test, but also permits an alternative route to admission through the Discovery Program for students who are a) disadvantaged, b) score below the cut-off score, c) are recommended by their local school and d) attend and pass a summer preparatory program. The Mayor's administration has proposed changes to the SHS admissions process by:

- a. Expanding the Discovery Program to 20% of seats at each SHS by fall 2020 and requiring that disadvantaged students also attend a high-poverty school with an Economic Need Index of at least 60%;
- b. Passing New York State legislation to i) replace the Specialized High School Admission Test (SHSAT) with a composite score to be determined by the Chancellor. The current proposed set of criteria is, students' rankings on their 7th Grade New York State Math and ELA exam scores, their course grades, and being ranked "in the top 25% of the city;" and ii) make offers to the top 7% of students from each public middle school.

² "New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future" UCLA Civil Rights Project, March 26, 2014, available at <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity>

5. More than 300 parents, educators and education activists attended a CEC District 2 public meeting on December 3, 2018 where the DOE presented the Mayor’s Proposal, and the overwhelming majority of attendees opposed the current proposal to regarding SHS admissions, as currently proposed;
6. The Specialized High Schools provide an accelerated, STEM focused learning environment, with a unique and praiseworthy record of academic excellence, which the DOE has failed to replicate in other High Schools³;
7. CECD2 insists that the conversation regarding the lack of some forms of diversity in Specialized High Schools includes a discussion of how to improve the K-8 education “pipeline” which currently results in far too many schools students not being grade-level proficient as measured by State Math and ELA exams, such as:
 - a. Starting early and expanding city and state education funding for high poverty schools to provide more resources for 3K, pre-kindergarten, elementary and middle schools, including funding smaller class sizes and expanded special education programs;
 - b. Offering the Gifted and Talented (G&T) test to all pre-K students, expanding G&T programs that start in third grade and reevaluating the 2006 decision to base admissions on a single test that has resulted in the percentage of minority children in these programs to plummet⁴;
 - c. Improving instruction in middle schools, and increasing opportunity for students of color, of low income, and of immigrant parents;
 - d. Providing effective outreach for students applying to high school beyond distributing a 400-page high school directory and requiring attendance at high school fairs, including language-accessible and culturally appropriate outreach to help ensure that families are not only informed about high school options, but that they also feel secure about the options that best meet the needs of their children, given that there are more than 700 public high school programs in New York City and 70 public high schools in District 2;
8. CECD2 asks that the Chancellor and Mayor address the fact that the current proposal reduces Asian enrollment in the SHSs by half⁵ and offer specific, detailed alternatives for where those students, excluded under the terms of the Mayor’s plan, can receive a comparable public high school education;
9. CECD2 notes that SHSs are currently some of the most gender balanced of NYC’s academically accelerated schools: 44% girls to 56% boys in a system that is 52% boys while under the Mayor’s plan that gender ratio would explode to 38% boys to

³ *The SHSAT—Disparities Impacting Diversity, Opportunity and Achievement in NYC Public Schools: A Comprehensive Action Plan for Change*, October 2018 contains a detailed and thorough discussion of the many considerations that should be included in any proposed changes to SHS admissions processes.

⁴ CEC16 worked for years to establish a G&T program in Bedford Stuyvesant:
<https://www.bkreader.com/2016/09/09/councilmember-cornegy-brings-gifted-talented-program-back-bed-stuy/>
http://www.cec16.org/uploads/7/0/3/3/70334807/cec_16_letter_of_support_for_g_t_fall_2016-.pdf

⁵ <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/admissions-overhaul-simulating-the-outcome-under-the-mayors-plan-for-admissions-to-the-citys-specialized-high-schools.html>

62% girls echoing the enormous gender disparity at many selective screened schools⁶ that are currently gender imbalanced in favor of girls. The resulting harm to the hundreds of boys who will be shut out of accelerated high school education options must be understood, analyzed and addressed by the Mayor’s administration, and the DOE Office of Enrollment, before implementing any plan, which would have such a significant and negative effect on the access to accelerated education opportunities for boys;

10. The Department of Education (DOE) did not meaningfully engage families and students who would be affected, including parent leaders, educators, researchers and other stakeholders in developing any proposals for changing the system;
11. The DOE has not publicly identified nor provided data or details about: how it will implement the expansion of the Discovery Program; how many low-income children will be excluded from the program based on the added criteria of attending a school with an Economic Needs Index (ENI) greater than 60%, how it will change the criteria for making SHS offers, in particular, by comparing course grades from every NYC middle school, explaining the plan to limit offers to students ranked “in the top 25% of the city”, determining how qualified (top 7%) students will be assigned to the 8 SHSs (will it be choice-based, by composite score, school rank or lottery?) and explaining the impact on offers to new or non-public school students;
12. The Mayor’s Proposal to change SHS admissions will reduce the number of District 2 students who attend SHSs and create greater demand for non-specialized high schools in District 2. Approximately 19% of District 2 middle school students attend SHSs and a drop to 7% would reduce seats for District 2 students by 177, excluding offers made to non-public school students. The DOE has not announced any plans to increase capacity at either SHSs or District 2 high schools; The D2 public school decreases would be as follows:

a. The D2 public school decreases would be as follows:

District 2 Middle School	SHS Acceptances in 2017-2018	Capped acceptances under Mayor’s proposal
NYC LAB MS	113	13
Robert F. Wagner MS	77	30
East Side MS	75	11
Salk School of Science	70	9
Simon Baruch MS	53	27
Battery Park City School	20	6
PS126	18	8
Clinton School	17	7

⁶ For example Bard Early College High School (63% female/37% male); Eleanor Roosevelt “ELRO” (61% female/39% male) Beacon (63% female/37% male) Clinton (68% female to 32% male)

School of the Future	15	7
Spruce	10	4
ICE	8	5

13. Only 5% of New York City High Schools (26 out of 489-including SHSs) offer at least 4 of the following STEM focused classes (AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Physics, AP Calculus AB and AP Calculus BC) and if the Mayor’s contention that the top 25% of New York City’s eighth graders in the City are well prepared for SHS curricula then NYC DOE must immediately increase the number of SHS or STEM focussed High Schools with equivalent curricula to accomodate both the ability and demand for such schools.

Therefore, be it resolved that the CECD2 does not support changing Hecht-Calandra Act as it is currently written, unless and until inclusive, meaningful community engagement with all affected communities is sought, listened to, and the concerns raised regarding the current proposal have been addressed;

Therefore, be it further resolved that CECD2 recommends that the Mayor and Chancellor engage in an inclusive, well-publicized and public process to devleop a revised proposal to increase diversity while maintaining the academic excellence that has characterized the SHSs of New York City;

Therefore, be it further resolved that CECD2 objects to the revised Discovery Program requirement that eligible applicants must attend a school with an Economic Need Index of at least 60% because this will reduce the number of low income students eligible to participate;

Therefore, be it further resolved that before New York State and New York City change Specialized High School admissions, CECD2 requests public access to all DOE data that are relevant to understanding the proposed changes to Specialized High School admissions; and seeks a comprehensive Review and Report of the impact of the Mayor’s Proposal on middle school and non-specialized high school students and families in District 2 and across the city, including potential unintended consequences, both positive and negative; and,

Therefore, be it further resolved that CECD2 urges the Department of Education to immediately pursue additional initiatives (outlined in Whereas #7 above) to increase diversity in New York City public schools;

Therefore, be it further resolved that CECD2 urges the Mayor and the DOE to immediately explore the creation and establishment of additional Specialized High Schools.