

# Reducing Segregation: What Could the Mayor Do?

Norm Fruchter &  
Christina Mokhtar-Ross

In his final State of the City speech, Mayor de Blasio pledged to reduce the school system's segregation by funding new district-level diversity plans and eliminating district priorities for high school admissions. But these actions will not significantly erode the intense segregation of the city's high schools.

Early in his first term, the mayor proposed abolishing the specialized high school test by changing the Hecht-Calandra Act, the state law passed in 1972 that established a test in math and science as the sole criterion for admission to Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech high schools, the original three highly segregated specialized schools. (The School of Performing Arts and The High School of Music & Art, consolidated in 1984 into LaGuardia High School, were also targeted by Hecht-Calandra, but admission was by audition and portfolio rather than by testing.) In the first decade of this century, the Bloomberg administration added five additional high schools to the specialized, test-entry category.

According to the Department of Education's Demographic Snapshot data, the student composition of the city school system for the 2019-20 school year is 16% Asian, 25% Black, 41% Latinx, and 15% White. Below are the current demographics of the original three specialized high schools the Hecht-Calandra Act designated and the five additional schools the Bloomberg regime added to that category.

TABLE 1.  
**DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE ORIGINAL THREE SPECIALIZED HIGH SCHOOLS**

School	Latinx (%)	Black (%)	Asian (%)	White (%)
Stuyvesant High School	3	1	72	19
The Bronx High School of Science	7	3	64	23
Brooklyn Technical High School	7	6	61	25
Queens High School for the Sciences at York College	4	4	83	4
Staten Island Technical High School	4	0	53	42
The Brooklyn Latin School	11	12	54	14
High School of American Studies at Lehman College	14	5	21	54
High School for Mathematics, Science and Engineering	17	8	30	29

Source: NYC DOE. Demographic Snapshot, SY 2019-20

Only the mandate of a former mayor and chancellor, rather than state law, requires these five high schools to continue to admit their students solely by test results. Any mayor and chancellor can simply change the schools' entry requirements and thereby reduce their segregated enrollment. Why Mayor de Blasio has not done this is an enduring mystery.

If the mayor were to remove the five high schools listed above from the group of specialized high schools, how should students applying to those schools be admitted in a way that reduces the extent of segregation? Let's extend the question. For demonstration purposes, we have constructed two lists of the fifty least diverse NYC high schools in 2019-20. The first list, the fifty schools with the highest percentages of White and Asian students and consequently the lowest percentages of Black and Latinx students, is below. (We will consider the second list, the fifty high schools with the highest percentages of Black and Latinx students and conversely the lowest percentage of White and

Asian students, in Part II of this blog). The exclusionary demographics of the schools on both lists are mostly determined by a series of entry requirements, usually called screens, that require middle schools to list their applicants' class grades, test score performance, and attendance records.

TABLE 2.  
**50 LEAST DIVERSE HIGH SCHOOLS - MOST WHITE AND ASIAN STUDENTS (2019-20)**

School	White and Asian Students (%)
High School for Dual Language and Asian Studies	95
Staten Island Technical High School	94
Stuyvesant High School	91
The Bronx High School of Science	87
Queens High School for the Sciences at York College	87
Tottenville High School	86
Brooklyn Technical High School	85
Leon M. Goldstein High School for the Sciences	83
Eleanor Roosevelt High School	81
Millennium High School	80
N.Y.C. Lab School for Collaborative Studies	78
Baruch College Campus High School	77
High School of American Studies at Lehman College	75
Townsend Harris High School	74
Francis Lewis High School	73
CSI High School for International Studies	69
The Brooklyn Latin School	68
James Madison High School	67
Rachel Carson High School for Coastal Studies	66
Bard High School Early College Queens	65
Bard High School Early College	64
New Utrecht High School	64
Fort Hamilton High School	64
Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts	63
New Dorp High School	62
Queens High School for Language Studies	61
Millennium Brooklyn High School	61
Susan E. Wagner High School	60
Academy of American Studies	60
High School for Mathematics, Science and Engineering	59
Gaynor McCown Expeditionary Learning School	59
Bayside High School	57
Edward R. Murrow High School	57
Midwood High School	56
NYC iSchool	55
Benjamin N. Cardozo High School	55
Origins High School	55
Beacon High School	53
Forest Hills High School	53
International High School at Lafayette	53
Franklin Delano Roosevelt High School	53
Thomas A. Edison Career and Technical Education High School	52
Queens Metropolitan High School	51
N.Y.C. Museum School	50
Manhattan / Hunter Science High School	48
Emma Lazarus High School	48
Robert F. Kennedy Community High School	47
Frank Sinatra School of the Arts High School	47
Aviation Career & Technical Education High School	47
Robert H. Goddard High School of Communication Art	46

Source: NYC DOE. Demographic Snapshot, SY 2019-20.

Consider a scenario for how to admit students not only to the five non-Hecht-Calandra specialized schools but also to the fifty least diverse high schools listed above. Suppose the mayor and Chancellor remove all the screening requirements for entry to all the city's public high schools, and reserve 50% of all available high school seats for students who are economically disadvantaged or have disabilities and are served by Special Education programs. (73% of the city's students are economically disadvantaged and 20% are classified as students with disabilities. The economically disadvantaged category includes students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, as well as students whose families receive varieties of federal aid, live in temporary housing, or are English Language Learners.) The other 50% of seats would be open to all students and selected through the current choice system. All high schools would be required, within a 5-year period, to transform their enrollment procedures so that 50% of their students reflect those categories.

Our suggestion is very similar to the entry recommendations for middle school put forward by the District 15 Diversity Working Group. That group called for removing all screens from the district's middle schools, using a lottery-based admissions process for all middle school applicants, and reserving 52% of all available seats in each district middle school for students from low-income families, students living in temporary housing, and students who are English Language Learners. (The DOE subsequently accepted the Diversity Working Group's recommendations, and District 15 is in its second year of enrolling its middle school students according to this formula.)

What might be the responses to such a proposed diversity policy to reduce the intense segregation of the city's high schools? That proposal would trigger a citywide firestorm of outrage and opposition. Opponents would charge the mayor and chancellor with ill-conceived and unfair social engineering. Critics would blast the policy as unjustifiable affirmative action. Many parents would respond with alarm to the realization that their children's selection of a "good" high school was suddenly jeopardized, while others would support the proposed policy. Fierce discussion about equity, privilege, political correctness, and reverse racism would dominate the city's education policy arenas.

The proposed policy would also have to navigate a set of procedural requirements. The mayor would need the approval of the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP), and the PEP has recently demonstrated, in its rejection of the Pearson contract for Gifted and Talented testing, that it is not always a predictable rubber stamp. Though the City Council cannot legally block the proposed diversity policy, it's likely that the Council would insist on weighing in, and the resulting debate about whether to approve or reject the policy would dominate education discussions across the city.

But assume, for this scenario, that the Council ultimately votes to support the mayor's proposal. Assume further that the timeline of the Council's deliberations makes it impossible to implement the diversity policy before the spring of 2022 at the earliest. The proposed policy would then become a major issue for the November 2021 mayoral election, making that contest a referendum about whether, and how, high schools should be integrated and diversified. Assume further that a tumultuous campaign results in a record turnout that elects a candidate who enthusiastically supports the diversity proposal. Assume, finally, that the policy is implemented effectively and a more integrated high school system evolves across the next five years.

What results might we expect? Look again at the chart of the system's fifty least diverse high schools. At least 50% of the enrollment of those schools would consist of a mix of students who are economically disadvantaged or are students receiving Special Education services. (Note that significant numbers of White and Asian students would be part of that 50%.) Those fifty least diverse high schools would be far more integrated after five years of the policy's implementation.

The citywide rage and anger generated by the new policy might gradually abate as students and their families adjust to the challenges and benefits of diversification. Some White and Asian students might leave the city's public school system for private options, though the initial experience of the District 15 Middle School Diversity Policy suggests that the district suffered little—if any—student enrollment loss during the first and second year of implementation. Though reserving 50% of available high school seats for economically disadvantaged and Special Education students



Wild Awake - stock.adobe.com

would achieve a major reduction in segregation, many students would still achieve their first choice in what are commonly viewed as desirable high schools. But the perception of which schools are desirable might also change. Research suggests that many schools targeted for diversification would welcome their new arrivals and begin building an effective school culture for all their students. As students, teachers, and their schools adjust to new challenges and changes, their adjustments might well transform the quality and outcomes of previously segregated schooling. As the 2018 report of the Mayor's School Diversity Advisory Group concluded:

Decades of research has taught us that diverse, integrated schools offer academic and social benefits for all students. Researchers have identified three major advantages to integrated schools: (1) all students benefit when they can learn from classmates who have different life experiences to share, evidenced by higher academic outcomes, stronger critical thinking skills, and increased creativity; (2) all students benefit from reductions in prejudices and implicit biases and improved social-emotional well-being; and (3) all students benefit from experiences that prepare them for an increasingly diverse society.

This sketch of the possible results of the implementation of the high school diversification effort we propose may be far too optimistic, given the complexities and passions involved, though we are encouraged by both the research on school desegregation and the early results of the District 15 effort. But there is still a major drawback to our suggested policy change. Implementing our diversity policy would not significantly reduce the intense segregation of the fifty least diverse high schools with hyper-concentrations of Black and Latinx students. Given that the school system in 2019-20 was 66% Black and Latinx and 31% White and Asian, there are simply not enough of the latter students to effectively diversify the most severely segregated city high schools. Our next blog looks at those schools and considers what might improve their learning opportunities and student outcomes, which by any measure are the most limited across the entire system.

We previously listed the fifty least diverse NYC high schools with the highest percentages of White and Asian students. To diversify those segregated schools, we proposed that the mayor remove all screening requirements for entry to all the city's public high schools, and reserve 50% of all available high school seats for students who are economically disadvantaged or are served by Special Education programs. The other 50% of seats would be open to all students and selected through the current choice system. All high schools would be required, within a 5-year period, to transform their enrollment procedures so that 50% of their students reflect those required demographics.

The table below lists the fifty least diverse high schools with the highest percentages of Black and Latinx students. This blog compares the demographics and outcomes of both groups of segregated schools and suggests what might improve the academic quality of the least diverse Black and Latinx high schools, since our diversity proposals for the predominantly White and Asian schools would not significantly reduce segregation in the schools listed below.

TABLE 3.  
**50 LEAST DIVERSE HIGH SCHOOLS - MOST BLACK AND LATINX STUDENTS (2019-20)**

School	Black and Latinx Students (%)	Special Education (%)	English Language Learners (%)	Economic Need Index (%)	Community School?	4-Year College Readiness Index (without CAT) (%)
Academy for Language and Technology	100	5	67	Above 95%	NO	75
Gregorio Luperon High School for Science and Mathematics	100	2	77	Above 95%	NO	49
Multicultural High School	100	1	86	Above 95%	YES	8
Pan American International High School at Monroe	100	1	87	Above 95%	YES	37
Manhattan Bridges High School	99	5	36	93	NO	73
Validus Preparatory Academy	99	26	12	94	NO	35
Pan American International High School	99	2	77	Above 95%	YES	39
Bronx Leadership Academy II High School	99	30	13	93	NO	41
Careers in Sports High School	98	27	16	93	YES	33
Longwood Preparatory Academy	98	30	16	92	YES	29
Mott Hall Bronx High School	98	24	9	93	NO	52
Gotham Professional Arts Academy	98	32	2	84	YES	53
Brooklyn School for Music & Theatre	98	21	3	84	NO	37
DreamYard Preparatory School	98	23	20	95	YES	49
High School for Violin and Dance	98	31	19	93	NO	16
Bronx Design and Construction Academy	98	37	9	90	NO	41
The Metropolitan High School	97	31	26	Above 95%	YES	23
Community School for Social Justice	97	27	23	93	NO	23
El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice	97	23	23	91	NO	41
East Williamsburg Scholars Academy	97	15	34	89	NO	30
Mott Haven Village Preparatory High School	97	30	16	93	NO	25
Alfred E. Smith Career and Technical Education High School	97	27	17	90	NO	67
Brooklyn Institute for Liberal Arts	97	21	4	76	NO	56
Kurt Hahn Expeditionary Learning School	97	31	6	78	YES	42
Urban Assembly School of Music and Art	97	25	4	85	YES	46
Frederick Douglass Academy VI High School	97	24	32	91	NO	19
Bronx Leadership Academy High School	97	28	16	Above 95%	YES	23
Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies	97	24	13	94	YES	60

School	Black and Latinx Students (%)	Special Education (%)	English Language Learners (%)	Economic Need Index (%)	Community School?	4-Year College Readiness Index (without CAT) (%)
EBC High School for Public Service - Bushwick	97	25	18	90	NO	33
Inwood Early College for Health and Information Technology	97	24	11	84	NO	46
Frederick Douglass Academy III Secondary School	97	28	18	93	YES	46
Manhattan Academy for Arts & Language	97	10	65	Above 95%	NO	48
High School for Law and Public Service	97	26	36	92	NO	20
The Urban Assembly School for Global Commerce	97	33	11	94	NO	39
High School for Health Careers and Sciences	97	19	42	93	YES	31
High School for Media and Communications	96	18	48	92	YES	18
The College Academy	96	21	54	93	NO	33
Explorations Academy H.S.	96	26	23	93	NO	28
Clara Barton High School	96	17	7	76	NO	46
Bronx High School for Law and Community Service	96	23	12	89	NO	80
Business of Sports School	96	26	7	81	NO	45
School for Excellence	96	26	27	Above 95%	YES	16
Fordham Leadership Academy	96	24	16	93	YES	61
The Academy of Urban Planning and Engineering	96	24	27	90	YES	45
Performing Arts and Technology High School	96	23	17	88	NO	31
PROGRESS High School for Professional Careers	96	22	22	91	NO	30
Frederick Douglass Academy VII High School	96	29	4	88	NO	44
Wings Academy	95	31	7	92	NO	13
Bronx Envision Academy	95	28	15	92	NO	21
Brooklyn Collegiate: A College Board School	95	24	6	84	YES	49

Sources: NYC DOE. Demographic Snapshot, 2019-20

NYC DOE. 2019-20 School Quality Snapshot. (Admissions Method and College Readiness Index Data) <https://tools.nycenet.edu/snapshot/2020/>

Notes: To maintain student privacy, schools with ENI values below 5% or above 95% have had their exact values replaced with “Below 5%” and “Above 95%” respectively.

9 predominately Black and Latinx schools had “Above 95%” as Economic Need Index (ENI) values. In calculating overall averages, we converted these values to 96%, thus the overall ENI average is likely to be higher.

4-Year College Readiness Index (CRI): This metric shows the percentage of students in the school’s four-year cohort who, by the August after their fourth year in high school, graduated with a Local Diploma or higher and met CUNY’s standards for college readiness in English and mathematics. The 2019-20 School Quality Reports and beyond will show the College Readiness Index (without the CUNY Assessment Test) and use that metric for report scoring. 2020 Regents waivers may affect metrics.

## Comparing the two groups of segregated schools

The predominantly White and Asian schools are quite segregated, with an average of 66% combined White and Asian student population (compared to 31% citywide). The Black and Latinx schools are hyper-segregated, with an average combined population of 97% (compared to 66% citywide).

Students in the predominantly White and Asian schools have fewer students from economically disadvantaged homes, and who are assigned to Special Education or English language instruction. Students in the hyper-segregated Black and Latinx schools come from predominantly poor families and their schools have relatively high percentages of Special Education students and English Language Learners.

We used the NYC Department of Education's College Readiness Index (CRI) to show the percentage of high school students graduating college-ready. (See the definition of the CRI in the table above). Some 57% of the city's students who completed their fourth year of high school met CRI standards in 2019-20.

The CRI dramatizes the differences between the two groups of segregated high schools. The fifty least diverse White and Asian high schools graduate almost all their students ready for college. The hyper-segregated least diverse Black and Latinx high schools graduate very few of their students as college ready, which means that the great majority of their graduates are funneled into low-wage precarious jobs in the economy's service sectors.

## Increasing diversity in the hyper-segregated Black and Latinx schools

Past educational policies have not weakened the strong link between demography and destiny. The zip codes of the city's families, most decisively the city's Black and Latinx families, still determine the quality of education their students receive. A complex pattern of inequities in land ownership, housing finance, mortgaging practices and residential zoning has produced the neighborhood segregation that underlies the hyper-segregation of the least diverse Black and Latinx high schools. Though our previous blog's proposals would substantially diversify the city's predominantly White and Asian schools, those proposals will not reduce segregation in the fifty least diverse Black and Latinx schools because there are not enough White and Asian students to diversify all the city's high schools. Until the city's deep structure of institutional racism is uprooted, reducing hyper-segregation in the city's high schools must focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in those schools. What follows are some policy proposals that suggest what the mayor needs to do.

## Improving instruction

Improving the least diverse high schools' quality of instruction requires recruiting, training and supporting a huge increase in effective Black and Latinx teachers. The hyper-segregated Black and Latinx high schools need teachers who understand their students' histories, cultural backgrounds, languages and daily struggles, and are committed to improving and nurturing their students' skills, capacities and futures. Recent research has demonstrated the added value that teachers of color bring to their students and schools. City leaders should mobilize the city's public and private higher education institutions to develop and fund a massive recruiting and teacher preparation program – a mini-Marshall Plan -- that triples the city's current Black and Latinx high school teacher cohort. A key target of this recruitment effort should be potential male teachers of color.

Since most of those newly recruited teachers will be young and inexperienced, the least diverse Black and Latinx high schools will need a cohort of lead teachers to train, guide, mentor and support the new entrants and help them consolidate collaborative teaching teams in their schools. The lead teachers should be recruited from all the city's high schools and receive a considerable bonus to commit themselves to their new schools for at least five years. Lead teacher recruitment from existing high schools should be capped to ensure that no school loses an excess of experienced teachers.

## Improving supports and services

Community School status should be expanded to all fifty of the least diverse Black and Latinx high schools. Community schools collaborate with local organizations to meet school and community needs: they provide after-school programs offering arts, sports, homework help, tutoring and mentoring; health care including vision, dental, socio-emotional and mental health services; family engagement and adult education. Much research, including a recent Rand Corporation study, documents clear gains in student achievement in NYC schools featuring varieties of community school efforts.

Yet only 19 of the fifty hyper-segregated high schools were given community school status by the de Blasio administration. If, instead of tackling the underlying causes of segregation, our city persists in assigning thousands of students to these hyper-segregated schools, it should provide the best teachers and the most comprehensive supports possible. We recommend that all fifty of the least diverse Black and Latinx high schools be awarded Community School status.

## Improving college access

The College Readiness Index (CRI) suggests that these hyper-segregated schools send very few of their students to college. Yet the city's higher education institutes and non-profit groups have developed varieties of bridge-to-college programs to support first-generation college students. The City University of New York (CUNY) has several such programs including College Now, which for 40 years has been recruiting high school juniors and seniors into credit-bearing CUNY courses provided on-site, and free, at their local high schools. We recommend that CUNY's College Now program make linkages with all fifty of the least diverse Black and Latinx schools.

College Access, Research and Action (CARA) has developed a school-wide model which works intensively with high schools to build effective college-going cultures. CARA integrates post-secondary exploration into students' schedules and provides targeted coaching and teacher development. By training peer mentors recruited from local schools and communities, CARA provides culturally responsive counseling throughout the college application process. We recommend incorporating CARA's programs or similar college-bound supports into each of the fifty least diverse Black and Latinx schools.

## What else is needed?

Improving instruction, supports and services, and college access are only initial suggestions for how to improve instruction, opportunities and academic outcomes for the students in these hyper-segregated high schools. These schools also need talented, committed and effective leadership, an intensive focus on on-track performance, beginning in 9th grade, as pioneered by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Reform, as well as the student progress analysis integrated into the DataCation platform that New Visions for Public Schools has developed. They also need intensive individualized tutoring programs; recent research from Brown University and the Education Lab at Saga/Match indicate such interventions yield substantial gains in student achievement.

Student capacity in these hyper-segregated high schools has been massively stunted because these schools have been under-served, poorly staffed and under-resourced for decades. Given the devastation wreaked by the pandemic, these schools need a huge additional investment in instruction and supportive services so that all their students graduate high school ready to succeed in college, just as the graduates in the fifty least diverse White and Asian high schools do.

*Note: This was originally published as a two-piece blog series. Minor revisions have been made to create continuity in this combined piece.*