

Presentation at New York City Council, Committee on Education,

Hearing on Diversity in New York City Schools

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New York City Council Chambers - City Hall

Submitted by Lisa Donlan President, Community Education Council for District 1

Good afternoon. My name is Lisa Donlan and I am the President of CEC 1 (the LES and East Village in Manhattan), and I want to thank the Education Committee Chair Danny Dromm and City Council member Lander and others for holding this important hearing on school segregation.

CSD 1 has a long history of fighting for equity and diversity in our community schools.

In 1991 the old CSB, led by parents and community members removed the school zones or catchments to create an equity based assignment plan whose goal was to help all the schools in the neighborhood reflect and serve the whole community. Based on parent choice, the plan controlled for fairness and equity by establishing lotteries - initially, for racial and ethnic targets that were pegged to the community census, and then - over time to include other factors such as academic achievement, and SES status .

As a data study undertaken by an independent urban planning agency last year demonstrates, admission policy matters. That plan the study shows, was helping to progressively integrate the D1 schools.

With the onset of Mayoral control and the dissolution of school boards and district offices, the plan was dissolved over community protest and eventually centralized policy for admissions was imposed by by OSEPO, turning controlled choice into blind choice.

As the D1 data study (and reams of research across the US) make clear, choice alone segregates. Under Bloomberg's market based choice plan, the D1 schools have begun to re- stratify by race, SES and academic achievement.

Over the past 10 or more years the CEC and the D1 community, with the support of our electeds, have engaged with the DoE to address the growing inequities among our schools caused by the choice plan.

The previous administration did make some changes – giving preference to siblings, eventually allowing Pre- K students to have priority to articulate into Kindergarten- but the past administration's response to our calls for managing choice for fairness and equity was always: CHOICE IS EQUITY.

Not only does the independent data study make clear that is not true, a quick review of the demographics of the D1 Elementary and Middle Schools shows high concentrations of at risk student in a few schools, with some schools serving proportionally very few ELLS, SWD, STH. D1 schools are also racially and economically highly stratified as well.

In the hand out made available to you there, is a recap of and links to that data and history.

I just to want to catch you up on our most recent initiative- we have piloted and launched a series of monthly community workshops that bring together diverse groups of community stakeholders to build consensus around the diversity priorities and values that matter to our community.

In the workshops diversity school admissions planner Michael Alves is helping us to define together what diversity looks like- how we define it and how we measure it.

At the end of the school year we will have completed the first phase of a pilot program on school diversity based assignment plans by creating community wide conversation on diversity and integration, doing community outreach and building consensus around a solution that will create equal opportunities for all children and families in District One.