



September 27, 2012

I write to offer my scientific support for the complaint filed today by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., LatinoJustice PRLDEF and the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College regarding the admissions policy for New York City's elite Specialized High Schools.

As a statistician, researcher and educator, I would like to address four fundamental problems with the current admissions policy for entrance into New York City's selective high schools, the use of a single high stakes examination:

1. **Science: A Misuse of Single Indicator.** Reliance upon a single indicator for high stakes decisions is never justified. Reports published by the American Psychological Association, National Academy of Sciences and the American Statistical Association and the American Educational Research Association agree that no high stakes decision should be made on the basis of a single examination.
2. **Lack of Evidence of Test Validity.** The SHSAT has never been subject to a thorough analysis of its construct or predictive validity. It is unethical and educationally irresponsible to rely upon a test that has never been validated.
3. **The Uneven Distribution of Opportunities by Geography, Race/Ethnicity and Immigration Status:** The racial, geographic and socio-economic distribution of admissions is dramatically skewed to favor students who have attended private middle schools, live in wealthy communities and/or have enjoyed the support of private tutoring companies. The precipitous drop in enrollment of Black and Latino students over the past 10 years signals a troubling sign of educational stratification in a city already burdened by widening inequality gaps.
4. **Distorting the Function of Public Education.** Historically, public education has been designed to challenge inequalities derivative of birth and neighborhood, widen and democratize opportunity structures and generate academic contexts in which a wide range of students grow, develop their skills and engage a civic and democratic commitment to a diverse society. By limiting access to our top schools to a small group of students who perform well on an unvalidated instrument and represent a narrow range of communities and ethnicities, this admissions policy undermines the democratic function of public education as an institution of opportunity expansion rather than constriction.

In New York City, as is true around the nation and world, access to selective high schools provides an automatic staircase to networks, educational opportunities, exposure to rigorous curriculum and quality educators, enhanced likelihood of acceptance into elite colleges and a fully transformed economic and educational trajectory. An alternative - and for me preferred -- vision of public education is that New York City schools *should be* institutions that widen, diversify and democratize access across racial, ethnic, class and geographic regions. Today, by enforcing statistically illegitimate entrance criteria, the elite high schools function as semi-private and increasingly segregated institutions drawing upon public dollars.

As a teacher and researcher of public education, I recommend that the New York City Department of Education commission a Blue Ribbon Panel of statisticians and educators to assess the quality, validity and appropriateness of this examination for admission and to determine the predictive validity of the tests for grades, graduation and post-graduation outcomes, and institute immediately a revised admissions policy that draws on multiple indicators of student achievement including grades, quality of writing, teachers' recommendations, personal essays, attendance, creativity and originality.

In light of the flaws in the Specialized High Schools admissions policy, I hope that the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights recognizes the public interest in a more equitable, more scientific, more valid and more democratic admissions policy. Living in times of widening inequality gaps, we must protect the equalizing function that public education has historically served and resist the use of elite schools as sorting mechanisms in a city already suffering from race and class stratification.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the Graduate Center, 212 817 8710.



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