



# Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

## Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Education

### Re: Diversity in New York City Schools and Proposed Int. No. 511-A-2014

#### Advocates for Children of New York December 11, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Coordinator at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 40 years, Advocates for Children has worked to promote access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Recent events, including those in Ferguson, Cleveland, and here in New York City, have reminded us of the need to come together as a community to address the racial disparities that exist in public education and in our public lives. We recognize the potential of public education in New York City to bring together different groups of children and promote the values of diversity, inclusion, and opportunity. Among the benefits of integrated schools is the ability for children to learn firsthand from the earliest ages that all lives matter.

Advocates for Children works on behalf of children who are at greatest risk for school-based discrimination or academic failure due to poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile or criminal justice systems. We thank the sponsors of Proposed Int. No. 511-A-2014 for broadening the bill to include many of these groups of students. We are alarmed by the disparities in educational outcomes for the groups of students included in the bill. For example, on the 2014 English Language Arts exam, while nearly 50% of NYC's white and Asian students performed proficiently, only 18% of black and Hispanic students performed proficiently; only 6.7% of students with disabilities, 4 out of 5 of whom are black or Hispanic, performed proficiently; and only 3.6% of English Language Learners performed proficiently. The proposed bill will give us important data about which populations of students are accessing which schools and programs and will help inform recommendations for policy change.

Ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds have access to high-achieving schools and programs is critical, but is only one step. As the City Council strives to ensure that every school and program in NYC serves a diverse group of students, the City and DOE need to prepare schools to provide an excellent education to these

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students. Schools need resources, training, and the development of specialized programs to meet the needs of all students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Just this week, we received a call from the parent of a kindergarten student of color. The student has a disability and is living in a shelter. The student is enrolled in a popular school that has been touted as high achieving. However, the school was not prepared to meet this student's needs. Instead of developing a plan to support and include this student, the school placed the student on a half-day schedule illegally, explaining that it could not manage the child's needs for a full day. Since September, the student has attended school for only three hours per day. To improve school outcomes for students, we must do more than give them access to different schools; we need to change what is happening inside those schools to ensure they are prepared to serve diverse groups of students.

We appreciate the work of the City Council and look forward to working together to advance these goals. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.