

# The New York Times

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## LETTERS

# Admission to New York City's Elite High Schools

June 26, 2018

### To the Editor:

Re "Integrate New York's Best Schools" (editorial, June 25):

Non-educators just don't get it. We are all dismayed by the lack of diversity in the specialized high schools, but remedial courses for ill-prepared students are not the answer.

The real question is, Can we increase the number of underrepresented minorities in the specialized schools *without* changing the admission process, which has been the key to the schools' success for generations?

One must look at the big picture. What is the root cause of the lack of diversity in the specialized high schools? Any honest appraisal would point to the lack of preparation students receive in grades K-8.

The city needs to invest more to ensure the presence of top-notch teachers in the lower grades, and to create more gifted programs once the most capable students are identified.

The city needs to offer prep courses for those who can't afford the private ones. Better communication regarding the specialized schools is also needed. Many middle-school parents aren't properly informed, and so their children never sit for the exam.

We must not be fooled into diverting our attention from the root causes of the underrepresentation of blacks and Latinos. The real inequity lies in the deficient preparation that some students receive, and that is where our efforts and finances should be directed.

STANLEY BLUMENSTEIN  
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*The writer is an alumnus and a former principal of the Bronx High School of Science.*

**To the Editor:**

As New York City schools chancellor from 2000 to 2002, I opened specialized high schools in areas where my mother warned me that there wouldn't be much demand. Like the High School for Math, Science and Engineering in Harlem, and the High School of American Studies at Lehman College in the north Bronx.

For about a dozen years they were great schools, serving almost any student who wanted to apply. Then they were, in effect, ousted. A book about their success was written, and the floodgate of applications opened.

While it was gratifying to see how much they were appreciated, their popularity made it hard for low-income students from those very neighborhoods to get in.

The Asian-American community in New York is famous for diligence in preparing for entrance tests. Instead of complaining about their disproportionate presence in the best city schools, we need to offer every child the same kind of training and encouragement.

HAROLD O. LEVY, NEW YORK

**To the Editor:**

If Mayor Bill de Blasio had begun upon election to build an enriched educational pipeline for high-potential students in underrepresented communities, we would be five years into ameliorating the unacceptable lack of diversity in specialized high schools.

Rather than improving educational opportunity for all high-potential students before the eighth grade, the mayor and Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza are scapegoating the admissions test.

The proposal pits poor working-class families against one another based on race and ethnicity. Introducing subjectivity and favoritism, while barring equal access for religious and private-school children who seek admission to the specialized high schools, furthers divisions.

As recently as 1989, a majority of Brooklyn Tech students were black and Latino, based on the test. The city has since dismantled enhanced academics in elementary grades and middle schools in underrepresented communities.

We support efforts to improve diversity: free test prep, a pre-Specialized High School Admissions Test in sixth grade, and an expanding Discovery program to help black and Latino students who just miss the test cutoff gain admission.

We know that students from every community can succeed if the city invests in earlier identification of high-potential students, and prepares them for the test and the schools' STEM-based education. We do not hear this from the mayor or the chancellor.

LARRY CARY, NEW YORK

*The writer is president of the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation.*