

November 4, 2019

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

As presidents of the Parent-Teacher Associations of five New York City Gifted and Talented (“G&T”) school-wide programs, we are deeply concerned by the recommendations released in August 2019 by the School Diversity Advisory Group (“SDAG”). We stand in strong support of the goal of increasing diversity in all public schools, including and especially in those with G&T programs, and welcome a discussion about how to change admissions to G&T programs to ensure inclusivity. **However, we do not support eliminating G&T programs, or any school or program that has demonstrated success in educating New York City Public School children.**

This year, our five schools are home to 3,852 students, all with unique learning styles, united by the need for an accelerated curriculum. These schools are serving students and families well. Their successes should be replicated and access to such programs expanded across all five boroughs, particularly to underserved populations.

Programs that serve accelerated learners can and should exist in many forms, including stand-alone schools, programs within district schools, mixed-ability settings, and pull out services. These varied options can also complement a system that incorporates the enrichment programs, magnet schools, and other enhancements proposed by the SDAG. **For a diverse urban setting serving 1.1 million students across 32 community school districts, no one system will be appropriate for all children, and a broad stroke to eliminate G&T programs is not the answer.**

Our schools have given serious thought, time, and effort to increasing diversity long preceding the formation of the SDAG. However, we recognize that we do not operate in a vacuum and, for this reason, our parents, teachers, and administrations stand ready to assist the Department of Education (DOE) in its efforts to diversify our schools and improve equity among school districts.

As is stated by the four Education Council Consortium and Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council members on the SDAG in “Making the Grade” [February 2019], “[i]n order to create positive and supportive policies we need parents’ voices — not the formal parent engagement that rubber stamps decisions already made by others, but true involvement in the planning and the making.” It is deeply concerning that among all 45 SDAG members recommending elimination of a program enrolling 16,000 K–5 students across the city, as well as thousands of students in grades 6–12, NONE were parents or school leaders specifically there to represent G&T programs.

In addition to G&T parents and school leaders, numerous parent bodies (e.g., District CECs, PTAs, and PTA Presidents’ Councils) should have an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. These parent-led organizations, along with schools serving G&T students, can partner with the Mayor’s Office and DOE in developing solutions to an issue we all agree is complex and multifaceted. We urge your office and the DOE to consult all District Councils and solicit formal parent feedback about the SDAG’s recommendations. Consultation should include multiple open sessions at which the SDAG report is on the agenda.

Above all, we implore you to include more parent voices in this important discussion and reject the recommendation to eliminate G&T programs.

Sincerely,

Maria Gualdoni, Kim Roberts, and Ronni Seigel, PTA Co-Presidents
01M539 New Explorations into Science, Technology and Math High School

Amanda Burnovski, Anjana Eapen-Sathaye, and Amy Gillston, PTA Co-Presidents
02M077 Lower Lab School

Kavita Batra, Carrie Marlin, and Jonathan Robilotto, PTA Co-Presidents
03M334 The Anderson School P.S. 334

Mark Levin, PTA President
04M012 TAG Young Scholars

Lynn Kennedy and Milko Milkov, PTA Co-Presidents
30Q300 The 30th Avenue School

Cc: Hon. Jumaane Williams, New York City Public Advocate
Hon. Scott M. Stringer, New York City Comptroller
Hon. Cory Johnson, Speaker, New York City Council
Hon. Eric L. Adams, Brooklyn Borough President
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Rubén Díaz Jr., Bronx Borough President
Hon. Melinda Katz, Queens Borough President
Hon. James Oddo, Staten Island Borough President
Richard A. Carranza, Chancellor, New York City Department of Education