

Preserve the SHSAT

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What Mayor Bill de Blasio is saying...

and why it's wrong

By Jonathan Wong Fri 3 Oct. 2014

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When Mayor De Blasio was making his campaign he raised up his standing on the Specialized High Schools. With the test contract being terminated De Blasio wanted to add other things to help prevent racial bias and preserve diversity. Now that he's finally in office he has decided to take action. Citing the low black and Latino percentage in Specialized High Schools and the high overall population of them in New York City De Blasio asked for a motion to add other factors besides the test that would determine whether someone gets in or not. Some suggested ones included were an essay, GPA, community service, principal/teacher recommendations and leadership. De Blasio argues that having GPA as a factor would make the Specialized High Schools accept some people from every school. Here's why it wouldn't work.

For one, some kids would not be able to stand up to the workload. Schools like Stuyvesant and Bronx Science aren't supposed to be about racial diversity; They're supposed to be a community of people that can handle the work. Therefore, the SHSAT is not at fault, but rather De Blasio's faulty education system. If kids in communities that generally have higher black/Latino population had access to better middle schools they might have done better. This raises another argument: the issue of prep. De Blasio can make a case that many "rich" white and Asian families "pay" their way in. This is not so. Although Asians do in fact have the generally largest income among all races they also have the greatest economic disparity with many being really poor. At least 47% of kids in Specialized H.S. are eligible for school lunch meaning all of the people who got in are not as De Blasio implied: "rich".

These are not the only things at fault. Determining a person's acceptance based on characteristics is subject to natural bias and cannot be objective. There is not one answer. These characteristics are ambiguous and can be interpreted in different ways. Rather than just having one set answer people can have personal bias and favoritism affect their acceptance.

Instead of having more economically disadvantaged people entering specialized high schools people of higher class and income would get in. How many economically disadvantaged people can display leadership and community service in a foreign country? Community Service is just a factor more economically advantaged people can buy. It is not about "community service".

Essays wouldn't help things either. Essays were retracted from the SAT for a reason. And principal recommendations? You have to realize these kids aren't going to college; they're still, at least for now, in middle school. They don't have as much of an opportunity to build up an awesome and impressive-looking portfolio. The new way De Blasio is doing it also means that kids who are really bright, so bright that they get bored and do bad in school would be excluded. De Blasio's plan excludes brilliant kids who just are in an academically non-challenging environment.

De Blasio is focusing on the wrong thing. Making standards more lenient and favoring the rich doesn't cut it. It only delays it.

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