

**Testimony of Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor, New York City Department of Education
House Committee on Education and Labor**

**“Brown v. Board of Education at 65: A Promise Unfulfilled”
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Good morning Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx and all the members of the Committee here today. On behalf of Mayor de Blasio and the New York City Department of Education, I am honored to be here today.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing, and thank for your support for our 1.1 million New York City public school students.

Now, I know—just as the Mayor knows, just as everyone in this chamber knows—that public education is an investment in the future. From my own experience as a student, a teacher, a principal, and, now, Chancellor of the largest school system in the nation, I can tell you that—beyond a shadow of a doubt—a public school education can change a life. Unfortunately, the scourge of school segregation robs many students of color and those living in poverty of the high-quality education they deserve.

Next month marks 65 years since the U.S. Supreme Court issued the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Notably, in that decision, Chief Justice Earl Warren found: “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place”—and segregated schools are “inherently unequal.”

And I ask you, nearly 65 years later, what do we have to show for *Brown v. Board of Education*?

65 years later, I humbly say to you, school systems nationwide have not fulfilled the mandate of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

What have we learned during this time? Decades of history have taught us that segregation is inherently unequal. For too long, we’ve been afraid to confront this reality. We closed our eyes and hoped the problem would fix itself—or simply go away. No more. We can no longer allow such a system to persist... just because the problem is hard to fix.

The bottom line: a public—and I underline public—school system should represent the entire city it serves.

So, today, it is my honor to share New York City’s efforts to increase diversity in our public schools, and to request the federal government’s support for these endeavors where appropriate.

I opened my testimony by talking about equality, which is terribly important. But my overarching goal as Chancellor is to advance equity. More precisely, to *advance equity now*. Why? Because advancing equity is the only way to disrupt the entrenched systems that

throughout our history have kept underserved students from achieving their potential. Consider that 70 percent of New York City’s public school students are black or Latino. Yet, if you are a black or Latino student, you are statistically less likely to be in an accelerated program or in specialized high schools compared with your peers. You have less access to Advanced Placement courses, and a lower likelihood of graduating, and of graduating college-ready.

Only an equity approach can right these wrongs. In New York City, equity means that we have the same high expectations for all of our students, whatever their race, ethnicity, or zip code. Equity means that we acknowledge that some students need more support than others—and we give them the resources they need to succeed. Equity means that we accelerate our work to reverse historic injustices, empower communities, and intervene throughout a child’s journey through our system. Equity means that all of our students are on a path to high school graduation, college, and meaningful employment. These are the pillars of our aptly named Equity and Excellence agenda: a series of specific academic and student support initiatives that we are implementing to ensure that every single student gets the quality education he or she deserves.

Integration advances equity, as our children are given the opportunity to learn from one another’s diverse perspectives, backgrounds and experience. Significant research demonstrates that integrated classrooms lead to improved test scores, improved critical thinking and problem-solving skills, lower dropout rates, reduction of racial bias, enhanced leadership skills, and better preparedness for success in the global economy. Integration doesn’t lower academic achievement for any student; it improves it for all.

Segregation, on the other hand, *does* shrink opportunity. So, we are confronting this problem head-on. We have started to increase diversity within schools in some of our most diverse but racially isolated school districts. After a community-driven process, we have approved diversity plans put forward in three of our school districts: Districts 1 and 3 in Manhattan and District 15 in Brooklyn.

While each of these plans warrants distinction, I want to take a little while to discuss the work in Brooklyn’s District 15. This is a beautifully diverse district that represents New York City in many ways.

Unfortunately, due in part to long-standing academic screens for admissions, many District 15 middle schools have long served very low numbers of low-income black and Latino students; others basically served *only* low-income black and Latino students.

To address the racial isolation in these schools, the District 15 diversity planning process brought everyone to the table: community members, parents and students, advocates and school staff from across the district, and they had tough but necessary conversations—conversations grounded in data, and occurring in different languages.

The District 15 committee looked at a huge amount of data and research, including middle school enrollment demographics, patterns of racial housing segregation, and academic outcomes. Following their consideration of a variety of potential solutions, they put forward a

comprehensive plan to change the middle school admissions process. The Mayor and I were proud to approve this plan.

Now, all the academic screens are gone, and are replaced by a lottery where students are matched to the schools they want to attend. District 15 middle schools prioritize approximately half of their seats for students from low-income families, English language learners, and students in temporary housing. Earlier this month, we released admission offers for middle schools and I am proud to say that almost all of the D15 middle schools met their diversity targets.

This is real action. With real buy-in. With real ownership of this plan and its success. It's not just in District 15—87 schools across New York City now have a “Diversity in Admissions” plan in place. That's up from just seven schools when the Diversity in Admissions program started three years ago.

Based upon our efforts to increase diversity in District 15, we have launched a \$2 million grant program to support school districts to develop locally driven diversity plans in communities across New York City. This program is supported by federal Title IV funding, which I will discuss later in in my testimony.

Slowly but surely, we are disrupting the status quo. We are advancing equity now.

Much of this work has come from a grassroots, “bottom up,” approach. These plans are *owned* by principals and superintendents, PTAs and parent-led Community Education Councils. They are ready to put in the elbow grease to make them successful.

At the same time, we cannot punt the imperative of improving the level of diversity to individual schools and communities. We have to pair grassroots “bottom-up” approaches with “top-down” vision, resources, and action.

New York City is taking initiatives to further support school diversity like never before. In 2017, we established the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) to make formal policy recommendations to ensure that New York City schools become integrated and equitable. The SDAG includes over 40 members, including city government stakeholders, local and national experts on school diversity, parents, teachers, advocates, students, and other community leaders. The SDAG has released an initial report which the Mayor and I have been reviewing, and will be responding to in the weeks ahead.

We are taking a hard look at some of our enrollment practices from 3-K through twelfth grade. In fact, our recently released Birth-to-Five early childhood RFP aims to make early education classrooms more socio-economically and racially integrated by bringing together programs that have traditionally served low-income families with our universal 3-K and Pre-K programs. This is because we believe all students benefit from diverse and inclusive classrooms. We are committed to creating and supporting learning environments that reflect the diversity of New York City.

Now I want to turn to an issue that has garnered significant attention in New York City and even nationally: admissions to our Specialized High Schools. New York State law mandates that admissions to eight of our best high schools are based solely on results from a single test, the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). No other institution in the country uses such an admissions process. What outcomes has this process led to? This year, black and Latino students received only 10 percent of the admission offers to New York City’s eight specialized high schools—in a school system that is nearly 70 percent black and Latino. This is unacceptable and must change.

The Mayor has put forward a proposal to change New York State law to eliminate the SHSAT and expand the admissions criteria to include a proven combination of grades and state test scores. We are working with our state delegation to move that proposal forward.

The single admissions test is unfair and the status quo is unacceptable. If we are to advance equity now, we must eliminate the single test for specialized high schools now.

With that said, we have no illusions. Increasing diversity in a system of 1,800 schools is tough work, and we know it will not happen overnight. What is more, integration means different things to different communities. It is not just about the movement of bodies, or giving black and Latino students access to predominantly white schools. Achieving meaningful integration is far more complicated, and far more important.

Meaningful integration is about giving all students equitable access, opportunity, and the chance to succeed. It is also about priming school communities for this change—by creating classroom cultures that respect and celebrate diversity. That is why this is not the job of one mayor or one chancellor. It is the responsibility of everyone who cares about the future of our public school students.

So, let me share another way we are coming at this problem. It involves 125,000 people who are employed by the New York City Department of Education. Not just teachers and principals and superintendents, but junior and senior staff members working in every capacity throughout our system. And here is what we’ve done: Starting school year, we’ve made a historic investment in implicit bias training for each of these 125,000 staff members. Now, this term may seem abstract, but it’s not. When we examine our implicit biases, we understand why we may have different expectations for different students. We understand why certain strategies or practices may affect different students in different ways. Implicit bias training is foundational to everything we do – it allows us to raise expectations for all students and build more inclusive school environments. It is central to advancing equity now.

We are also expanding culturally responsive education through teaching materials that are culturally relevant and include a diverse range of communities and topics. This includes the *Passport to Social Studies* curriculum, which has lesson plans about African, Latino, Asian,

Middle Eastern, and Native heritage people as well as about gender, LGBTQ, and religious history. Across our vast system, we are working to show our students, through the literature we read, in the language we use, and in the way we invest our resources, that we are a deeply connected society made up of different voices and perspectives. Like implicit bias, this is not an abstract concept; it is central to creating schools that engage and motivate students, and advancing equity now.

As we talk about equity here today, about truly reaching and serving our students, I urge you all to keep one other question in mind: how do we truly reach and serve our parents? We must truly empower them, not just pay lip service to parent engagement. Do parents know about the school options available to them? Do parents know what they should be talking to teachers about during parent-teacher conference night? Do parents know that their child should be able to take Algebra in eighth grade, or college-prep courses in high school? You see, knowledge is power. With this in mind, I have established a new division at the DOE for Community Empowerment, Partnerships, and Communications to specifically focus on how we communicate to and with our parents and communities. This is just one example of the infrastructure we need for our parents to be empowered and active—and we need more of it in historically underserved communities.

All of our work to increase diversity and dismantle the status quo directly supports the Mayor’s Equity and Excellence for All vision and agenda. Through 3-K and Pre-K for All and initiatives like Universal Literacy, Computer Science for All, and College Access for All, we are changing the odds for all of our students. The basic premise is this: whether our students attend a school with mostly white peers, or mostly black and brown peers, they all deserve excellence. Every student needs the opportunity to develop invaluable life skills, and the social capital that helps to open doors.

Now I want to turn to some ways in which the Federal government can support this work.

1. Reinstate Federal guidance to support diversity in schools.

The prior U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) guidance on racial diversity in K-12 schools and higher education provided that support by explaining how, consistent with existing law, school systems can voluntarily consider race to achieve diversity and avoid racial isolation in schools. Although the current administration rescinded that guidance, it has failed to issue any alternative policies. This lapse in support from the Federal agency responsible for enforcing Federal laws governing education institutions and ensuring equal access in education leaves school systems such as DOE without the Federal leadership to fulfill the promise of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

2. Reinstate Federal guidance to support to equity in discipline.

The prior USDOE school discipline guidance supported school systems by describing how those systems can administer student discipline without discriminating against students on the basis of race, color or national origin. Since the current Administration rescinded that guidance, it has not been replaced with any alternative policies.

The rescinded school discipline guidance recognized that substantial racial disparities in student discipline could be due to bias, implicit or otherwise, by staff or an adverse discriminatory impact resulting from a school policy or practice. Consequently, the guidance encouraged school systems to consider uniformly applied disciplinary rules and alternatives to exclusionary discipline, to both reduce student misconduct and maintain a safe learning environment. These proposed programs included conflict resolution, restorative justice practices, a structured system of positive behavior interventions, and providing wraparound social service supports to address the root causes of student misbehavior through school based counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, and mental health and other supportive service providers.

Ensuring equity in education includes the utilization of equitable discipline policies and practices, particularly because there is a link between exclusionary discipline and school avoidance, decreased academic achievement and engagement, and the increased likelihood of students dropping out.

Under the leadership of the Mayor, the City has changed its approach towards school discipline—instead of leaning towards punitive approaches like suspensions, our schools are helping students and staff address conflict while keeping students in the classroom. Through this change in approach and a \$47 million investment in strategies to strengthen school climate, we've seen suspensions decrease by 31.5 percent over the last five years, and major crime decrease 29 percent in the same time frame. At the same time, we continue to have significant racial disparities and have much work ahead.

3. Increase and protect Title IV resources.

The Administration's proposed budget includes the elimination of Title IV, an important resource that we are currently using to fund our \$2 million diversity grant program. Title IV also that encourages diversity conversations at the local district level. We ask that Title IV is fully funded and expanded.

4. Pass the Strength in Diversity Act:

This Act authorizes \$120 million to provide planning and implementation grants to support voluntary local efforts to increase socioeconomic diversity in schools. Similar grants funded the District 1 diversity plan—New York City's first-ever district-wide diversity plan—and integration work currently ongoing in 11 New York City districts. New York City could use these funds to further this and other community-driven work that I have discussed today.

5. Increase and protect the Magnet Schools Assistance grants (MSAP)

A magnet school is a public school that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds. The Administration's proposed budget includes a reduction in funding for these grants. We ask that the MSAP grants are fully funded and expanded.

Thank you for considering these ways in which the Federal government can support diversity work at the local level.

The goal of New York City's diversity agenda is to build a future that is not bound by history, by demographics, or by income. That is what equity and excellence are about. We believe we can create a school system that reflects the best of our diverse, inspiring, and innovative city. We believe that integration and equity can unleash our students' innate brilliance, unlock their creativity, and put them on a path to their dreams. As a result, we must continue to engage in the hard work necessary to disrupt the status quo, desegregate our schools, and advance equity now.

We are grateful for this Committee's focus and support on fulfilling the promise of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision through meaningful integration and the advancement of equity in school systems nationwide. I thank you for your time, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.