

Parents rip DOE's elite-HS admit plan



CLASS ACTION: A parent on Monday night wants gifted and talented programs — one of many complaints during a raucous Manhattan meeting on changes to high-school admissions.

GETTING TESTY

By SELIM ALGAR
Education Reporter

A crowd of more than 350 Manhattan parents jeered a Department of Education official over a proposed admissions overhaul at the city's elite high schools.

The DOE dispatched a senior official for the first time to one of its citywide presentations on the controversial plan, which aims to increase black and Latino enrollment at the primarily Asian and white schools by scrapping a single-test-score admission system.

The move left the official, Deputy Chancellor Josh Wallack, walking into the lion's den Monday night.

Speaking at a meeting of Community Education Council District 2, a parental advisory group in one of the city's top-performing districts, Wallack characterized the single test as a needless educational barricade.

He said the new admissions proposal — in which the top 7 percent of students in each middle school will get into the elite schools instead of the top scorers on tests citywide — would “give us

the best picture of the talent that is out there in the city and that can succeed at the specialized high schools.”

The department is, trying “to find a way that is objective and transparent, that gives us more information about a way a student has performed, that we believe is better and fairer,” Wallack said.

The backlash began as soon as he finished his opening remarks at the Clinton School on East 15th Street.

More than 30 parents lined up to denounce his department's proposal as racist, deluded and divisive — and fueled by political rather than pedagogical reasons.

“It's a political bill that's being sold on dishonest, false and even racist messaging,” raged a parent of two Stuyvesant HS students. “Our school is not segregated. It's a loaded and racist term that they use. Shame on the mayor, the chancellor, and anyone at the DOE and any politician that engages in this kind of rhetoric.”

Several Asian speakers highlighted the toll the new plan would exact on their community.

Asian kids — including Chinese,

Korean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani students — make up roughly 60 percent of the current population at the city's eight specialized high schools. At the most prestigious campuses, such as Stuyvesant HS and Bronx Science, their numbers are even higher.

“This proposal is nothing about education and all about division,” parent Wai Wah Chin said.

Other speakers from District 2, which extends from the Upper East Side to Tribeca, predicted that the changes would lead to discord in the classroom.

They argued that black and Latino students admitted through modified entrance requirements would inevitably become stigmatized — and suffer for it.

“If this proposal is enacted, we are going to increase the racism and prejudice of our kids,” said NYU sociology professor and parent Jonathan Haidt.

Other parents pushed back at City Hall's framing of the dispute as a confrontation between wealthy parents who can afford test-prep classes and those from less affluent demographics.

“My parents were immigrants,”

said one speaker. “They were poor. They were illiterate. So the advantages we had were no advantages. We knew how to work, how to study. And through studying, we achieved.”

Others accused the DOE of purposefully using the specialized-school plan to divert attention from larger systemic failures at middle schools in primarily black and Latino areas.

“The administration is trying to find a cheap fix for a big problem,” one speaker argued.

But Wallack did find at least one ally in the crowd.

“New York City public schools are riddled with practices that favor some children and leave others out in the cold,” the mom said.

“For all of us who have been thinking about ‘what's good for my kid,’ we need to start thinking about what's good for our kids and our community as a whole.”

The elite schools also include Brooklyn Tech, Staten Island Tech, HS of American Studies (Bronx), HS of Mathematics, Science and Engineering (Manhattan), the Brooklyn Latin School and Queens HS for the Sciences,