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## Testimony on high-stakes testing before the NYC Education Committee

September 24, 2019

Thank you, Chair Treyger for holding these important hearings and for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Emily Carrazana, I work at Class Size Matters and I attended public elementary and middle schools in the Bronx. Beginning in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I would trek up to Bronx Science two or three days a week, and for most of my summers to participate in the Dream/Specialized High School Institute (SHSI), a program designed to help prepare low income and high achieving students for the SHSAT.

After many hours of sacrificed time out of my childhood , I did not get into any of the specialized high schools, despite my good grades and high scores on the state exams. . My parents, first generation immigrants, did not know the first thing about the bureaucratic process that is the complex high school admissions process in this city. So, when I was rejected from the specialized high schools, they did the only thing they thought they could do.

They moved our entire family out of the state to neighboring New Jersey. I ended up graduating from my town's public high school, successfully completing AP and International Baccalaureate courses and went on to earn my bachelor's degrees from Rutgers in three years. My results on the SHSAT were no indication of where my abilities stood back in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, just as they are not a valid marker for success for any student today.

While many people argue that eliminating this exam and/or gifted programs will cause the families of high-achieving students to move out of the city, the example of my family shows how the opposite happens currently because of the use of an unfair high-stakes exam – which has been shown not only to discriminate against students of color but also high-achieving girls.

The SHSAT is an invalid and biased exam. While nearly all of the discussion and debate has so far revolved around the way in which it leads to racial disparities, this exam has also been shown conclusively to be highly gender-biased. Though NYC girls receive higher test scores on the state exams and better grades, they are accepted into the specialized high schools at much lower rates. Here are last year's results by gender, revealing a gender gap of eight percentage points.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2019/03/dismal-results-and-gender-bias-remains.html>

Gender	#stud tested	% students tested	#got offer	% of total offers
F	14,116	51%	2,206	46%
M	13,405	49%	2,592	54%
Total	27,521	100%	4,798	100%

The disparity at the most selective schools such as Stuyvesant is even greater. Last year, 56% of those admitted to Stuyvesant were boys and only 44% were girls.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the SHSAT is biased against girls has been conclusively proven by Jon Taylor, a research analyst at Hunter College, who has published his research findings in a peer-reviewed journal.<sup>3</sup> He discovered that girls who are admitted to the specialized high schools with the same test scores as boys do better on their course work and receive higher grades, including in the most advanced courses.<sup>4</sup> His research also shows that a student's 7th grade point average is the most valid predictive factor for success at New York City high schools in general, including the Specialized High Schools.<sup>5</sup> This merely underscores the need to eliminate the SHSAT as the sole determinant for admissions to a NYC school.

We oppose the use of high-stakes testing in general and the SHSAT in particular. No other school district in the country bases admissions to any one of their schools on the basis of one test alone.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, this practice has long been opposed by the American Psychological Association, the National Council on Measurement in Education, and the American Education Research Association, whose standards contain the following statement: "Any decision about a student's continued education... should not be based on the results of a single test, but should include other relevant and valid information."<sup>7</sup>

As the National Academy of Sciences has explained, "*current psychometric standards... recommend that a decision that will have a major impact on a test taker should not be made solely or automatically on the basis of a single test score, and that other relevant information about the student's knowledge and skills should also be taken into account.*"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/7871-new-research-shows-shsat-less-valuable-predictor-than-middle-school-grades>

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Taylor, Fairness To Gifted Girls: Admissions To New York City's Elite Public High Schools, *Journal Of Women And Minorities In Science And Engineering* 25(1): 75–91 (2019) at:

<http://www.dl.begellhouse.com/journals/00551c876cc2f027,294b56436594090b,2e036b8a364ae7df.html>

See also: <https://hechingerreport.org/the-problem-with-high-stakes-testing-and-women-in-stem/>

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Taylor, Fairness To Gifted Girls: Admissions To New York City's Elite Public High Schools, *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, 25(1): 75–91 (2019).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gothamgazette.com/opinion/7871-new-research-shows-shsat-less-valuable-predictor-than-middle-school-grades>

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/28/nyregion/specialized-high-school-admissions-test-is-racially-discriminatory-complaint-says.html> See also Chester E. Finn, Jr. & Jessica A. Hockett, *Exam Schools Inside America's Most Selective Public High Schools*, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.apa.org/pubs/info/brochures/testing> see also: <http://www.aera.net/About-AERA/AERA-Rules-Policies/Association-Policies/Position-Statement-on-High-Stakes-Testing>

<sup>8</sup> National Research Council. 1999. *High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, p169 at: <https://doi.org/10.17226/6336>.

If we really want more diverse, integrated schools throughout our system, we must rely on multiple measures, including grades and more holistic factors. In addition, we should discourage tracking as much as possible – another form of segregation that occurs *within* schools that merely widens the achievement gap between racial and ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup> Separating out kids by “ability” has been shown to disadvantage those who are concentrated in the lowest-performing classrooms.<sup>10</sup> This is why we also oppose segregated gifted programs, especially those based on a high-stakes exam given to children as young as four. Yet only about four percent of all elementary school children are in gifted classes.<sup>11</sup> As NYC schools begin to enroll students of diverse backgrounds, both racially and economically, this will further highlight the reality that children from disadvantaged backgrounds need more support from their teachers to reach the same goals, and that equality isn’t the same as real equity.<sup>12</sup> Integration alone without small classes cannot erase those differences.

Moreover, teachers often understandably complain that it is very difficult to individualize instruction with students of different achievement levels, and indeed it is especially challenging given the large class sizes we have in NYC. But if class sizes were lowered, this would make teachers’ jobs much easier. In Finland, when the government decided to stop tracking in the middle grades, the national teachers union successfully demanded systematic reductions in class size, to ensure that they could meet the needs of students of different academic levels. Both the elimination of tracking and the concurrent lowering of class sizes contributed to the rapid improvement of Finnish schools in the 1970's, along with the elimination of most standardized tests.<sup>13</sup>

The Department of Education must also reduce class size to allow teachers to deepen their interactions with students and meaningfully individualize instruction. All students benefit from smaller classes in terms of heightened engagement, fewer disciplinary problems and increased learning, but, as studies show, students of color benefit the most. This is why class size reduction is one of very few reforms proven to work to narrow the opportunity and achievement gap.<sup>14</sup>

As Shino Tanikawa, co-chair of the Education Council Consortium (ECC) and a member of the School Diversity Advisory Group, and Leonie Haimson of Class Size Matters concluded in an op-ed published in the Daily News last May, the integration of classrooms must be accompanied by class size reduction if we want to provide true equity to all children.<sup>15</sup> This op-ed is included as an appendix to my testimony.

As NYC schools begin to enroll students of diverse backgrounds, both racially and economically, this will further highlight the reality that children from disadvantaged backgrounds need more support from their teachers to reach the same goals, and that equality isn’t the same as real equity. Integration alone without small classes cannot erase those differences.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/04/gifted-and-talented-programs-separate-students-race/587614/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/pb-options-10-tracking.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://nycpublicschoolparents.blogspot.com/2019/09/what-both-supporters-and-critics-of.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-lower-class-size-and-school-integration-go-hand-in-hand-20190517-jhwyfyxzhvcrmp5p2vgoeieau-story.html>

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Samuel Abrams, *Education and the Commercial Mindset*, 2016 , p. 281 and footnote 3 on p. 382. Also

<https://newrepublic.com/article/82329/education-reform-finland-us>

<sup>14</sup> See the numerous research studies at: <https://www.classsizematters.org/research-and-links/#opportunity>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-lower-class-size-and-school-integration-go-hand-in-hand-20190517-jhwyfyxzhvcrmp5p2vgoeieau-story.html>

In our schools, class sizes have increased substantially since 2007 and are 15% to 30% percent larger on average than class sizes in the rest of the state. More than 336,165 students were crammed into classes of 30 or more this fall. In the early grades, the number of first-through-third-graders in classes of 30 or more has ballooned by nearly 3000 percent since 2007. Our schools can never provide students with an equitable chance to learn with classes this large.

As we eliminate the use of high-stakes testing and move to create classrooms and schools that are diverse in race, ethnicity, gender, language, ability and more, we need to simultaneously push for small classes because this will make truly differentiated instruction possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to you today.