



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

December 7, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Randi Levine, and I am Policy Director at Advocates for Children of New York. For more than 45 years, Advocates for Children has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. We work 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.

Public education has the potential to bring together different groups of children and promote the values of diversity, inclusion, and opportunity that are so important to our city. Currently, enrollment across the school system perpetuates divisions by race and other attributes as well. New York City's children have a vast range of abilities and disabilities. They come from homes that speak more than 100 different languages, practice a wide variety of religions, and span the entire economic spectrum from extreme poverty to enormous wealth.

The UCLA Civil Rights Project found that New York City has one of the most racially segregated public school systems in the nation. School assignment systems that create and further this segregation need urgent attention. Beyond school assignment, however, we are alarmed by disparities in educational outcomes. For example, on the 2017 English Language Arts exam, while 61% of NYC's white and Asian students performed proficiently, only 29% of black and Hispanic students performed proficiently; only 10.7% of students with disabilities, 78 percent of whom are black or Hispanic, performed proficiently; and only 5.6% of English Language Learners performed proficiently.

The City should ensure that students from diverse backgrounds have access to high-achieving schools and programs and should also ensure that schools are prepared to provide an excellent education to all students who enroll. Schools need resources, training, and the development of specialized programs and supports. For example, to serve students and families from a variety of backgrounds, the City must ensure that school staff receive training in cultural competency and implicit bias. To ensure that

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students with physical disabilities have the same school options as their peers, the City must increase the number of schools that are fully accessible. To serve students living in shelters, the City must increase the number of DOE social workers focused on providing the advocacy and counseling that many of these students need. To serve students with disabilities and English Language Learners, the City must ensure that schools have specialized programs that meet their needs. To improve school outcomes for students, it is important that the City examine school admissions policies and, at the same time, change what is happening inside those schools to ensure they are prepared to foster inclusion and 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.