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Senator Jamaal T. Bailey Statement on Mayor's Specialized High School Proposal

The recent announcement by Mayor De Blasio regarding proposed changes to the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT) is a necessary step forward in a discussion on diversity that has been ongoing for quite some time.

In my time in the State Senate, I have been focused on creating greater equality in our entire public education system, introducing legislation to study the segregated nature our schools seem to operate in, city and statewide. I have also introduced legislation creating a "pre-SHSAT" that would operate much like the PSAT examination, familiarizing students with the examination. I've also sponsored legislation to compel mandatory use of the Discovery program in specialized schools, and legislation to create a commission to study diversity in specialized schools, as I realize that the amount of black and brown children attending these schools has dwindled year after year.

As one of a handful of people of color in the legislature who have attended specialized high schools and as a graduate of the Bronx High School of Science, I understand firsthand how such an excellent academic environment can inspire one to succeed, and how greater diversity within such schools can only make the educational atmosphere better. I also remember being one of the few black or brown faces in many of my classes, which further motivates me personally to find answers to the diversity problem that exists now- and has existed since my days as a student, and likely beyond.

Unfortunately, the current discussion about diversity, while well-intentioned, has become far too polarized and has created the appearance that there are sides to be taken in this matter that depend on how one feels about the SHSAT or not.

Let me be clear- I believe this is a conversation that has to continue, and must be about what's in the best interest of the children in New York City, not solely a discussion about the SHSAT. And not a discussion that stops at simply one bill or plan. It's important also to look at the pipeline to success. Focusing on our elementary and middle schools, creating the opportunity for and giving our kids the necessary tools to succeed must also be an integral part of the conversation going forward.

The end result is to create not only greater diversity in our schools, but to increase the success of our children, especially those from communities of color who have gone unrepresented in our city's schools for far too long. I look forward to a robust discussion with any and all stakeholders to truly determine the best way to diversify our entire school system. I welcome a discussion on anything that will increase opportunity for our children- in any New York City school, specialized or not.

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