



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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## **New York City Council, Committee on Education Hearing on “Diversity in New York City Schools.” Testimony by Kristen Berger, Community Education Council 3 Thursday December 7, 2017**

Community Education Council for District 3 (CEC3), represents the Upper West Side and parts of Harlem. Community School District 3, like much of the city, lacks diverse schools. District 3’s diverse student body is not reflected in our schools. Our council takes this problem seriously. We commend the Department of Education for stating commitment to diversity and producing a diversity policy. That statement of commitment must be substantiated by strengthening the current Diversity Policy, *Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools*. Our schools need high-level leadership on integration, a commitment to resources, authentic community engagement and greater transparency.

CEC 3 has made equity and diversity real priorities for our district. As a council we made diversity a goal during our historic 2016 rezoning; which rezoned eleven elementary schools on the Upper West Side. We maintained that work with the Harlem School Summit and a Middle School Diversity Symposium in the spring of 2016 and continue the focus through our Equity & Excellence committee while bringing a cross cutting lens on equity and diversity to all of our work.

The City Council is presumed to already be sufficiently aware of the segregation in New York City schools, as *School Diversity Accountability Report* makes apparent. The recently published NYC Independent Budget Office Report finds that “despite the racial diversity of the student body, almost 80 percent of New York City public elementary schools had students from one race in the majority.”<sup>i</sup> In District 3 this segregation is seen in many categories. If we look at ‘economically disadvantaged’ we have a middle school with 100% of its population economically disadvantaged and another with only 6%<sup>ii</sup>. It would be hard to pretend that there is real equity between schools with such profoundly different needs.

There is significant demonstrable research that racial and economic diversity benefits students improving academic performance and providing societal benefits in school<sup>iii</sup>. A 2016 Century Foundation report finds “a growing body of research produced a social science consensus that school integration—by race and by socioeconomic status—is good for children”<sup>iv</sup>

### **CEC 3 finds a number of specific areas in which the Diversity Policy falls short:**

- We need high level **leadership and accountability** from the City to create real integration in our schools. An issue as challenging as school integration requires that visionary holistic leadership is reflected at every level. We have not received any guidance on what authority the School Diversity Advisory Group will have or how they will engage with the community. We are skeptical that an “advisory committee” will necessarily be heeded.
- School integration and true equity require **authentic community engagement**. We fear groups or representatives who maybe cherry picked to represent the “community”. Specific engagement must be made with the communities most impacted by education inequity, cross-sector collaboration, shared goals and measurements, and dedicated institutional resources and support. The community must have a leadership role in the discussion and decision making from the earliest stages. The CEC offers a valuable avenue to parent engagement when it is sufficiently supported and informed.
- Through the aforementioned community engagement the city needs to introduce **initiatives to address: enrollment, resource allocation, culturally responsive pedagogy and diversifying the workforce**. This is the crux of where real change can happen.
  - Including diversity in rezoning changes (Chancellor's Reg A-185) isn't sufficient in its ability to make the kind of change that is needed to integrate our enormous school system. The process for rezoning is driven at the community level, by the elected parent leaders of CEC's, PTA/PA's, and community groups. Because of this ground level of engagement, discourse often starts more than a year before a vote is taken. Chancellor's Reg A-190 changes, on the other hand, are driven by the DOE, via several administrative departments and lack respectful and thorough engagement at the community level. While improvements in diversity may occur if two schools merge or grades are changed within a school, etc, these changes often lead to greater mistrust and other frustrations in our school districts. **CEC3 believes that the A-190 regulation must closer align to A-185 in order to implement our citywide efforts in diversity.**
  - **The DOE needs to make a serious commitment to leveling the playing field between charter schools and district schools.** This includes addressing access to marketing lists and resource allocation. This division exacerbates the segregation and inequality in our schools.
  - In schools segregated by income the resources that parent bodies bring to their schools amplifies the gap between schools and increases inequity, **the tacit acceptance by the city that PTAs**

**will provide substantial supplemental budgets and/or volunteer hours in order to help a school succeed breeds inequity.**

- **The City Council must amend the *School Diversity Accountability Report*** to be more accessible and timely for citizen analysis. It needs to include data on who applied to each screened school or program by racial and socioeconomic status; a more robust measure of socioeconomic status than Free/Reduced Lunch and include data on Charter Schools.

The DOE's Diversity Policy *Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools* is a first step in increasing diversity in NYC's schools. We look forward to working as partners with the DOE to strengthen and develop this policy in order to fulfill the commitment to school diversity and equity. This effort will be enhanced by high-level leadership on integration, a commitment to resources, authentic community engagement and greater transparency.

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<sup>i</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office (2017) Schools Brief: From Grades 3 to 8: Tracing Changes in Achievement Gaps by Race & Gender in New York City Public Schools

<sup>ii</sup> NYSED, 2016 Final- school level data by grade <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Research Brief: School Integration and K-12 Outcomes: An Updated Quick Synthesis of the Social Science Evidence (2016) The National Coalition of School Diversity

<sup>iv</sup> Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo (2016) How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students, The Century Foundation