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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony before the New York State Assembly
May 10, 2019 Public Hearing – Committee on Education**

Topic: Specialized High Schools

Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President

Good morning. I am Gale A. Brewer, Borough President of Manhattan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this public hearing regarding New York City's specialized high schools. Since the summer of 2018, when Mayor Bill de Blasio announced plans to change the SHSAT admissions process, my office has been in conversation with education advocacy groups, education researchers, community boards, student leaders, and parent leader groups about the impact of that admissions exam on racial diversity and about school integration in general. I hope to offer insights we have gleaned from those conversations as well as establish what I believe to be key elements of true school integration.

Many of my constituents are against keeping the single-test admission process for specialized high schools. I have learned that from numerous conversations and also from a poll conducted by Quinnipiac University which found that 60% of people in Manhattan believe other factors should be considered aside from that admissions test. We should not be surprised at the overwhelming support for changing the admissions process for specialized high schools. Extant educational research has already highlighted the flaws of standardized exams by evidencing the tendency of such exams to be biased by design while generating inequitable results for test-takers. Hence, standardized exams are not a way to combat inequities in society but rather showcase those societal inequities as we see correlations between academic performance and race and socioeconomic status.

I believe that when it comes to the specialized high schools, the most important statistical fact to remember is that there is a stark underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in those elite schools. Despite the vast majority of New York City students identifying as Black and/or Latinx, these students often only receive 10% of admission offers to elite high schools. This does not mean there is something wrong with those students. It means that there is something wrong with the education system of New York City.

One of the reasons for this discrepancy is the failure of elementary and middle schools to provide access to rigorous education for all students. For example, Gifted and Talented programs have not been made available to students from all backgrounds and economic levels.

Given that we know there is a systemic failure in how the City educates the majority of its students, we must create a systemic solution. We must re-envision the ways in which young people are educated and be much more considerate of the societal factors impacting their lives.

Changing the admissions policy for specialized high schools will help some small subset of students, but the most meaningful changes to our education system will be inclusive of all students in all grades. Segregation is a systemic problem from the first day New York City students enter schools. Piecemeal desegregation efforts are therefore not enough to fully support the children of our city. What we need is a comprehensive integration policy.

IntegrateNYC has already designed a framework called the “5 R’s of Real Integration.” Briefly, those 5 R’s are:

- Race and enrollment – public schools should provide a diverse and inclusive environment for all learners.
- Resources – equitable distribution of resources to those communities that have been historically oppressed.
- Relationships – developing schools that are empathetic toward all identities and build bridges between those identities.
- Restorative justice – decriminalizing schools by eliminating punitive discipline models and the policing of children.
- Representation – diversifying school faculty so that communities of color, immigrant communities, and the LGBTQ+ community are fully representative in school faculty and administration.

In addition, in order to truly support students at all levels, I believe every school should have on-site social workers; teachers skilled in culturally responsive education practices; and parents who are engaged and empowered to work in collaboration with school leadership.

The changes that I am calling for are deep and long-term. However, when a school system has been found to be one of the most segregated school systems in the country and the vast majority of students of color are denied opportunities to excel, profound change is required, and we need to begin that change right now. Thank you.