

TESTIMONY OF
NEW YORK APPLESEED

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

May 1, 2019

I am Matt Gonzales, Director of the School Diversity Project for New York Appleseed, which advocates for integrated schools and communities in New York City and New York State. While I am testifying today on behalf of my organization, I want to disclose that I am also a member of the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG).

I want to thank Chairs Treyger and Eugene for shining a light on the issue of school segregation today. Appleseed has spent that past eight years advocating for school integration. We are proud of the progress that has been made, but believe much more can and should be done. We fully endorse the 73 recommendations outlined in the SDAG's report, and encourage all members of the Council to join us in calling for immediate implementation.

Appleseed and our student-led partner IntegrateNYC have long understood that the path to *Real Integration* requires more than the movement of bodies. It requires the movement of resources, the movement of curriculum and pedagogy towards culturally relevant practices, the movement of discipline policies away from those that disproportionately punish Black and Latinx students, and the movement of efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty and staff in all schools.

While so much of the conversation and attention as of late has focused on admissions at eight so called "elite" specialized high schools, we believe the early success of the Community School District 15 diversity plan is the real news. Tweaking admissions requirements to these eight schools is only a small part of a total solution: the specialized high schools — indeed all of our public high schools — will not become integrated until all children enjoy equal access to educational opportunity before high school. Fourteen of the 15 middle-schools with the highest numbers of students receiving specialized-high-school admission offers — representing over 1600 students with offers in total — are not fully open to all students. It is time to open our public middle schools to the public.

City Council should join us in calling on DOE to immediately eliminate the use of exclusionary middle-school screens citywide. Middle school screens, which are based

on students' educational attainment and behavior during the first nine years of their lives will only serve to maintain segregation in our schools.

Lastly, we applaud the various members who have proposed legislation to leverage the power of City Council to disrupt segregation. At this time, we are not prepared to take a specific position on any of the proposed bills. However, we would like to articulate some of our principles that relate to the legislation.

1. **Accountability for School Diversity:** Appleseed has always been committed to more accountability, transparency, and data when it comes to school demographics. We strongly advocated for the original School Diversity Accountability Act and will continue to support efforts to ensure that data disclosed under the law reflects the original priorities articulated in the original December 2014 bill. Two letters are attached to this testimony outlining problems in the implementation of the current law. Some, if not all, of these issues may need to be addressed legislatively.
 2. **Eliminating Segregative Admissions Policies:** Appleseed has long understood that Gifted & Talented (G&T) programs in New York City have operated as tools of segregation: from serving as a strategy to retain white and middle class families by offering segregated (mostly white and Asian) classrooms to continuing to offer a sense of entitlement to those same families, who often do not believe their children are gifted, but rather understand G&T programs will offer more resources and opportunity at the expense of others. As Appleseed demonstrated in a 2014 briefing, as far back as 2003, efforts to diversify G&T have been repeatedly attempted and have repeatedly failed. The use of segregated G&T classrooms, a pedagogically outdated model, ignores the positive impact models like schoolwide enrichment have had in New York City and across the country in serving the needs of all children - including those identified as gifted. We strongly oppose any efforts to expand these segregative programs. To parrot Chief Justice Roberts, the answer to segregation is not more segregation.
 3. **Community Engagement:** We've always believed K-8 integration policy must be developed with community investment and input. However, those efforts must prioritize the voices of those who have been most directly impacted by segregation -- not just the loudest and most privileged. This is true for both district-based and citywide planning.
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Table of Attachments

1. Matt Gonzales and David Tipson, "Equitable Admission to High Schools Must Start with Middle School, *City Limits*, January 21, 2019.
2. New York Appleseed, *Student Assignment to Public Middle Schools in New York City*, January 2019.
3. January 2016 Letter from David Tipson and Rene Kathawala to Councilmember Brad Lander regarding implementation of School Diversity Accountability Act.
4. April 2019 letter from members of High School Application Advisory Committee to Chancellor Carranza regarding implementation of School Diversity Accountability Act.
5. Halley Potter and David Tipson, "Eliminate Gifted Tracks and Expand to a Schoolwide Approach," *NY Times*, June 4, 2014.