

May 10, 2019

An Open Letter to New York City and New York State Elected Officials:

As parent leaders of elementary and middle school communities throughout New York City, we are writing to express our strenuous opposition to Mayor de Blasio's proposed plan to change the admissions process for specialized high schools, and to ask for your support. The mayor's plan, as set forth in Bill S1415 & A2173, is both ill-conceived and fails to address the issues we believe are truly problematic regarding the city's specialized high schools. We are also deeply concerned that the mayor's rollout of the plan deprived our constituent communities of meaningful opportunities for constructive engagement with, and representation regarding, changes that would so fundamentally impact our children.

We, along with our school communities, whole-heartedly support the goal of advancing equity by expanding diversity at the specialized high schools. However, the currently proposed admissions process changes do nothing to address the inherent, systemic failures by the Department of Education (DOE) to provide opportunities for students from under-served communities to gain admission and thrive at these premier institutions. Equitable reform and increased diversity can only be achieved by adequately addressing the current educational deficiencies in those areas at the elementary and middle school levels.

Therefore, we believe any genuine solution requires substantial funding to establish, support and expand beneficial programs and opportunities in such lower-grade schools. We call upon you, as an elected official, to ask that the mayor and DOE take positive steps to fund and establish enrichment and acceleration programs in all these schools across the city so that all students, in every district and from all backgrounds, are properly prepared to gain admission to specialized high schools.

Any specialized high school admissions processes must be meritocratic, with standards that are transparent and incorruptible. The chancellor should not be authorized—as the proposed bill intends—to assign different weights to different measures that are arbitrary, inconsistent, vulnerable to varied implicit biases, and easily manipulated to achieve goals other than that of identifying academically accelerated students.

We also firmly believe that the specialized high schools serve students by providing them with exceptional opportunities that are currently unavailable in other schools. Given the ever-expanding population of our city, it is imperative that the DOE explore ways to develop and expand the number of available high school seats, at the academic level of the specialized high schools, available to qualified students. We therefore request your help in seeking public funding for more specialized and academically rigorous high schools. If New York City is to retain its status as a global leader throughout the 21st century, it is imperative that access to high-quality secondary education be expanded.

As parent leaders, we deplore the fact that no standardized process currently exists to ensure that proposals such as Bill S1415 & A2173 are subject to the proper public vetting and scrutiny that they deserve. We ask for your support in requiring that the DOE establish a uniform process that sets forth mandated standards including firm timelines to ensure that schools, parents, District President's Councils and Community Education Councils are provided with adequate notice of any proposed changes and have reasonable amount of time and a proper forum in which to respond or comment. The secretive and presumptive way that the DOE has sought to roll out the mayor's current plan runs counter to the very concept of democracy. As parent leaders, we have determined through school surveys and open votes that our parents overwhelmingly oppose this plan; and many of our parents have expressed their frustration at not having a proper forum in which to express their absolute rejection of the plan as written. We also lack any method by which to compel the Office of Student Enrollment to conduct a comprehensive review of, and to report on, the impact the proposed bill would have on middle-school students and families across the city.

We therefore ask that you oppose Bill S1415 & A2173. The admissions process to specialized high schools should remain meritocratic and not be changed until a formalized process for community input—one that fully engages school teachers, administrators, students and families from all New York City school districts and the specialized high schools—is clearly established, well-publicized and thoroughly implemented. Diversity and equity will not be achieved by pursuing the admissions-process changes the mayor has proposed. True equity and diversity will only be possible when children from under-served communities are finally provided with the quality education, resources and tools that they need to gain admission and succeed at these academically rigorous, selective schools.

Sincerely,

**NYC Lab Middle School
Parents' Association**



**Manhattan New School
PS 290
Parents' Association**



**Salk
Parents' Association**



**East Side Middle School
Parents' Association**

PS 130

**Hernando De Soto
Parents' Association**



**The Christa McAuliffe
Intermediate School
PTO, Inc**



**Booker T. Washington
Middle School
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