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InsideSchools

Screened Schools:
How to Broaden Access and Diversity

February 2019 | By Clara Hemphill, Nicole Mader, Melanie Quiroz, and Laura Zingmond

THE NEW SCHOOL
CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS

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This report is made possible thanks to the generous support of the New York Community Trust and Deutsche Bank.

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Introduction

Mayor Bill de Blasio's proposal to increase the number of Black and Hispanic students at eight specialized high schools by replacing the entrance exam used for admission to them has dominated headlines in recent months. Far more children, however, are affected by admissions rules at another group of schools: the 73 high schools and 110 middle schools that "screen" admissions based on applicant grades, test scores, attendance, an audition, an exam or interview, or some combination of factors.

During the 2017-18 school year, these schools served 41,311 high school students and 36,341 middle school students, dwarfing the 15,540 students who attended the schools that use the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT). Moreover, unlike the plan to replace the SHSAT, which requires approval from the State Legislature, the mayor and his schools chancellor, Richard Carranza, can make changes to the screened admissions schools on their own. Ensuring that these schools offer opportunity to all is just as, if not more, important to the goal of improving educational options for more students throughout the city as any changes to the high-profile specialized high schools.

Screens are also a hot-button issue. Some see screens as reinforcing segregation in an already segregated system. Carranza, soon after he became schools chancellor, said screens are "antithetical" to the mission of public education; more recently, he has said they have a limited, "very specific" place.

In preparing this report, we drilled down into the data, and found a nuanced picture that varies from school to school and neighborhood to neighborhood. Some schools do indeed have admissions requirements that overwhelmingly favor White and Asian students from high-income neighborhoods. However, many other schools that screen for academic or artistic talent are islands of opportunity for Black and Hispanic students in low-income neighborhoods. Still others have a mix of children of different races and income levels representative of the city as a whole. The City should take care to preserve and expand success stories even as it addresses the many racial, ethnic, and income-based inequities in the system.

The Mayor's School Diversity Advisory Group this week released a preliminary report calling on the City to be "more aggressive and more realistic" in setting goals for racial and socio-economic diversity. It promised more specific recommendations on "screened" schools by the end of the school year. Our analysis is designed to inform the group's deliberations.

We examine the demographics of "screened" schools in comparison to "unscreened" schools—that is, schools that admit children of all abilities. Our report divides schools into the following categories:

- **Specialized schools.** Stuyvesant High School, Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Technical High School and five smaller schools admit students according to their scores on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT).
- **Academic screens.** These middle and high schools admit students based on their grades, test scores, attendance, an exam or an interview, or some combination of these factors. Also in this group are schools that require auditions and screen students for artistic talent. We included

LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts in this group. (LaGuardia is a specialized school, but doesn't require the SHSAT.)

- **Screened language.** These schools give priority in admissions to children learning English.
- **Hybrid schools.** These schools have multiple programs, such as an "unscreened" program that guarantees admission to students who live in the school's attendance zone and a "screened" program for advanced students. Large schools may have as many as 10 programs.
- **Unscreened.** These schools have no admission requirements. They include zoned schools and schools that admit children by lottery. Also included here are "educational option" schools, which admit students according to a bell curve designed to ensure a mix of students of different abilities.

Our analysis examines the demographics and performance of students in each of these types of schools.

Findings

In 2017-18, nearly 15% of the city's 277,521 high school students attended schools with academic screens, compared to fewer than than 6% who attended SHSAT schools. At the middle school level, about 18% of the city's 200,565 students attended schools with academic screens.[1] The schools with academic screens tend to be small, with an average enrollment of 566 for high school and 330 for middle school, compared to an average size of 1,943 for the SHSAT schools. Overall, these schools have a considerably higher share of Black and Hispanic children, low-income children, and students with disabilities than do the SHSAT schools. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: School size, demographics and performance by admissions categories

	# of schools	# of students	Avg. school size	% in poverty	% Black or Hispanic	% English Language Learners	% with disabilities	Avg. "Impact"	Avg. Grad. Rate	% Proficient in Math	% Proficient in ELA
All high schools	**424**	**277,521**	**655**	**74%**	**65%**	**12%**	**17%**	**53%**	**81%**		
Specialized	8	15,540	1,943	51%	10%	0%	1%	56%	99%		
Screened (Academics+Audition)	73	41,311	566	60%	59%	2%	14%	57%	93%		
Screened Language	31	14,022	452	87%	77%	61%	5%	61%	77%		
Hybrid	55	94,987	1,727	74%	54%	11%	16%	48%	80%		
Unscreened	257	111,661	434	80%	82%	11%	21%	52%	77%		
All middle schools	**483**	**200,565**	**415**	**75%**	**64%**	**12%**	**21%**	**43%**		**39%**	**45%**
Screened	110	36,341	330	59%	55%	5%	19%	48%		57%	61%
Screened Language	15	4,328	289	82%	69%	24%	22%	48%		36%	38%
Hybrid	75	56,014	747	77%	54%	14%	19%	43%		43%	48%
Unscreened	283	103,882	367	80%	72%	14%	22%	41%		31%	38%

Data sources: 2017-18 Demographic Snapshot, School Quality Report, and Impact and Performance Scores; 2018 High School Directory, 2018 Middle School Directory. Impact Scores are a DOE measure based on all student achievement metrics; measures school against expected outcomes, adjusted for incoming student factors. (DOE 2017-18 School Performance Dashboard).

1 These numbers do not include charter schools, transfer schools, District 75 schools for students with significant disabilities, or Hunter College High School, which is administered by the City University of New York. We use the demographic categories used by the Department of Education, with "Hispanic" rather than Latinx and "Other" to capture Native American, multi-racial, or students who do not report their race (listed as Multiple Race Categories Not Represented in DOE data). Where the "Other" category is not included in the text, percentages may not add up to 100%. "Percent in poverty" includes students who qualified for free or reduced price lunch or who are eligible for Human Resources Administration (HRA) benefits. We grouped Black and Hispanic students together in line with the categories used in the city's 2017 plan for Diversity in Admissions. It's often common to group White and Asian students together, as this report frequently does. This is because the performance on standardized tests of White and Asian students frequently track one another rather closely. We also recognize that doing this obscures often very significant differences in incomes between the families of White and Asian students. Where such differences are marked and evident, such as in the demographics of the SHSAT school student bodies depicted in this report's Figure 5, we call attention to them.

More than half the students in academically screened high schools are Black and Hispanic

Some 58% of the students in academically screened high schools were Black and Hispanic in 2017-18, compared to 65% of high school students citywide; some 60% of the students at screened schools were low-income compared to 74% citywide.

Not all screens favor academically successful students. The city has 31 high schools and 15 middle schools that limit admissions to students who are still learning English; these serve 14,022 or 5% of high school students and 4,328 or 2% of middle school students. Not surprisingly, these screened language schools have high proportions of low-income students and overwhelmingly serve one language group—those speaking either Spanish or Chinese. We separated "screened language" schools from our analysis of "screened" schools to better understand the impact of screens for academics and artistic talent on a school's demographics.

Many schools have multiple programs, each with different admissions criteria. Some 34% of high school students, or 94,987, and 28% of middle school students, or 56,014, attended what we call hybrid schools, schools with more than one program, in 2017-18. For example, the High School for Environmental Studies on Manhattan's Upper West Side has two programs, one open to students of all abilities, and a small honors program open to students with average grades of at least 85. Hybrid schools tend to be larger than either the "screened" schools or the "unscreened" schools. Unlike smaller schools, they have big enough enrollments and budgets to offer a wider range of courses, including college-level classes and remedial help. At Environmental Studies, students who enter through the regular program may have access to the honors classes, college-level courses, and other activities offered in the "screened" program—opportunities that are not generally available in the small unscreened schools that focus on remediation.

The largest category of schools is unscreened. In 2017-18, 40% of high school students, or 111,661, and 52% of middle school students, or 103,882, attended unscreened schools; these schools tend to be small and serve mostly Black and Hispanic and low-income children.

We found, as other researchers have, that Black and Hispanic students are concentrated in unscreened schools, which, taken as a group, have lower levels of performance as measured by averages of State standardized test scores or graduation rates. White and Asian students are more likely to attend screened schools which, using the same rubric, have higher student performance.

It's important to note, however, that some high-performing, sought-after high schools are "unscreened," and have no admissions requirements. For example, Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics admits a broad range of students—from struggling to high-achieving—yet its graduation, college attendance, and college readiness rates are on par with the city's most competitive schools. Ninety percent of its students in 2017-18 were Black and Hispanic and 86% were low-income. More than 3,000 middle school students applied for 85 seats in its freshman class of 2018, a ratio of 37 applicants per seat. Expanding enrollment at successful schools like Bronx Center is a way to offer more opportunities to more students, whatever decisions are made about "screens."

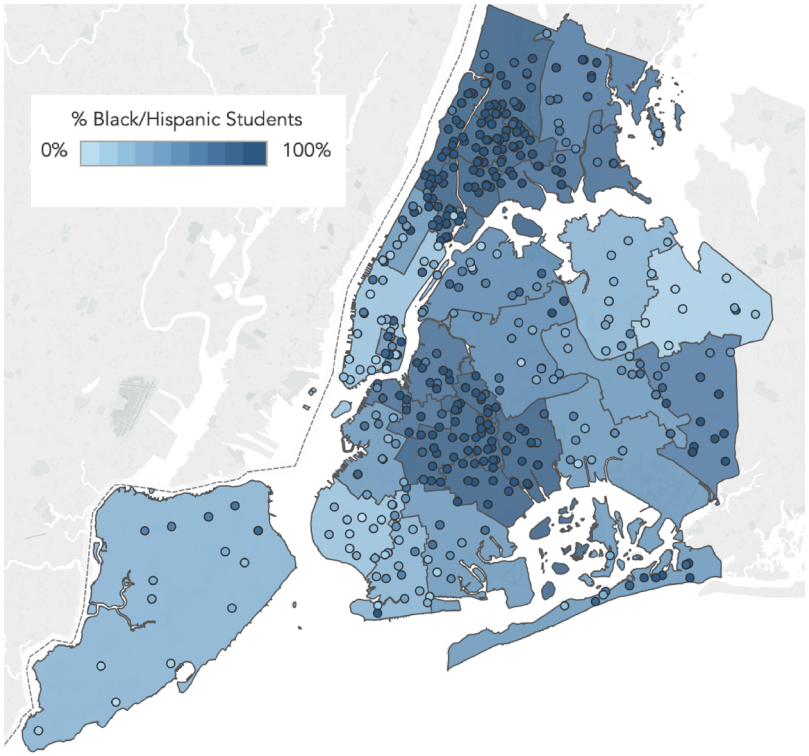
Geography matters—especially for middle school

The city is divided into 32 community school districts and, with the exception of students in "citywide" gifted programs and a handful of other schools, most children are assigned to middle schools in the districts in which they live. The racial composition of the city's middle schools mirrors, to a large extent, the racial makeup of its school districts. A large number of districts have very few White and Asian pupils. In a few, including District 26 in Bayside, Queens, District 20 in Bay Ridge and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, and District 2 on Manhattan's East Side and Tribeca, Whites and Asians predominate.

One of the top-performing middle schools in the city is IS 187, The Christa McAuliffe School. A highly selective, screened program that limits admission to students living in District 20, McAuliffe typically sends a vast majority of its graduates to the specialized high schools. Its enrollment of 873 in 2017-18 was 68% Asian and 24% White; 66% are poor enough to qualify for free lunch. Stanley Ng, a parent leader opposed to de Blasio's plan to scrap the SHSAT, says even parents of limited means send their children to private after-school test prep, beginning in 2nd or 3rd grade, to gain admission to Christa McAuliffe. Once a district with a large Italian-American population, District 20 schools now serve increasing numbers of children of Chinese, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi origin.

Two districts, District 15 in Brooklyn, which includes Park Slope, Red Hook, and Sunset Park, and District 3, which includes the Upper West Side and Harlem, are racially diverse but have screened middle schools that are disproportionately White and Asian. Perhaps not surprisingly, Districts 15 and 3 have been the focus of recent debates over school integration—because their middle schools have the potential for significant racial integration within existing district lines. Both districts have plans to modify their "screens" for the 2019-20 school year in an attempt to make their schools better reflect the demographics of their districts. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Percent of Black and Hispanic middle school students by district and school



The color scales on the map show the percentage of Black/Hispanic students at both the district and school level.

Click the image and scroll down to see a further breakdown of demographics and admission information at each district, or the school filter to see schools in different admission categories.

Data sources: 2017-18 Demographic Snapshot and 2018 Middle School Directory

In high-poverty, mostly Black and Hispanic neighborhoods, the prospects for racial and economic integration are slim, given the current district boundaries. In these neighborhoods, screened schools don't serve the function of "hoarding privilege," to use the term favored by integration advocates. Rather, screened schools may serve as a critical pipeline for low-income children to gain admission to academically challenging high schools and universities.

For example, Mott Hall III, a screened middle school in District 9 in the Morrisania section of the Bronx, offers an accelerated curriculum with high school-level courses in algebra and biology in the 8th grade. The rooms are filled with healthy chatter as students work on projects such as estimating the epicenter of an earthquake. With just 363 students in grades 6 to 8, its enrollment in 2017-18 was 97% black and Hispanic and 93% low-income. The school shares a building with an elementary school.

Some schools that were racially mixed some years ago have 'tipped' as demand increased.

At Jonas Bronck Academy, part of District 10 in the Fordham section of the Bronx, students do far more research and writing than at a typical middle school. They read plays of Shakespeare, write five-page research papers, and debate the relative merits of Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece. Housed in an office building, the school has just 268 pupils in grades 6 to 8; its enrollment in 2017-18 was 89% black and Hispanic and 90% low-income.

Both Mott Hall III and Jonas Bronck "screen" applicants for good grades and attendance, but both serve children with a wide range of abilities, including some with special needs. Fewer than half of the students at either school enter 6th grade reading at grade level, according to State standardized test scores. Both schools send graduates to academically demanding high schools, not only the SHSAT schools but also selective private schools such as the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in the Bronx or Phillips Academy in Andover, MA.

In more prosperous districts, on the other hand, academic screens combined with geographical preference largely exclude Black, Hispanic, and low-income children. Some schools that were racially mixed some years ago have "tipped" as demand increased; they now serve mostly Whites and Asians and few low-income children.

For example, Salk School of Science near Gramercy Park in Manhattan's District 2, founded in 1995 in collaboration with doctors from NYU School of Medicine, was designed, in part, to encourage Black and Hispanic children to consider careers in science and medicine. In its early days, Salk admitted children from as far away as the Bronx and Brooklyn and had more Black and Hispanic children than Whites. In 2017-18, just 16% of the student body of 386 was Black or Hispanic and 61% was White; the proportion of low-income children declined from 39% in 1998 to 11%. Admission is now limited to children living in District 2, which includes some of the most expensive real estate in the country. Students are admitted according to their grades, standardized test scores, attendance, and assessment of their behavior; unlike the screened middle schools in the Bronx, more than 90% of Salk's entering 6th graders read at grade level, according to standardized tests. In 2018, the school had 658 applicants for 108 seats in 6th grade.

Less than two miles away, near a public housing development in Hell's Kitchen, is City Knoll Middle School, the only unscreened middle school in District 2. This tiny school's 236 children were 76% Black and Hispanic and 74% low-income in 2017-18. The school is evidence of that fact that there are pockets of poverty even in a high-income district like District 2, and demonstrates that the system of "screens" can lead to segregation of children by income level as well as race.

Louis Armstrong Middle School—an experiment in court-ordered integration

If the combination of a screen for academics and a student body drawn entirely from a high-income district is a recipe for segregation, the opposite— a school without screens that draws students from a wide geographic area—can promote diversity. But even in the best of circumstances, it's tricky to get it right.

Louis Armstrong Middle School in the East Elmhurst section of Queens, founded in 1979 as a court-ordered experiment in racial integration, embodies the philosophy that children learn best when they have classmates from different ethnic groups, neighborhoods, and academic abilities. Students' families come from 100 different countries and speak 51 different languages; 72% of the school's 1,586 pupils in the last school year were low-income. Children are admitted from across the borough according to a complicated lottery based on home neighborhood, race, and academic ability. The formula does a good job making sure the school has a mix of strong students, average students, and those who need extra support; moreover 14% of the students have disabilities. But, because some seats are set aside for children who live in Districts 24 and 30, which are heavily Hispanic and have few Black children, Black students are underrepresented at the school compared to their numbers in Queens as a whole. It's a conspicuous irony in a school honoring the memory of a celebrated Black musical artist — one that reflects the demographic changes in an area that was a significantly Black middle class neighborhood when Armstrong lived there and retained something of that character when the school was born. Last school year, Louis Armstrong's student population was 50% Hispanic; 27% White; 14% Asian; and 8% Black. (Black students make up nearly 18% of

the public school enrollment in Queens but less than 3% of students in District 24 and less than 7% of students in District 30.)

The school is unusual in that it serves students with a range of abilities, including those with significant disabilities, in the same classroom, even for subjects like mathematics where students are typically grouped by skill level. Teachers adapt lessons to challenge top students while giving support to those who need it. For example, in a math class with two teachers, some students use paper cutouts to measure angles while those with a more abstract understanding calculate the angles using an approach called transformational geometry.

Mark Twain Middle School—a less successful attempt at integration

Another school that accepts children from many different neighborhoods has been less successful in achieving a racial and ethnic mix. Mark Twain School for the Gifted and Talented, a middle school in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, admits students from across the city based on auditions and tests in 11 "talent" areas, including music, dance, art, drama, science, and math. The school typically sends more than one-third of its students to the specialized high schools. However, Black and Hispanic students made up just 13% of the school's 1,322 students during the 2017-18 school year.

Removing the quotas has not resulted in a significant change in the school's demographics.

A magnet school founded as part of a court-ordered 1974 desegregation plan, Mark Twain for many years admitted students on the basis of an extremely complex formula taking into account students' test scores, the results of their "talent" test, and quotas based on the racial categories "White" and "non-White"—originally 70% White and 30% non-White. As the proportion of non-Whites in the school's home District 21 increased, the racial quotas remained the same and, as a result, the formula effectively became affirmative action for Whites. An Indian-American family filed a lawsuit against the quota system and, in 2008, the City successfully petitioned the court to remove Mark Twain from the desegregation order. Removing the quotas, however, has not resulted in a significant change in the school's demographics. The 2017-18 enrollment—28% Asian, 7% Black, and 6% Hispanic—was almost the same as it was in 2008; during that time the proportion of White students decreased from 57% to 51% while a new category, "other," now accounts for 8% of the population. (See Appendix for racial and ethnic makeup of all screened middle schools.)

High schools with the most restrictive screens tend to have more Whites and Asians

Unlike the middle schools, most high schools, with a few notable exceptions, admit students who live anywhere in the city. Geography, at least in theory, is less important than at the middle school level.

As part of the high school admissions process, students rank their high school choices, schools rank the students they want to admit, and a computer matches them. The effect is that students get sorted into high schools in narrow slices according to their 7th grade academic performance and test scores: some schools only admit students with a GPA of 90+, some 88+, some 85+, some 80+, some 75+, and so on.

Our analysis found that high schools with the most restrictive screens tend to have enrollments of predominantly White and Asian students. Aside from the eight specialized schools that require the SHSAT for admission, these include a handful of highly selective citywide schools, such as Beacon High School in Manhattan and Townsend Harris High School in Queens. They also include a number of schools that combine academic and geographic screens—that is, that only admit high-achieving students from a particular school district.

Among schools that required average GPAs of at least 85 in 2018, just 30% of students are Black and Hispanic, compared to 60% at all screened schools and 65% at all high schools. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: School size, demographics and performance by screen difficulty

	# of schools	# of students	Avg. school size	% in poverty	% Black or Hispanic	% ELLs	% with disabilities	Incoming Math Proficiency	Incoming ELA Proficiency	Avg. "Impact"	Avg. Grad. Rate	Avg. Apps. per seat
All high schools	424	277,521	655	74%	65%	12%	17%	2.6	2.8	53%	81%	10.8
All screened schools	*73*	*41,311*	*566*	*60%*	*59%*	*2%*	*14%*	*3.2*	*3.4*	*57%*	*93%*	*18.9*
Audition	14	10,823	773	58%	65%	2%	14%	3.0	3.3	52%	91%	6.8
Academics	59	30,488	517	60%	58%	2%	14%	3.3	3.4	58%	94%	21.5
Schools that admit 85+ GPA	16	10,006	625	43%	30%	1%	12%	3.9	3.8	61%	98%	35.1
Schools that admit 80+ GPA	22	13,077	594	49%	36%	1%	13%	3.7	3.7	62%	98%	30.1
Schools that admit levels 3+	13	8,483	653	42%	28%	1%	12%	3.9	3.8	61%	98%	34.1
Schools that admit levels 2.5+	19	11,261	593	47%	36%	1%	12%	3.8	3.8	59%	98%	29.8
Schools that require an interview, writing sample, or on-site exam	26	12,452	479	63%	67%	3%	14%	3.2	3.3	55%	93%	19.0
Specialized high schools	*8*	*15,540*	*1,943*	*51%*	*10%*	*0%*	*1%*	*4.3*	*4.1*	*56%*	*99%*	*93.3*

Data sources: 2017-18 Demographic Snapshot, School Quality Report, and Impact and Performance Scores; 2018 High School Directory. Impact Scores are a DOE measure based on all student achievement metrics; measures school against expected outcomes, adjusted for incoming student factors. (DOE 2017-18 School Performance Dashboard).

There is a wide range of requirements among the screened schools. Some are almost comically restrictive, while others have admissions requirements that are so low as to be meaningless. For example, to be admitted to Eleanor Roosevelt High School on Manhattan's Upper East Side, students must have: a grade point average of at least 93 in 7th grade; excellent attendance; standardized test scores of Level 4, the highest level; and must live or attend school in Manhattan's District 2. (Students who live outside District 2 but who attend private school in the district are also eligible for admission.) More than 5,000 students apply for 100 seats in 9th grade, a ratio of 50 applicants per seat.

At the same time, some screens hardly deserve the name: Dr. Susan McKinney Secondary School of the Arts in Brooklyn admits students with course grade averages of 55 to 65, or barely passing, and standardized test scores of Level 1.6 in math and Level 1.9 in reading, well below grade level. On paper, the school requires an audition. In practice, it cannot attract enough applicants to fill its seats.

Somewhere in between are schools with screens designed to ensure that students are prepared to complete a demanding college preparatory curriculum, but don't set an admission bar so high as to exclude students who don't get straight "A's" and perfect test scores. These include Brooklyn schools like Medgar

Evers College Preparatory School in Crown Heights, or Science, Technology and Research Early College High School in Flatbush. Both schools are more than 80% Black and have good records of graduating students on time and preparing them for demanding colleges.

Schools that require an audition (usually for music, drama or art) have average enrollments of 65% Black and Hispanic and 58% low-income students. Here, too, there is a wide range of requirements. LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts on Manhattan's Upper West Side requires both an audition and top grades and test scores. Some 27% of its students were Black and Hispanic and 29% were low income in 2017-18. In contrast, Art and Design High School and Talent Unlimited, both on the Upper East Side, require an audition but admit students with a range of academic skills; their enrollments were majority Black and Hispanic and low-income in 2017-18.

Screened schools striving for diversity

Some high-performing screened schools are dedicated to serving a mix of students from different racial and ethnic groups, as well as students with disabilities and those from low-income families. As these schools become increasingly popular, the number of qualified applicants has soared. This makes it more difficult for schools to admit a diverse student body under the City's admission system, which requires each each school to rank applicants according to their grades, test scores, attendance, and other factors that are often related to a child's socio-economic status. Under this ranking system, low-income students and Black and Hispanic students who have good grades and test scores and are capable of completing a demanding college-prep curriculum may be squeezed out by other students with even higher grades and test scores. In an attempt to reverse this trend, three high schools have joined the city's Diversity in Admissions pilot, which allows them to give priority in admissions to students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The pilot, first rolled out in seven elementary schools in 2016 and subsequently expanded to 81 schools of all grade levels, is designed to stem the decline in the enrollment of low-income students as their schools become popular choices for better-off families.

Bard High School Early College Queens was founded in 2008 in Long Island City as a partnership between the City and Bard College. It offers an extremely accelerated curriculum: students complete 9th and 10th grade in classes taught by college professors, skip 11th and 12th grade, and take college-level courses their 3rd and 4th years. Students graduate with both a high school diploma and an associates degree—a huge financial boon for first-generation college students. The school's demographics have shifted over the years, with declining numbers of low-income and Black and Hispanic students. By 2017-18, its enrollment of 623 students was 34% Asian, 34% White, 19% Hispanic, 11% Black, and 3% other; 40% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. To increase the proportion of Black and Hispanic students, the school recruits heavily in the Bronx and permits students to take its admission test at their middle school, rather than traveling to Queens. The school also relies heavily on interviews to identify talented students whose grades and test scores may not reflect their potential. Bard Queens is able to conduct significant outreach (which includes interviewing 2,000 students for 134 9th grade seats) because it has financial support from Bard College—an advantage most New York City public schools do not have. In the first year of the diversity pilot, for admission to the 2018-19 school year, the school gave priority for 63% of its seats to low-income students; it increased its proportion of low-in-

come, Hispanic, and Asian students, while the proportion of White students decreased and that of Black students stayed the same, schools officials said.

Manhattan/Hunter High School, opened in 2003 in the Martin Luther King Campus on the Upper West Side, had 442 students and a 2017-18 enrollment that was 33% Hispanic, 28% Asian, 19% White, 16% Black and 4% other; 61% of its students were low-income. Designed to jump-start the education of average or slightly below-average students, it offers three years of classes at the high school, followed by one year of classes at Hunter College on the Upper East Side, where high school teachers continue to offer guidance and support. Graduates may complete their bachelor's degrees at Hunter College for free. The school has become wildly popular, with 53 applicants per seat, and, as demand has grown, its admission standards have risen. Students now must have grades of 87 or higher and test scores that are well above average to be admitted. Concerned that the school would "tip" toward higher-income students, Manhattan/Hunter also joined the Diversity in Admissions pilot for admission to the 2019-20 school year. Although final admission statistics aren't available, a staff member said preliminary results are promising.

Central Park East High School, which shares the Jackie Robinson Educational Complex in East Harlem with a charter school, had 496 students and an enrollment that's 52% Hispanic, 26% Black, 14% Asian, 5% White, and 2% other; 83% were low-income. Central Park East has grown in popularity in the past decade and now has more than 4,400 applicants for 112 seats. Although its population is still largely Black and Hispanic and low-income, the school has joined the Diversity in Admissions pilot as a way of retaining a demographic mix in the future. (See Appendix for racial and ethnic makeup of all screened high schools.)

Our analysis of screened schools paints a complex picture. Black and Hispanic and low-income students are disproportionately assigned to unscreened schools. White and Asian students, including many who are also low-income, predominate at the specialized schools that require the SHSAT for admission.

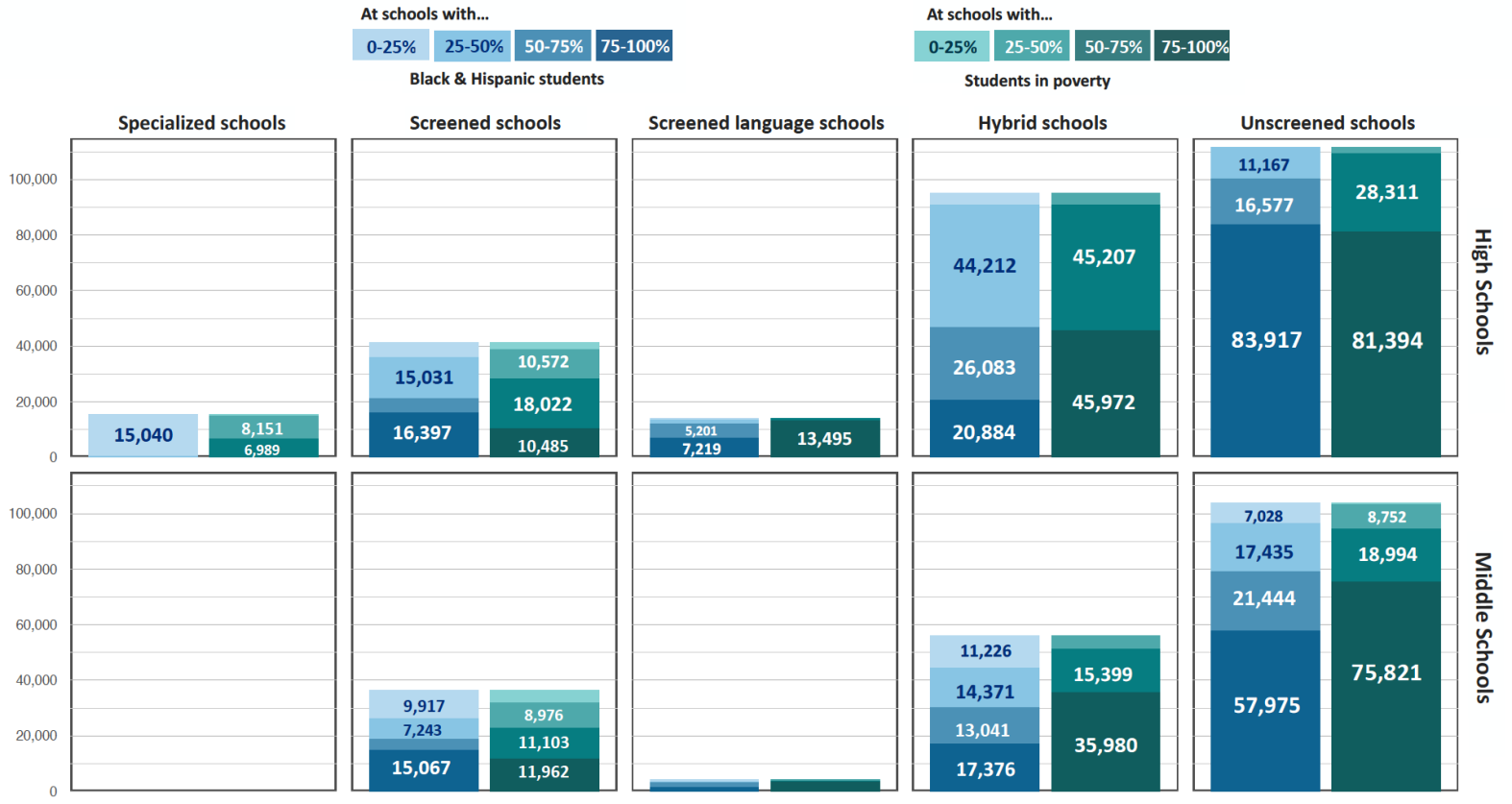
The "screened" and the "hybrid" schools fall somewhere in between. As a group, these schools are more integrated, both racially and economically, and serve many more students than the specialized high schools. (See Figure 4.)

However, the averages mask differences at the individual school level.

While two-thirds of the city's 110 screened middle schools in 2017-18 had enrollments more than 50% Black and Hispanic, 18 had enrollments more than 75% White and Asian. These included four of the five citywide "gifted and talented" schools with grades K-8 (that admit children based on an exam given at the age of 4); a citywide middle school, Mark Twain School for the Gifted and Talented in Brooklyn; and a number of "screened" middle schools that limit admission to children living in Manhattan's Districts 2 and 3 or Brooklyn's Districts 15 or 20.

And, while more than half of the city's 73 academically screened high schools had enrollments more than 50% Black and Hispanic, eight had enrollments more than 75% White and Asian, including: Townsend Harris and the Baccalaureate School for Global Education in Queens; Leon Goldstein High School for the Sciences in Brooklyn; and Eleanor Roosevelt, Baruch, NYC Lab School, Millennium, and Clinton School for Writers and Artists in Manhattan. In a school system where 65% of high school students are Black and His-

Figure 4: Number of students in each admission category, by share of Black and Hispanic and students in poverty at each school



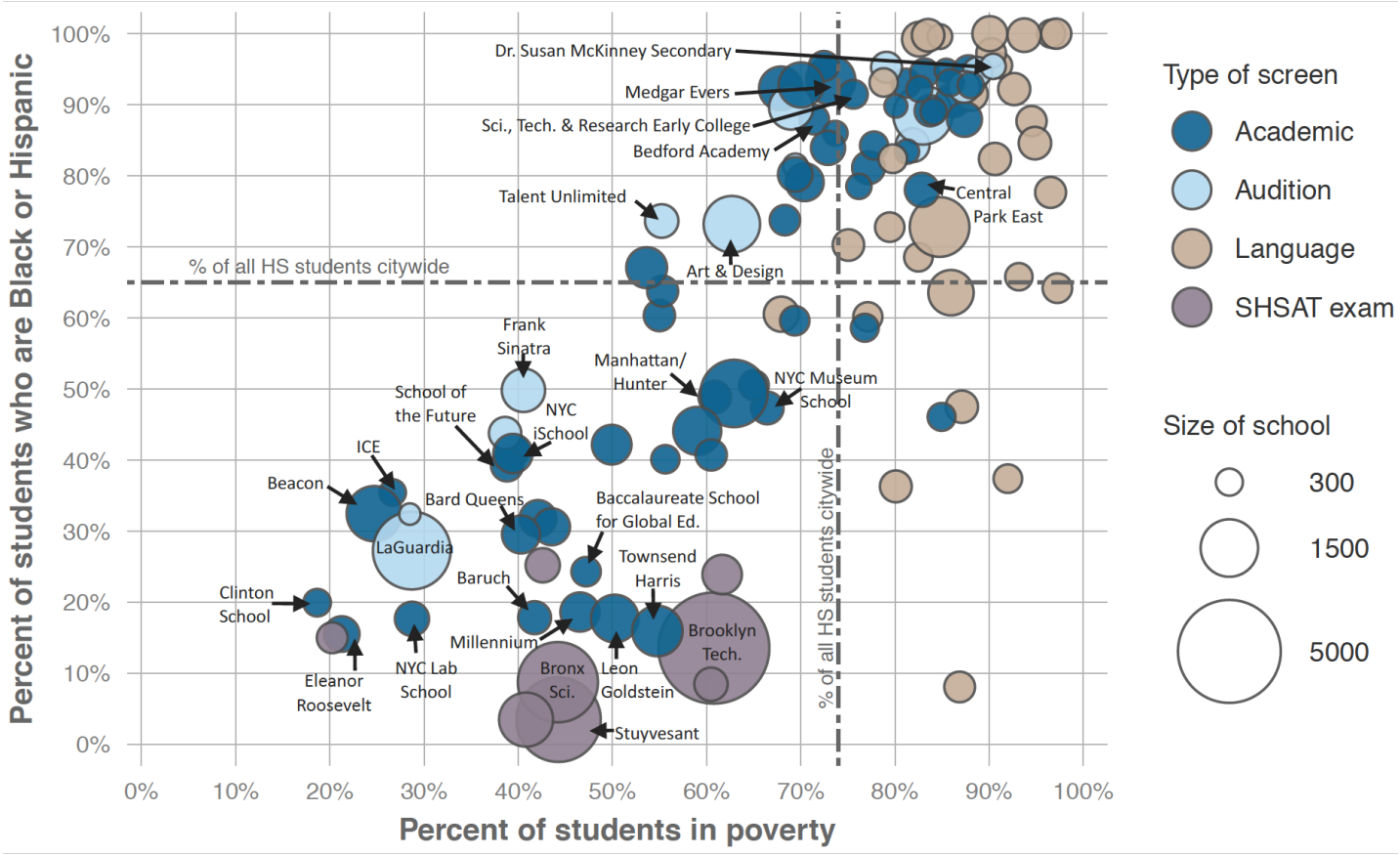
Data sources: 2017-18 Demographic Snapshot and 2018 High School Directory

panic, these schools clearly do not have enrollments that are representative of the city as a whole.

Teasing out race and class complicates the issue still further. For example, the schools that require the SHSAT have relatively few Black and Hispanic students, but have a significant number of low-income students, reflecting the fact that many Asian students attending these schools are low-income.

Among the 112 schools that screen students based on academics, an audition, language, or the SHSAT exam, only about one-third serve lower shares of students in poverty and Black or Hispanic students than the share of all high school students citywide. These schools tend to be larger and are more likely to screen for academics or require the SHSAT than the schools that are more reflective of the city's high school student population. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Demographic and Size Comparison: All Screened, Screened Language and Specialized High Schools



Data sources: 2017-18 Demographic Snapshot and 2018 High School Directory

History

A little history helps make sense of the jumble of different schools with different admission methods. For most of the 20th century, most children attended the zoned neighborhood schools to which they were assigned according to their home address. Many of these schools were "tracked," that is, children were assigned to classes according to their ability, with an honors or "top" class, an above-average class, an average class, and a remedial track. Junior high schools and high schools tended to be large, with more than 1,200 students. A tiny handful of schools—Stuyvesant High School, Brooklyn Technical School, Bronx High School of Science, and several arts-themed high schools—had selective admissions.

Beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the 1990s, alternative high schools were created to accommodate children who were unhappy or unsuccessful in traditional schools. Some, like Central Park East Secondary School (founded in 1985) and Beacon High School (founded in 1993), admitted racially diverse groups of students from a range of neighborhoods. To ensure that the alternative schools offered opportunities to students of different academic abilities, the City created an admission formula called "educational option." According to this formula—still in effect today at many schools—16% of students score above average on standardized tests, 16% are below average, and 68% are in the middle.

The junior high schools, meanwhile, were undergoing a transformation to a new model called "middle schools." Instead of large schools where students changed classes every 43 minutes, as they might in high school, the City created small middle schools in which students would stay with the same teacher for two hours or more. These smaller schools, many sharing buildings with elementary schools, tended to be safer and more intimate than the large junior high schools they replaced. Instead of being assigned according to their address, students could apply to schools with themes that interested them.

The city's 32 school districts are a legacy of the State's 1969 school decentralization law designed to give communities control over their elementary and middle schools. Although most of the law was superseded by the 2002 law giving the mayor control of the schools, each district still sets standards for its middle schools. The result is a crazy quilt of admission requirements: some districts still have zoned schools; some require students to apply through a districtwide school choice program; and some have a mix of zoned schools and "schools of choice."

The district lines were drawn to meet the political exigencies of the time.

The district lines were drawn to meet the political exigencies of the time; half a century later, they tend to reinforce school segregation at the elementary and middle school level. District 20 in Brooklyn, for example, includes neighborhoods, like Bay Ridge and Bensonhurst, with very few Black children; District 2 in Manhattan includes mostly White neighborhoods like the Upper East Side and Tribeca but excludes adjacent neighborhoods, like East Harlem and the Lower East Side, that have more Hispanic children. (See Figure 2.)

High schools, with a few notable exceptions, have always been under the control of the central school administration and, theoretically at least, offer more opportunity for integration because students are more able to travel to other neighborhoods.

The current high school application system is the legacy of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his first schools chancellor, Joel Klein. When Bloomberg took office in 2002, many of the city's large zoned high schools were dismal, disorderly places where barely one-third of the students graduated on time. Building on the success of the small alternative high schools that had been created the decade before, Bloomberg and Klein launched an ambitious plan to close dysfunctional high schools and create more than 200 small, themed schools, most of them inside the same buildings that had housed the larger schools. Instead of a large school with one principal and as many as 3,000 students, each building would house five or six small schools, one on each floor, each with its own principal and just 400 students. Most of these schools had no admission requirements beyond attendance at an open house; a few had "screens."

Meanwhile, as some of the older "ed-opt" schools grew in popularity, they switched their admission criteria to "screened." Manhattan schools like Beacon, the Institute for Collaborative Education, New York City Museum School, School of the Future, Baruch College Campus High School, and Brooklyn's Leon Goldstein, all of which had served a range of students of different abilities, began to skew toward high-achieving students.

As with the middle schools, some "screened" high schools morphed from serving mostly Black and Hispanic students to serving mostly White and Asian students as they became better-known and demand increased. For example, NYC iSchool, a small Manhattan high school founded in 2008, had a majority of Black and Hispanic students until 2017; in 2018 its enrollment was 41% Black and Hispanic. More than 3,800 students apply for 98 seats in the freshman class, a ratio of 39 applicants per seat.

In some respects, the old system of tracking *within* schools was replaced by tracking *among* schools, as the number of high schools ballooned from 191 in 1998 to 432 in 2017. While the number of screened high schools increased over that period, the number of students enrolled in screened programs (either stand-alone schools or honors programs within schools) has shown only a modest increase since 2005, according to economist Sean Corcoran of Vanderbilt University, who has conducted extensive research on the city's schools.

This initiative has found some promising early results for low-income students.

In 2013, toward the end of the Bloomberg administration, the City Department of Education began requiring screened schools to accept more children with disabilities. The policy was designed to address the concern that some schools were assigned disproportionate numbers of children receiving special education services while others enrolled almost none. All screened schools, with the exception of the specialized schools, were asked to admit students with disabilities based on the percentage of special needs students in each borough. While not specifically designed to increase the number of low-income or Black and Hispanic children, the policy forced screened schools to accommodate children with a broader range of academic skills.

The de Blasio administration has taken steps to remove some barriers to middle and high school admission and to expand opportunities for low-income children. It eliminated one category of high school admission, called "limited unscreened," which gave preference to students who attended an open house. The "limited unscreened" preference was seen as giving an advantage to children whose parents could afford time to visit schools. In most cases, it was replaced with the "ed-opt" formula designed to assign students according to a bell curve of students' test scores.

In addition, the de Blasio administration launched a "Diversity in Admissions" pilot which allows schools to give preference in admission for a portion of their seats to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, a measure of poverty. As our recent report, Promising Outcomes, Limited Potential, found, this initiative has shown some promising early results for low-income students, although the impact on the racial and ethnic makeup of schools is unclear.

As part of the diversity pilot, two districts have modified their middle school admissions: Manhattan's District 3 on the Upper West Side and Harlem and Brooklyn's District 15, which includes Park Slope, Red Hook, and Sunset Park. For the 2019-20 school year, most of the schools in District 3 will give priority for 25% of their seats to children who are low-income or lower-performing—not a significant change from their current

enrollment. District 15's plan is more ambitious: it will remove all screens and give preference to low-income children, those learning English, and those in temporary housing for 52% of the seats in each school.

De Blasio's most ambitious and controversial policy proposal has been to scrap the exam for admission to the eight specialized high schools and replace it with system that would admit the top 7% of students at each middle school, using metrics such as grades and State test scores. The result would be more Black and Hispanic students and fewer Asian students, who now make up a majority of the students at the specialized schools.

Not all high schools can meet the needs of all students equally well.

While prospects for approval of that plan by the State Legislature are uncertain, there are a number of steps the City can take now to broaden opportunity for high-quality middle and high school education for more students.

Recommendations

Some advocates have suggested that the City should eliminate all "screens" to expand access to high-quality schools to more low-income children and Black and Hispanic children. Our research suggests a more nuanced approach would be preferable. Some screens do indeed limit access, such as the District 2 high schools that require near-perfect academic records as well as residence in a high-income neighborhood. But other screens may, in fact, help low-income and Black and Hispanic students gain access to a quality education.

The small high schools created during the Bloomberg administration were designed, in part, to help students who were far behind in their studies catch up and graduate on time. Indeed, they were largely successful in this regard, and were responsible for a marked increase in the City high school graduation rate, as researchers at MDRC found.

However, most of these unscreened schools have a very limited curriculum: by focusing intensely on students who enter high school reading at a 5th or 6th grade level, they don't have the budget to offer higher-level courses such as physics, chemistry, or Algebra II, as we found in our 2015 paper, "What's Wrong With Math and Science in New York City High Schools." A more recent study found that attending a small, unscreened high school has a positive effect for low-achieving students but a negative effect for high-achieving students.

Not all high schools can meet the needs of all students equally well. While there is an important place for the small, unscreened schools that help students who are far behind in their studies, there is also a place for schools that limit admissions to students who are ready for high school work, as demonstrated by passing grades in middle school, regular attendance, and at least average standardized test

scores. Many of the small schools with academic screens that serve low-income communities do just that. Removing the screens at these schools would not increase opportunities for low-income children.

What the City should do, however, is remove or modify unreasonable screens while replicating or expanding the enrollment of successful schools, both screened and unscreened, that have far more applicants than seats. We interviewed 22 principals, teachers, guidance counselors, parent leaders, and Department of Education officials as well as scholars who have researched school choice. Based on our conversations with these experts, here are our recommendations.

Remove "screens" for District 2 middle schools

In most of the city, the racial and ethnic makeup of the middle schools mirrors the makeup of their school districts; that is, mostly Black and Hispanic districts have mostly Black and Hispanic middle schools. However, the demographics of District 2 middle schools vary significantly: City Knoll Middle School in Hell's Kitchen, for example, is an unscreened school with a 2017-18 enrollment that was 76% Black and Hispanic and 74% low-income, while East Side Middle on the Upper East Side is a screened school which had just 12% Black and Hispanic and 11% low-income students. Getting rid of the screens at District 2 middle schools could serve to distribute students more evenly. City Knoll is "an unscreened school in a sea of screened schools," one parent leader said.

Examine admissions at screened boroughwide and citywide middle schools

Schools that admit children from all five boroughs have the potential to be racially and economically diverse because they draw from every neighborhood. However, most of the citywide middle school programs have few low-income, Black, or Hispanic children.

Nearly all citywide 'gifted' schools have enrollments that are less than 25% Black and Hispanic.

At Mark Twain School for the Gifted and Talented, long considered one of the top middle schools in the city, Black and Hispanic students made up just 13% of the school's 1,322 students last year. The city should examine the admissions procedures to determine why so few Black and Hispanic students attend.

Nearly all of other citywide gifted and talented schools have enrollments that are less than 25% Black and Hispanic students. (An exception is the TAG School for Young Scholars in East Harlem, which is racially mixed.) These serve children in grades K-8 and admit children based on the results of an exam given at the age of four. The city should examine the admission procedures for these schools as well.

Expand enrollment at successful "unscreened" high schools

While many small unscreened high schools focus their resources on remediation, others manage to serve a range of students well. Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics, for example, does a particularly good job of challenging high-achieving students while giving others the support they need. With an enrollment of 463 and 37 applicants per seat, Bronx Center admits students according to the ed-opt formula designed to ensure a mix of low-, average-, and high-achieving students. Principal Ed Tom would love the opportunity to expand his school; he told us he could maintain his school's culture and results with double the size.

Bronx Center shares its South Bronx building with another successful school, Eximius College Preparatory Academy, with an enrollment of 432 and nearly 20 applicants per seat. Eximius, which means "most excellent" in Latin, was featured on the PBS NewsHour for its success in helping low-income students attend college. Like Bronx Center, it admits students according to the ed-opt formula and serves a range of students, including many with special needs. Both schools have enrollments that are overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic.

Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics challenges high-achieving students.

Bronx Center and Eximius are a 10-minute walk from the Morris Educational Campus, a castle-like structure with high ceilings, stained glass windows, and a huge auditorium with a pipe organ. Built in 1897 as the first public high school in the Bronx, the former Morris High School now houses four small schools, three of which are unable to attract enough students to fill their seats. One of these, the High School for Violin and Dance, had just 264 students in 2017-18. The Department of Education should consider consolidating tiny schools to make room for the expansion of successful, high-demand schools in their place.

Other high-demand, unscreened schools that serve a range of students well include Bronx Latin, South Bronx Preparatory, Pelham Preparatory Academy, Collegiate Institute for Math and Science in the Bronx and Essex Street Academy, Harvest Collegiate, and the Academy for Software Engineering in Manhattan. Some of these are successful precisely because they are small and teachers are able to form close bonds with their students. However, increasing enrollment slightly—from 340 to, say, 450, could offer more students an opportunity to attend a successful school while preserving their secret to success.

Because these schools are committed to serving students with a range of abilities, expanding their enrollment is less likely to leave other schools with disproportionate numbers of high-needs students.

Increase enrollment at popular screened schools—carefully

Some high-demand screened schools, like Manhattan-Hunter Science High School in the Martin Luther King Campus, share a building with schools that cannot fill their seats. Consolidating small, low-demand schools in these buildings may free up space for the high-demand schools to expand; leasing additional space is another option.

In other cases, schools can increase their enrollment by moving. Bedford Academy High School, housed in a small building in the Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, had an enrollment of just 364 last school year, and enjoys an excellent record preparing its students, most of whom are Black and Hispanic and low-income, for college. In fact, most students take classes at nearby Medgar Evers College or other colleges while still in high school. The school, which admits students with GPAs of 70 or above and standardized test scores of Level 2.5 or above, (which puts them slightly below grade level), has an astonishing 56 applicants per seat. Meanwhile, Boys and Girls High School, about a mile

away, has excess capacity. If Bedford Academy moved into the Boys and Girls building, it could increase its enrollment.

When increasing enrollment at screened schools, the Department of Education should take care not to siphon off the most successful students, leaving other schools with disproportionate numbers of struggling students. This can be done either by adjusting the admissions formulas or by adding new, unscreened programs at screened schools.

Add new "ed-opt" programs at popular screened schools

Educational option or "ed-opt" is an admissions method designed to ensure that students of all skills levels get an opportunity to attend popular schools. It also eases the concern that a popular school takes all the strongest students, leaving other schools with needier and hard-to-reach students. In this method, schools pick half the students, a computer picks half, and an algorithm ensures that students fall on a bell curve of achievement.

It doesn't always work; schools that strong students avoid wind up with all low-performing students, regardless of the computer algorithm. But at schools with high demand it can ensure an academically diverse population, which often turns out to be racially and economically diverse as well.

Bedford Academy High School has an astonishing 56 applicants per seat.

Very popular screened schools, like Manhattan/Hunter or NYC iSchool, could add an ed-opt program as they expand their enrollment. Some students would continue to be admitted according to the "screens," while others would be admitted according to a bell curve.

Eliminate ranking of applicants at screened schools

Under current procedures, screened high schools must rank applicants according to their grades, tests scores, attendance, and other factors. There may be no significant difference between, say, a student with an 88 average and one with an 89 average, but the ranking system requires schools to make a distinction between them. The result is that only students with the very highest test scores and grades are admitted to the most popular schools, even if students with slightly lower grades are prepared to take a college preparatory curriculum and could be successful. Instead, screened schools should set a threshold for admission—say grades of 80 and average standardized test scores—and have a lottery among students who meet that threshold.

Replicate schools with successful models

For schools without physical space to expand, or those whose success depends on staying small, consider replicating schools with successful models. Millennium Brooklyn High School is an example of a popular school designed on the model of Millennium High School in Manhattan. Louis Armstrong Middle School in Queens and the Urban Assembly School of Applied Math and the Science and Laboratory School of Finance and Technology, both in the Bronx, are examples of successful schools that serve a range of students and that could be replicated, if conditions are right.

Replication doesn't always work: the attempt to create half a dozen schools on the model of Manhattan's Frederick Douglass Academy failed, for example, because the City tried to do too many too fast, without enough effective school leaders and staff. On the other hand, the Internationals Network for Public Schools has created 28 schools for new immigrants, thanks to a thoughtful curriculum, extensive principal training, and leadership at the network level.

Eliminate geographical preference for District 2 high schools

While most of the city's high schools accept students from all five boroughs, four highly sought-after and highly selective schools—Baruch College Campus School, Eleanor Roosevelt High School, School of the Future, and NYC Lab School for Collaborative Studies—limit their admissions to District 2, causing considerable resentment among parents who live elsewhere. Because these schools, which serve few Black and Hispanic and low-income students, are small, opening them up citywide would not create many seats; some could also increase their enrollment overall, perhaps by moving into underutilized buildings.

Let LaGuardia be LaGuardia

LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, the ninth specialized high school and the only one that doesn't require the SHSAT, has long required an audition for admission. However, there have been widespread complaints since the school's administration began giving priority in admission to students with top grades and test scores—rejecting students with outstanding artistic talent. Returning the school to its original mission of training artistically talented students, regardless of their grades and test scores, may also serve to increase access for students who did not attend an academically challenging middle school.

Changing admissions should be just the beginning

Increasing access to high-quality schools doesn't have to be a zero-sum game, with winners and losers fighting over scarce seats. As our research shows, most of the screened schools are small—with fewer than 400 students in middle schools and fewer than 600 in high schools. In addition, there are many small, high-performing schools that don't screen children for admission. Some of these have more than 30 applicants per seat.

Not all the small schools should be enlarged; some, particularly at the middle school level, are successful precisely because they are small. Replicating the successful ones—rather than expanding their enrollment—may be the way to go.

Nevertheless, doubling the enrollment of as few as 20 schools that now serve about 500 students each would create 10,000 seats at schools that are in high demand. The size of a school determines its budget, the size of its faculty, and the range of courses it can offer. Larger schools can often serve a wider range of students, who can take electives, sports, and extracurriculars together even if they are enrolled in different level classes for subjects like math and science.

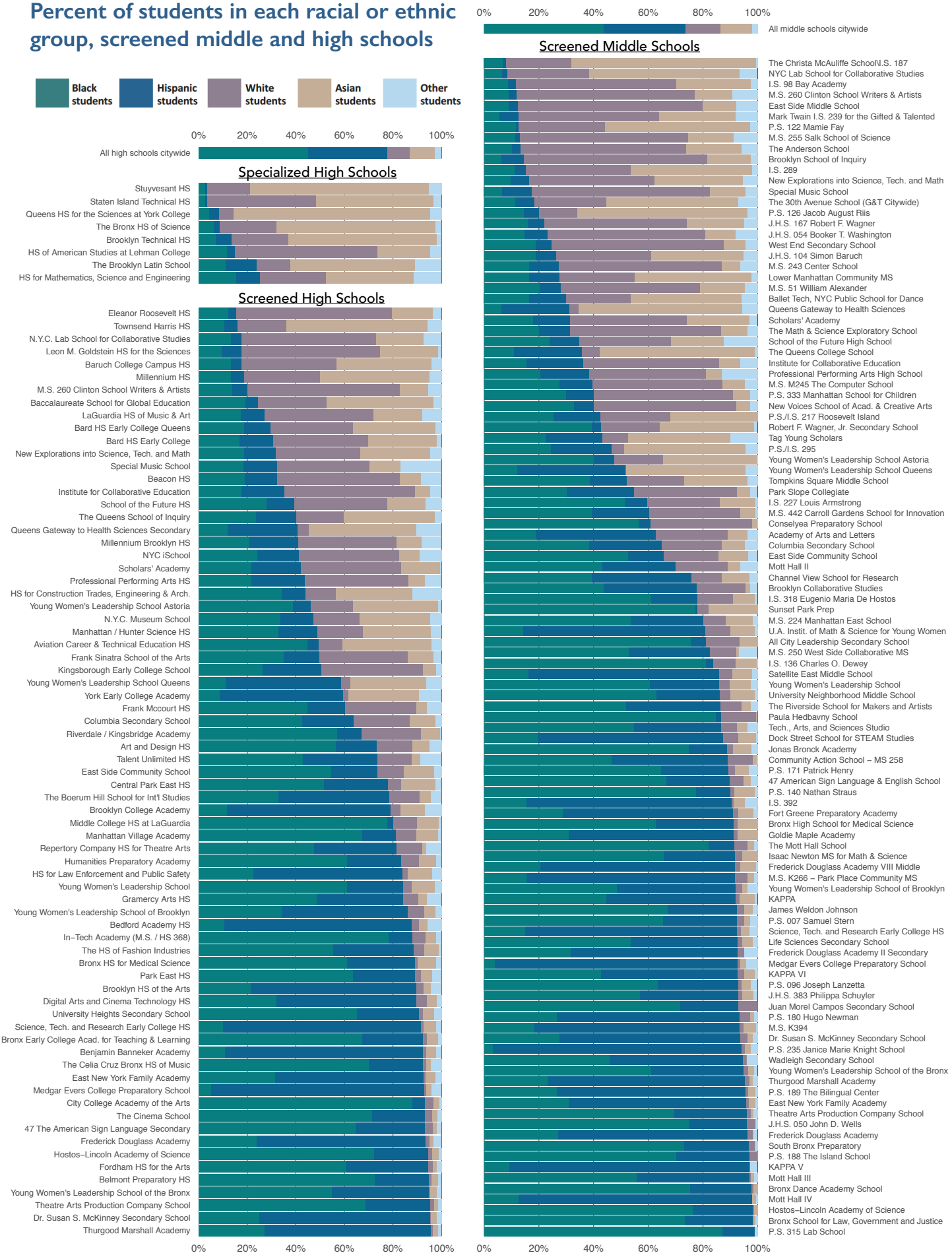
Finding space for new classrooms is always a challenge. Maintaining a high-quality staff while a school expands is difficult. It will take careful planning to ensure that sought-after schools don't merely siphon

off the most successful students, leaving other schools with ever-higher concentrations of students who need the most help. Nonetheless, if one school has students clamoring to get in while another in the same building can't attract enough students to fill its seats, why not expand the high-demand school?

In expanding successful schools, the City should also take steps to avoid internal tracking, which effectively segregates students by ability within a school building. All schools should be welcoming to students of different races and ethnicities. They should hire more teachers of color and make the curriculum more responsive to students of different cultural backgrounds.

Rather than reinforcing segregation by ethnicity and income, New York's public schools, including its secondary schools, should reflect and embrace the city's diversity. They should offer more students of all backgrounds greater opportunities for challenging, high-quality education. We recognize that it's easy to proclaim these lofty goals, and much harder to realize them. But we also believe that this report suggests a range of practicable ways to advance that process.

Appendix:
Percent of students in each racial or ethnic group, screened middle and high schools



Data sources: 2017-18 Demographic Snapshot and 2018 High School Directory

Download data **used for this report.**

THE INTEGRATION PROJECT at the Center for New York City Affairs, a multi-year research and reporting effort headed by InsideSchools founder Clara Hemphill, is examining racial and economic integration in the nation's largest public school system. Previous publications of this project include:

Promising Outcomes, Limited Potential: Diversity in Admissions in New York City Public Schools, by Nicole Mader Abigail Kramer and Angela Butel, Center for New York City Affairs, November 2018.

The Paradox of Choice: How school choice divides New York City elementary schools, by Nicole Mader Clara Hemphill and Qasim Abbas, Center for New York City Affairs, May 2018.

The Calculus of Race and Class: A New Look at the Achievement Gap in New York City Schools, by Nicole Mader and Ana Carla Sant'anna Costa, Center for New York City Affairs, January 2018.

No Heavy Lifting Required: New York City's Unambitious School 'Diversity' Plan, by Nicole Mader and Ana Carla Sant'anna Costa, Center for New York City Affairs, June 2017.

Five Steps to Integrate New York City Elementary Schools, by Clara Hemphill, Lydie Raschka, and Nicole Mader, Center for New York City Affairs, November 2016.

West Side Story: How City Leaders Can Back a Brave School Zoning Plan, by Clara Hemphill, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, November 2016.

Integrated Schools in a Segregated City: Ten Strategies that Have Made New York City Elementary Schools More Diverse, by Clara Hemphill, Nicole Mader, and the InsideSchools staff, Center for New York City Affairs, October 2016.

Tough Test Ahead: Bringing Diversity to New York City's Specialized High Schools, by Bruce Cory and Nicole Mader, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, June 2016.

Diversity in New York's Specialized Schools: A Deeper Data Dive, by Nicole Mader, Bruce Cory, and Celeste Royo, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, June 2016.

Can Controlled Choice Help Integrate NYC Schools, by Clara Hemphill, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, April 2016.

Segregated Schools in Integrated Neighborhoods: The City's Schools Are Even More Divided Than Our Housing, by Clara Hemphill and Nicole Mader, Center for New York City Affairs, January 2016.

Are Schools Segregated Because Housing Is? It Ain't Necessarily So, by Clara Hemphill and Nicole Mader, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, December 2015.

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