



New York City Residents Alliance (NYCRA)

May 8, 2021

To: NY State Senators

Re: NY State Senate Bill S3087

We are aware of a bill in the NY State Senate (S3087) which asks to repeal the Hecht-Calandra law mandating that the specialized high schools in New York City use the SHSAT admissions test as sole criterion for admission. This test has allowed some of the brightest students in New York City with high proficiency in Math and English Language Arts to attain a quality education at these STEM focused high schools. Many of these students are Asian American immigrants and are not well off yet the reputation of these public high schools offering rigorous coursework are why Asian American immigrants who cannot afford private school apply to take the test and flock to the STEM high schools.

On Thursday 4/29/2021, the SHSAT results were released to families and the results, sorted by race and ethnicity, were immediately attacked in the news. The results were attacked as being unfair to Black and Hispanic students. Even the NYC Department of Education Chancellor Meisha Porter, attacked the results as "unacceptable" as unfair to "all our children." Not a word of congratulations to the students who were offered seats based on their SHSAT scores, only condemnation. And as almost 54% of offers went to Asian American students, how are we, as parents, to respond to such implied animus against our children? We view it as judgemental and discriminatory, especially in light of the many reported anti-Asian attacks on Asian American men, women, children and seniors. We are outraged at yet another form of attack on us - that our children do not merit seats at top competitive schools, that we are forever foreigners living in these United States.

There were 23,528 applicants yet only 4,262 offers were made to the specialized high schools and because there are too few seats available, the competition for entry is fierce. We understand this and exhort our children to do better and sacrifice much for their education. The SHSAT is not racist. It does not ask your race. The test is color blind and that there are so few Black and Hispanic students who score high enough to get an offer is an indictment of the quality of education they have received from the Department of Education. There are many NYC public schools in underserved districts which do not have Gifted & Talented programs, an educational opportunity for students to do accelerated coursework in elementary and middle schools. This is a travesty and a failure on the part of the city. We believe increasing access to such quality programs/curriculum would enable more Black and Hispanic students the opportunity to prepare themselves for the rigor of the SHSAT schools.

Additionally, many DOE public schools are not doing a great job of educating children. In 2019, citywide basic proficiency in ELA was just 47.4% and Math was just 45.6%. Less than half of all NYC public school children are grade proficient in the subjects of ELA and Math; this is atrocious. NYC DOE must do better. As taxpaying residents and voters, we expect our taxes to provide excellent schools for all children and hope that the legislators will join us to demand the NYC DOE focus on working to meet students' educational needs and fix K-8.

We hope that Asian Americans will be treated fairly in a merit-based education system. Please do not pass this bill. Please extend the courtesy of speaking with us via a Zoom meeting.

Thank you.

Donghui Zang, NYCRA President