



Eric L. Adams
Brooklyn Borough President

Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
City Council Committee on Education
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Good afternoon, Chair Dromm and members of the City Council Committee on Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and a special thank you to Council Member Robert Cornegy, Jr. for introducing this important piece of legislation concerning equality of access to the New York City Department of Education's (DOE) Gifted and Talented programs. I also want to thank Council Members Margaret Chin, Laurie Cumbo, Mathieu Eugene, Rosie Mendez, Donovan Richards, Ydanis Rodriguez, Helen Rosenthal, Ritchie Torres, and Ruben Wills for their co-sponsorship of this bill.

Intro No. 1347 is an important step toward having a gifted and talented program that is truly equitable, but it is only one step of many that will be needed to reach that goal. Along with Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., I have formed a taskforce comprising parent leaders who will explore ways to improve access and equity in the City's gifted and talented programs. At two public hearings, we heard from parents and experts about their personal experiences navigating the current system. Many of the parents stated that they learned about the gifted and talented programs and the testing by chance or through sources other than the DOE. The legislation before you today will help address that very concern. Gifted and talented programs should not be treated like a government secret. All parents should be made aware of their existence and all parents should be informed on multiple occasions through multiple methods about testing dates and procedures. By the time a student enters the DOE system, their parent or guardian should have been actively informed about these programs and had an opportunity to have any questions addressed.

The City's gifted and talented programs are often the gateway to New York City's specialized high schools, which, in turn, are gateways to Ivy League colleges for New York City students. We cannot allow lack of awareness to be the reason why a student is not tested and is ultimately left behind on the pathway to the Ivy League. Beyond the critical need for sharing information with all families, the DOE should explore other ways to make this process easier for families to

navigate, such as opt-out testing, in which students are scheduled to be tested unless their parent or guardian specifically opts out of the process. This will ensure that the only students who are not tested are students whose family knows they are not being tested.

For too long, the major determining factors in acceptance to gifted and talented programs, as well as the City's test-in specialized high schools, have been the family's ability to provide extra resources to their child in the form of test preparation, and/or the school the student attends. In essence, this means that affluence is the real test for gifted and talented programs, not the innate abilities of the child. In addition, many programs don't begin until the third grade, meaning that students who lack resources are already behind their peers. Earlier testing, before a gap in educational outcomes can be a determining factor and equity in access to preparatory classes, can help mitigate these factors.

Every year, New York City goes through the same disturbing exercise: the results of the specialized high school exam are posted and we look on in shock that minority students are once again underrepresented in the schools' freshman class. In 2015, Black and Latino students made up 23.1 percent and 23 percent of the test takers respectively, while they received only 4.9 and 6.8 percent of the offers. Of the 5,104 offers, only 595 went to those students. In 2016, those numbers barely moved, with Black and Latino students comprising 21.9 and 22.5 percent of test takers while receiving 4.1 and 6.3 percent of the offers, a grand total of 530 out of 5,106 offers. In 2017, we saw very similar numbers with Black and Latino students being 21.0 and 23.7 percent of test takers while receiving 3.8 and 6.5 percent of the offers, resulting in just 524 out of 5,078 offers.

The fact that this happens every year suggests that our current approach to rectifying this injustice is not working. We need a new approach, but we also need the right approach. We cannot continue to do the same thing every year and expect different results. We cannot leave anything on the table. If we truly want a gifted and talented system that is available to all, we need to look at access to the gifted programs, the quality of the programs themselves, the timing of the tests, how these programs feed into the specialized high schools, and why the very access to these programs has for far too long been based on things that have absolutely nothing to do with whether a child is gifted and talented.

There is a comprehensive solution to this problem, and passing this legislation is a step toward that solution.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.