



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## KLEIN, AVELLA JOIN LAWMAKERS & ALUMNI TO LAUNCH PROPOSAL TO INCREASE DIVERSITY IN SPECIALIZED HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

JEFFREY D. KLEIN | March 9, 2016

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*Proposal will increase access to resources from an early age to ensure every child has access to educational enrichment opportunities*

**QUEENS, NY - Independent Conference Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester), State Senator Tony Avella (D-Queens), Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (D-Bronx) and Assemblyman Walter Mosley (D-Brooklyn)** joined alumni groups and advocates to launch a new proposal to increase diversity in the New York City Specialized High Schools' student admission.

In a proposal released today, "New York City Specialized High Schools Diversity Initiative and Gifted and Talented Program Expansion," the Independent Democratic Conference laid out a four-step plan to increase diversity in the schools' enrollment by increasing resources for underrepresented groups at the elementary and middle school levels.

"A Specialized High School might be a great fit for so many of New York City's underrepresented students, but we will never know if we don't ensure that every student has the resources to prepare and apply. While studies have shown that changing the admissions process will not increase diversity, we know that increasing access to resources from an early age will. Our proposal will provide outreach coordinators, establish test prep

programs in every school district, implement a Middle School Pipeline program at every Specialized High School, and increase the Gifted and Talented programs available to all. By providing resources to these students early, and continuing throughout middle school, we can ensure that every child in the New York City public school system has the same opportunity to learn, grow, and potentially enroll in these prestigious schools,” **said Senator Klein.**

“Bridging the deep diversity gap that exists in our schools starts with strengthening our students' foundations. Studies have shown that simply changing the admissions process would do nothing to address the lack of diversity at our city's most prestigious schools. With this four-step proposal, we will improve outreach to underrepresented schools, expand Gifted and Talented programs, unburden parents of costly test preparation programs by making them available in every district and implement Middle School Pipeline programs which have already been proven effective. This more than just checking off a box, this is the opportunity to ensure that every student has an opportunity to enter one of these esteemed schools,” **said Senator Avella.**

The proposal details the disproportionately low number of black and Latino students that apply for and enroll in the New York City Specialized High Schools every year. In a review of the rising population of eighth graders from 2005 to 2013, despite the fact that black and Latino students made up a majority of eighth graders - 71.6 percent - they made up only 52 percent of students who take the Specialized High School Admission Test.

Of the students who were offered a seat at one of the Specialized High Schools from 2005 to 2013, black and Latino students comprise only 16.1 percent, with white students comprising 29.1 percent and Asian students comprising 54.2 percent. In the most recent data released by the Department of Education, while 19 percent of all test-takers were offered a spot, only 3 percent of black students and just over 5 percent of Latino students were admitted.

The proposal found that many students advance to a Specialized High School from a feeder middle school - a school that prepares its students for admissions - and that 42 percent of those schools have a Gifted and Talented program to enrich their high-achieving students. However, the school districts with the highest concentration of black and Latino students also had the lowest number of schools with Gifted and Talented programs. Shockingly, the two school districts in The Bronx with high concentrations of black and Latino students had no Gifted and Talented program at all.

Senators Klein and Avella laid out a four-step proposal to tackle New York City's Specialized High Schools increasing diversity problem.

While information about the schools is made available to the public, middle school administrators and teachers play a significant role in informing and encouraging students. To ensure that every student is encouraged to apply, regardless of their middle school, the IDC proposes investing \$350,000 to provide an outreach coordinator at every Specialized High School. The outreach coordinator would contact underrepresented middle schools and families in order to increase the number of applicants coming from those groups.

Students who are ultimately offered a spot at one of these coveted schools typically go through extensive preparation to take the exam, starting as early as the sixth grade. However, test preparation can be expensive and unaffordable for many low-income families. The IDC would dedicate \$1 million to establish test preparation programs in every school district, to ensure that every student has equal access to a rigorous preparatory program.

The Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation/National Grid STEM program currently provides STEM instruction and test prep to students from underrepresented middle schools in Brooklyn, and has played a significant role in helping black and Latino students secure spots. The IDC proposal would replicate this successful program, and establish a Middle School

Pipeline program with instructional and test prep components. By securing funding of \$1.28 million, this program would run Monday through Thursday, for five weeks, with extensive Saturday test preparation, and ultimately provide a direct pipeline into a specialized school for underrepresented middle schools students.

High-performing elementary and middle schools with Gifted and Talented programs ultimately serve as the best preparation for admissions to the Specialized High Schools. However, access to these programs is shockingly absent among underrepresented groups. The IDC would invest \$2.55 million to increase the number of elementary and middle school Gifted and Talented programs in low-income neighborhoods throughout New York City.

“The underrepresentation of some minority groups in New York’s Specialized High Schools is indicative of a larger set of challenges facing this city’s educational system that begin as early as kindergarten or before for many students. While some have advocated for a more complex admissions process, they are in reality doing a disservice to the students they want to help, and to the premise of objectivity upon which these specialized schools were founded. I strongly oppose making any changes to the SSHAT. I am proud to support this proposal, which would provide funding for students to take free test preparation classes, in addition to investing in outreach coordinators at each of the specialized high schools will be effective in raising the numbers of potentially qualified minority applicants attending these schools, while maintaining the schools’ academic integrity,” **said Assemblyman Dinowitz, a Bronx Science Alum.**

“I applaud the IDC for implementing this diversity initiative for New York City Specialized High Schools. Assemblymember Jeffrey Dinowitz and myself have championed this proposal to the Speaker of the Assembly as well. We must expand the programs that prepare our youth to take the Specialized High School Admission Test. As a member of the Board of Regent’s blue ribbon panel on improving outcomes for boys and young men of color, we

highlighted the need for more programming to prepare them to compete for positions that Specialized high schools in New York City in a report issued last year. I look forward to working with my colleagues in government to push this initiative and it a reality,” **said Assemblyman Walter T. Mosley.**

“We developed the Brooklyn Tech STEM pipeline program because we know high-achieving students from every community can succeed on the test and in the schools if we commit to providing them the enhanced academics and test preparation they need and deserve. We applaud the IDC’s diversity initiative for looking to expand that model so every specialized high school works with underrepresented middle schools can help level the playing field and increase diversity in the schools,” **said Larry Cary, president of the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation.**

“The STEM Pipeline is the strongest model I have seen in getting students interested in STEM education and the specialized high schools. Expanding the program can help motivate and prepare students to master the materials they need to succeed on the test, and thereby increase diversity in the schools,” **said Michael Mascetti, executive director of Science Schools Initiative, which runs programs providing enhanced academic programming and test preparation to prepare low-income students from underrepresented communities to succeed on the SHSAT.**