

Presentation at New York City Council, Committee on Education, Hearing on Diversity in New York City Schools

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Submitted by Yasmin Secada, representing *District 3 Equity in Education Task Force*

My name is Yasmin Secada, and I'm a co-coordinator with Flor Donoso of the Parent Leadership Project (PLP), and a steering committee member of the *District 3 Equity in Education Task Force*.* I am pleased to be here today to share with you the work we have been doing in Community School District 3.

District 3, which stretches from 59th Street to 122nd Streets, mostly along the West Side of Manhattan (and includes the neighborhoods of the Upper West Side, Manhattan Valley, and the southern portion of Central Harlem) is one of the most racially and economically diverse districts in the nation's largest school system, yet is also one of the most segregated and unequal.

Although our district's public school population averages 66% students of color, many of our elementary schools do not reflect this reality.

According to the criteria put forth by UCLA's Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles recent report, "New York State's Extreme School Segregation" (March 2014), "intensely segregated" schools are schools with less than 10 percent white student enrollment, and "apartheid schools" are schools with less than 1 percent white student enrollment. Based on these criteria, nine schools in District 3 are "intensely segregated;" and of those nine schools two are "apartheid schools."

According to the Task Force's findings, CSD3's current admissions policies and criteria have resulted in uneven access to the district's schools and an uneven distribution of students:

- **Socio Economic Status:** the combined average Economic Need Index for District 3 public elementary schools is 61%. However, some schools range under 15% while others range as high as 97-100%.
- **English Language Learners:** ELLs comprise 8.8% of District 3 students, yet the percentage of ELLs at District 3 schools ranges from a low of 0.2% to a high of 18.9%.

- Race: Approximately two-thirds (66.5%) of District 3's students are Black or Latino. Some schools, however, are comprised of 95-99% Black and Latino students while at other schools, less than 30% of the student body is comprised of Black and Latino students.

For many years, a member-led social justice organization, the Center for Immigrant Families (now PLP) challenged inequitable admissions and segregated and unequal schools. CIF documented the stories of over 300 low-income parents of color and identified disparate treatment and mechanisms of exclusion at work in CSD3. At PLP, we are committed to organizing through the lens of racial and economic justice, and our community has to include all segments of the community. As we think about our schools, we must always ask, who has access and who doesn't.

In 2012, the Parent Leadership Project joined forces with educational leaders in CSD 3 to spearhead a district-wide task force to examine the inequality in CSD 3 schools.

Amongst other reasons, the Task Force responded to a need for new and innovative policy. Other policy measures have not worked: the 2009 federal magnet grant recognized the racial and socioeconomic disparities among schools in CSD3 and awarded the district an \$11 million grant to address the high rates of racial isolation. Despite best efforts and good intentions, the magnet grant had limited impact.

The task force includes educators, community leaders, parents, and education activists with the common goal of furthering equitable access for all students to all schools in our district. Over the course of two years of meetings, we came to a consensus on a framework for creating a fair and equitable admissions policy in CSD 3, which we have recently published and have begun to share with others. As our findings demonstrate, a controlled choice policy can effectively achieve equity in CSD 3 and ensure that our public schools reflect, respect, and serve all families in the district.

We look forward to continuing our work together—work that is rooted in our communities. Thank you.

*District 3 task force steering committee members include Ujju Aggarwal, Teresa Arboleda, Donna Nevel, Yasmin Secada, Lizabeth Sostre