

Introduction

MS54 is hosting this district-wide informational session, to share information about proposed changes to specialized high school admissions. All presentations and more will be available at ms54.org

The city has eight specialized high schools that have heretofore admitted students based on a single test: the SHSAT. These schools are Bronx Science, Brooklyn Latin, Brooklyn Tech, HS for Math Science & Engineering at City College, HS of American Studies at Lehman College, Queens HS for Science at York College, Staten Island Tech, and Stuyvesant. (*The 9th specialized high school, LaGuardia, admits based on auditions/portfolios, and will continue to do so.*)

With goals to diversify SHS populations and draw more representative students from across the city, there is a proposal to phase-out the SHSAT as a basis for admission. New York State Law currently requires the SHSAT as the sole criterion for admission to the SHS. In order for any of these changes to go into effect, the New York State legislature must vote to change state law. If the proposal goes through, current 7th graders are likely to be the first class impacted.

Legislators and influencers were invited to share their positions. Representatives from the Manhattan Borough President's Office, the Community Education Council for District 3 (CEC3), and CoalitionEDU will be participating; the DOE could not attend.

Other attendees of note include:

- Mark Levine, NYC Council Member, 7th District (representing Washington/Hamilton/Morningside Heights, Manhattan Valley, and the UWS). He supports the CEC, is opposed to prioritized districts for HS admissions, and is upset that none of the citywide CEC or education/diversity task forces were consulted by the DOE in this process.
- Ilene Altschul, NYC DOE D3 Elementary & Middle School Superintendent. She was not part of the proposal or any high school processes, but is attending because it affects her D3 elementary and middle school community.

DETAILS OF NYC DOE'S PROPOSAL**Presentation: [Specialized High Schools Proposal – Making Admissions to the SHS More Equitable for All Students](#)**

1. Expand the current *Discovery* program (*a summer enrichment program for disadvantaged students attending high-poverty schools and scoring right below the SHSAT cutoff score*) to 20% of seats in each school
2. Phase-out SHSAT so it is eliminated after a two-year period, and instead make admissions offers....
 - YEAR 1: First, to top 3% of students from each MS in the city (~25% of seats), then through SHSAT (~75%)
 - YEAR 2: First, to top 5% of students from each MS (~50% of seats), then through SHSAT (~50%)
 - YEAR 3: First, to top 7% of students from each MS (~90%), then through lottery to new/non-public school applicants with averages over 93% (A-)

PANELIST PRESENTATIONS

- David Lee, Founder of CoalitionEDU
- Patrick Joseph, Senior Education Analyst to Manhattan Borough President Brewer
- Kim Watkins, President of CEC3

Presentation by David Lee, CoalitionEDU

Against the Proposal, Advocate of the SHSAT

Formed CoalitionEDU, a network of alumni/students/parents with a goal to ensure that the community at large is educated on the extensive issues that plague the New York City Public Schools, while protecting the SHSAT-only admissions policy for Specialized High Schools.

Sees the proposal as inequitable, and an “asian-american exclusion act” due to projected reductions in Asian student admissions (from current ~50% to proposed ~30%), particularly to Korean-speaking families (which will reduce ~75%).

Sees the SHSAT as validated, unbiased (doesn't look at race/gender/income as admission criteria), and proven (since SHSAT, specialized high schools have been majority-minority)

Acknowledges a dip in minority participation starting in 1995, but argues this isn't related to SHSAT but the fact that NYC DOE did away with tracks and honors programs, impacting primarily black and Hispanic high-performers, who then moved out of the public schools to parochial and charter schools.

Advocates: reinserting honors in every grade and every school; more SHS seats; after-school academies for advancement in communities based on economic need index – mandating they take the SHSAT; and recognition of need for advanced programming instead of homogenization

Presentation by Patrick Joseph, Manhattan Bureau President's Office

Former teacher, taught in Bronx, UWS, Queens...

He is against the Mayor's proposal (as is Gale Brewer)

Main points:

- We live in a segregated city, and we have to do something about that. The 2016 UCLA report revealed that NYC is one of the most segregated cities in the country – we want to de-segregate city schools. Black and latinx are NOT minorities here in NYC.
- There are inequities in admissions (60% of students are black or latinx, but only 10% get offers from specialized high schools).

Sees arguments for and against SHSAT, but every single testing instrument is subjective and includes biases.

Feels the proposal will have a very small impact on desegregation at large (why put so much energy here on 2% of students, instead of fixing the broken system and earlier in the process)

Recommended reading: [the report from Sean Corcoran \(IESP\) and Christine Baker-Smith \(RANYCS\)](#)

2017 HS Data from Kim Watkins/CEC3

CEC3 is one of the 32 Community Education Councils (CECs) in New York City. CEC3 represents Community School District 3, which includes public elementary and middle schools. CEC 3 holds monthly meetings, and contributes to shaping educational policy in District 3.

Another meeting Tuesday, December 12, 2018, 6:30pm at PS 199 to discuss actions CEC is taking in response to this proposal

On top of NYC being one of the most segregated cities, D3 is the most segregated district in NYC

Some recent CECS priorities/actions:

- CEC wants to remove district priorities that many HS's have. There are NO D3 high schools, while other districts are prioritized for high school admission (namely, D2). Want to leverage that even the chancellor has said there should not be priorities for certain districts in HS admissions.
- Outreach to the other districts; none were consulted on the proposal before it was rolled out.
- Investigation into the 30 assembly members who were sponsors of the proposal. 8 don't even live in NYC; the two assembly members that overlap D3 were NOT contacted or consulted before/during/after the proposal; continuing to look into who these people are and why they support this.

CEC IS TAKING YOUR FEEDBACK. We are all here to try to lean in on details to help the District move forward. It will be a lot of work; please get involved. Email CEC3@schools.nyc.gov.

Q&A

Pre-submitted questions:

1. Why are disadvantaged students who do not attend a high poverty school excluded from this program?

David Lee: the mayor's diversity initiative is looking for a particular demographic, skipping over Title 1 students (primarily Asian) to get them. He hasn't put out his discovery plan yet, because he's looking at the data and will fix it to get the population that he wants.

Kim Watkins: the economic needs index is being used by school versus by individual because not all individuals fill out the forms. It's "easier" to use a school-wide index.

2. How is it "equity" if a student in the 25th percentile (ranked 275,000 out of 1,100,000) gets into a SHS but a low income/ELL student in a non-qualifying school who ranked 275 on the SHSAT does not?

*Patrick Joseph: want to emphasize that the mayor's plan (which I do NOT support) is still skimming the cream of our MS's – taking the best of the MS's and putting them into SHS. There is an over-estimation of how many people will do poorly in the SHSs – if they're in the top of their schools, they will do fine in SHS. We don't need the **absolute** best and brightest there, and, for example, some kids with autism/hyperactivity/etc. would do just fine....*

3. The summer intensive DREAM program excludes D3. How can we help under-represented D3 students to have more access?

Superintendent Ilene Altschul: There is some availability to our students to prepare them to take the test, including training and test-taking inside the school. Looking into the DREAM program.

4. Is there data on who has been in the Discovery program in recent years and their success rates?

David Lee: Brooklyn Tech was the only school that had the Discovery program – highly successful because it takes people RIGHT BELOW the cut-off (3-5%)

5. As a lifelong New Yorker and public-school student with family members who have attended these schools back to the late 1940s, I know the historical makeup of these schools have been non-wealthy 1st generation immigrants whose parents are extremely involved in their child's education. Why aren't we creating a strong program around parent involvement?

Kim Watkins: we are working very hard on parental involvement. Agree the city as a whole has a lot of work to do in this area. There is a disparity across districts in both involvement and representations – e.g. a district with 64,000 students and 11 parents on a council sits alongside a district with 6,000 students with the same number of parental representation. Generally speaking, participating parents tend to be rich and white. We need to involve others...

6. If my kid wants to be on a path toward a STEM career, which high schools in District 3 can they go to for the levels of math or science, like calculus or AP Bio, they need to advance those studies in college?

There isn't one. Hunter Science is an option, but it's not D3 and does not give priority to D3. This is a problem that CEC3 and Councilman Mark Levine want to address.

7. What will be done with the students enrolled in middle school G&T programs, as part of the current proposal? Encouraging kids, and their parents, to enroll in ultra-competitive schools such as the citywide G&T's (where one needs to score 97% or above and often 99% is required) and then shutting the SHS door to most of them is not a reasonable or humane solution.

Superintendent Ilene Altschul: there will likely be a shift of these high performing students to other high schools across the city. Problem: 1. There are no high schools with D3 priorities, and 2. The other districts DO get priorities in many high schools.

Questions from the floor:

Q: In DOE model, did they include the amount of white and Asian flight that will occur because they cannot get their kids into a school because of these changes?

(No answer)

Q: We need to do something but the proposal goes too far, and parents need to come behind a proposal that compromises – for example, take 25% of the seats for top performers across all middle schools, and fill the remaining 75% by using the SHSAT; compensate for SHSAT seat losses by opening new specialized high schools (using space that is opened up by closing down the failing schools).

(No answer)

Q: Why should we believe the real purpose of this plan is to FIX the SHS rather than destroy them so they can be shut down?

(No answer)

Q: Why are minorities not as represented in SHS? Do they not take the test? Not do as well? Are they accepted and don't go? If we don't know this *why*, it's hard to trust the plan. The solution isn't to force the system into diversity. If we know *why*, will this plan get to those causes?

Patrick Joseph: *It's a great question. Sure, some are accepted and don't come (I was one of those, accepted but went elsewhere). The bigger issue is that specific groups of people have been suppressed for so long – the vestiges of slavery are pervasive (recommended read: The Color of Law – segregation was legislated into our country, it didn't just happen). Which groups are excluded from economic opportunity and move to ghettos? Which are persecuted by police? Etc. Black and latinx fall in the center of these.*

Schools are sites of social reproduction: what you see outside of school, is what you get in school. Students bring baggage with them into school. I grew up in the projects with a crack epidemic and a lot of arrests, and I experienced a lot of trauma that will always be there. We have to look at the social barriers we put up to people, including Asian families.

Regarding whether some people just work harder: there is something called a "Cool Pose". Some (fake) scientists suggested black and latinx kids don't want to work as hard because it's not seen as "cool" and not valued in their cultures. This was debunked. Race does not determine this – every parent wants their kids to do well in school.

There is an idea that school is a great equalizer – if you do well, things will work out. BUT, schools are sites of social reproduction, and students who grow up in impoverished areas can have the same stress levels as soldiers/veterans, which makes it more difficult to out-perform.

Recommended viewing: [Tested](#), a documentary about testing into SHS

David Lee: *I learned today that it is believed "those who have more should give to those who have less" – but my fear is that someone is keeping a scorecard, and who is that? The mayor or chancellor? Are they deciding who "has too much" and have to have less now? Greatest fear is this contest, for Asian-Americans in particular, because they aren't as represented in government, will steal their opportunities away under the guise of fairness.*

Q: We are losing site of the fact that integrated schools benefit all children. If the Asian community is a minority community, why are we preaching this doom and gloom? If these minority students were to be accepted at the SHS they would be ignored and socially unaccepted... this is not true. The adults need to look at this as a human problem, and we need to look at integration as a benefit instead of a competition.

(No answer)