

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

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December 16, 2008

Start: 2:30 pm

Recess: 5:25 pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E:  
ROBERT JACKSON  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Bill de Blasio  
Simcha Felder  
Lewis A. Fidler  
Helen D. Foster  
G. Oliver Koppell  
John C. Liu  
Domenic M. Recchia, Jr.  
Peter F. Vallone, Jr.  
Albert Vann  
David Yassky  
Maria del Carmen Arroyo  
Daniel R. Garodnick  
Jessica S. Lappin

## A P P E A R A N C E S

## COUNCIL MEMBERS:

James Vacca  
Vincent Ignizio  
Letitia James

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Dr. Marcia Lyles  
Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning  
New York City Department of Education

Anna Commitante  
Director of English Language Arts, Social Studies, and  
Gifted and Talented  
New York City Department of Education

Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger  
Senior Advisor to the Chancellor  
New York City Department of Education

Elizabeth Sciabarra  
Chief Executive of the Office of Student Enrollment  
New York City Department of Education

Karen Alford  
Vice President of Elementary Schools  
United Federation of Teachers

Robin Aronow  
Schools Consultant  
School Search NYC

Annmarie Hunter  
24/81 Parents for Enrichment

Christopher Spinelli  
President  
Community District Education Council, District 22

Helen Paradise  
Parents for Enrichment

Joseph Piro  
Board of Directors  
Association of the Gifted and Talented Education

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Xi Chang  
Parent

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Good afternoon everyone and welcome to this delayed Committee on Education hearing on the oversight of Gifted and Talented programs in New York City. So we're going to have an oversight hearing on that, but before we do that we have two resolutions that we must address. A Resolution 1541 calling on the New York City Department of Education to survey schools to assess compliance with curriculum mandates in the State Education Law and in the Regulations of the Commissioner of the State Education Department, and to assist schools that are not in compliance with such mandates to fully comply with the law. And this includes all of the mandates in the state curriculums that are necessary for our children to receive a round, holistic education. In addition to the core curriculums mandated in mathematics, science, social studies, civics, English, and the arts, the New York State law also--and the regulations of the Commissioner of the State Education Department set forth several provisions which require instructions in other areas such as patriotism, citizenship, civility, character education, fire

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2 and arson protection, the humane treatment of  
3 animals, physical education, prevention of child  
4 abuse, health education regarding alcohol, drugs,  
5 tobacco abuse, and instruction on Acquired Immune  
6 Deficiency Syndrome, commonly known as AIDS.

7           This is a resolution that has been  
8 put forward by myself and we are voting on that  
9 resolution today. And also Resolution 497  
10 introduced by our colleague Council Member Tony  
11 Avella. And this resolution calling upon the New  
12 York City Department of Education to help increase  
13 compliance with section 809 of the New York State  
14 Education Law which requires instructions on the  
15 humane treatment and protection of animals by  
16 issuing a memorandum to all New York City public  
17 schools that notifies them of the humane treatment  
18 of mandates in section 809 and by requiring that  
19 all elementary school principals direct their  
20 teachers to act in accordance with this  
21 requirement.

22           These are two bills that we're  
23 voting on today, my colleagues of the Education  
24 Committee, and before I make the recommendation on  
25 these, let me introduce my colleagues that are

1  
2 present here today. In front, directly in front  
3 to my right is Oliver Koppell of the Bronx; to my  
4 left Al Vann of Brooklyn; Maria del Carmen Arroyo  
5 of the Bronx. And up here to my left, Peter  
6 Vallone, Jr., standing from Queens; Domenic  
7 Recchia from Brooklyn; Simcha Felder of Brooklyn;  
8 Dan Garodnick of Manhattan. And to my right, John  
9 Liu of Queens; Vincent Ignizio of Staten Island;  
10 James Vacca of the Bronx; and Lou Fidler of  
11 Brooklyn.

12 [Pause]

13 On these two matters before we move  
14 into the Gifted and Talented, there were two  
15 hearings that were held on both of these matters,  
16 I don't have the dates in front of me--

17 FEMALE VOICE: They were held on  
18 September 19th for 1541--

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I'm sorry,  
20 what date?

21 FEMALE VOICE: September 19th for  
22 1541.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: September  
24 19th--

25 FEMALE VOICE: For 1541.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Or 2008 we  
3 held a hearing on Resolution Number 1541.

4 FEMALE VOICE: And December 10  
5 [pause] 10 2007.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And on  
7 December 10th, 2007, we held a hearing on  
8 Resolution Number 497. So with that, the  
9 recommendation of the Chair is to vote aye on  
10 Resolution 1541 and then there will be a separate  
11 vote on Resolution 497, a motion to table  
12 Resolution 497, and that's what the Chair  
13 recommends. So with that, I'm going to ask the  
14 clerk to call the roll.

15 COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member  
16 Jackson.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I vote aye on  
18 Resolution--we're voting on just 1541. Aye on  
19 1541.

20 COMMITTEE CLERK: Felder.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: No.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Fidler.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Aye.

24 COMMITTEE CLERK: Koppell.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Aye, and,



1  
2 Mr. Chairman, I'd like to be added as a co-sponsor  
3 of 1541.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Liu.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LIU: Yes.

6 COMMITTEE CLERK: Recchia.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Yes.

8 COMMITTEE CLERK: Vallone.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Aye.

10 COMMITTEE CLERK: Vann.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VANN: Aye.

12 COMMITTEE CLERK: Arroyo.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Aye.

14 COMMITTEE CLERK: Garodnick.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Aye.

16 COMMITTEE CLERK: Vacca.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Aye.

18 COMMITTEE CLERK: Ignizio.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Aye, and I  
20 too would like to be added as a sponsor, if I can.  
21 Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE CLERK: Foster.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Aye.

24 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 12 in  
25 the affirmative, one in the negative, and no

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2 abstentions, Resolution 1541 is adopted.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And I forgot to acknowledge our colleague Helen Dianne Foster who is next door also, she's between two hearings. And now the next item that we're going to act on is Resolution 497, and the Chair recommends a motion to file based on the fact that the intent of this is included in Resolution Number 1541 and so the Chair recommends a aye vote on the motion to file. I ask the clerk to call the roll.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Jackson.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Felder.

COUNCIL MEMBER FELDER: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Fidler.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Foster.

COUNCIL MEMBER FOSTER: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Koppell.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOPPELL: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Liu.

COUNCIL MEMBER LIU: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Recchia.

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COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Vallone.

COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Vann.

COUNCIL MEMBER VANN: Yeah.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Arroyo.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: No.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Garodnick.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Vacca.

[Pause]

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: [No response]

COMMITTEE CLERK: Ignizio.

COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: No.

COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 10 in  
the affirmative, three in the negative, and no  
abstentions, Resolution 497 is filed.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: With that,  
we're going to move to the oversight hearing on  
Gifted and Talented. As you know, this hearing  
was scheduled to begin at one, we apologize for  
the delay. There was a hearing on the MTA report  
by--issued by Chair Ravitch on behalf of the  
Commission, and so with that, I'd like to begin

1  
2 the oversight hearing on the Gifted and Talented.  
3 Okay.

4 [Pause]

5 So good afternoon and welcome to  
6 today's Education Committee oversight hearing on  
7 Gifted and Talented programs admission policy in  
8 the New York City public school system. In the  
9 past year, admissions procedures for Gifted and  
10 Talented, commonly known as G&T, programs have  
11 undergone significant changes. These changes  
12 follow at least two previous changes to G&T  
13 admissions by the Chancellor over the past several  
14 years.

15 G&T programs in New York City have  
16 long been controversial. G&T programs are  
17 credited with helping to keep middle-class  
18 families from fleeing the public school system.  
19 But critics contend that G&T programs are  
20 exclusionary and discriminate against low-income,  
21 black and Hispanic students in particular. In  
22 fact, New York City's gifted programs have been  
23 under investigation by the Federal Department of  
24 Education Civil Rights Office since the mid-1990s.

25 Soon after Chancellor Klein assumed

1  
2 control of the school system, rumors began to  
3 circulate that the Department of Education planned  
4 to eliminate G&T programs. Perhaps to allay these  
5 fears in an election year, Mayor Bloomberg  
6 promised in his January 2005 State of the City  
7 speech to maintain all existing G&T programs and  
8 to create more in historically underserved  
9 districts.

10                   Shortly thereafter, in February  
11 2005, DOE announced plans to develop a  
12 standardized admissions test for 4 and 5-year olds  
13 seeking admissions in G&T programs beginning in  
14 the spring of 2006 to replace what school  
15 officials called a hodgepodge of district  
16 admissions procedures.

17                   In November of 2005, before the  
18 citywide admissions test was ready, Chancellor  
19 Klein announced that DOE was instituting a single  
20 standardized application process for G&T programs.  
21 At that time, districts were told to use multiple  
22 criteria such as I.Q. and creativity until the  
23 Department of Education's uniform assessment would  
24 be ready sometime in 2006.

25                   The new citywide assessment for

1  
2 pre-K through grade 2 admissions to G&T classes  
3 was announced in September 2006 for students  
4 applying for the 2007-2008 school year. The  
5 assessment consisted of two parts: the Otis-Lennon  
6 School Ability Test, commonly known as OLSAT,  
7 which used verbal and nonverbal items to measure  
8 cognitive ability and the Gifted Rating Scale,  
9 commonly known as GRS, which asks a teacher to  
10 rate elements of a child's behavior observed over  
11 time. Parents throughout the city had complaints  
12 about the new admissions process, particularly  
13 about administration of the new entrance exams and  
14 the fact that they were not informed about  
15 children's acceptance in G&T programs until the  
16 end of the school year.

17 In October of 2007, Chancellor  
18 Klein announced the latest improvements to the  
19 Gifted and Talented admissions procedure. One so-  
20 called improvement was a change in the tests used,  
21 with the GRS being replaced by the Bracken School  
22 Readiness Assessment, BSRA, because it was easier  
23 to administer and considered to be more objective  
24 than the teacher observation. Students would be  
25 given a combined weighted score of the two tests,

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2 with the OLSAT comprising 75% of the overall  
3 score, and the BSRA contributing to the remaining  
4 25%. Initially, DOE maintained that only those  
5 scoring at the 95 percentile nationally or above  
6 on these exams would be admitted because,  
7 according to DOE, the research on Gifted and  
8 Talented education shows children in the top 5%  
9 need significant curricula modification and  
10 adaptation in order to succeed academically. When  
11 DOE's top 5% standard produced too few students  
12 who qualified, the cut-off score was lowered to  
13 the 90th percentile nationally.

14           Although Mayor Bloomberg promised  
15 in his January 2005 State of the City address to  
16 maintain all existing G&T programs and to create  
17 more in historically underserved districts,  
18 according to news reports, the changes implemented  
19 by DOE have had exactly the opposite effect.  
20 Whereas, last year, only two districts had no  
21 entry-level G&T programs, this year seven  
22 districts lack such programs. The total number of  
23 entry-level G&T students also dropped by more than  
24 half this fall, from 2,678 last year to 1,305 this  
25 year. And this drop occurred despite DOE's

1  
2 greater outreach efforts which resulted in a huge  
3 increase in the number of students that applied  
4 for G&T classes, 16,322 people applied in 2008, up  
5 from 6,246 the year before, which was 2007.

6 Further, rather than becoming more  
7 integrated, G&T classes have become far less  
8 diverse. In a school system in which kindergarten  
9 and first grade students population is 17% white,  
10 41% Hispanic, 27% black, and 15% Asian, this  
11 year's entry-level G&T classes are 48% white, 9%  
12 Hispanic, 13% black, and 28% Asian, and this  
13 represents a big step backwards from ratios under  
14 the previous admissions policy which resulted in  
15 G&T classes that were 33% white, 15% Hispanic, 31%  
16 black, and 20% Asian.

17 The changes in G&T policy have also  
18 created additional inequalities. There are some  
19 new G&T kindergarten classes with as few as 8 to  
20 11 students in the same school, where other  
21 kindergarten classes struggle with 22 to 28  
22 students. Also, rather than guaranteeing a Gifted  
23 and Talented seat to all eligible children, some  
24 students who achieve the required test scores for  
25 entry were unable to take advantage of G&T



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2 placements, because there was no G&T program  
3 nearby and DOE denied bus transportation to them.

4           Based on these revelations, my  
5 colleague Lou Fidler, who you'll hear from  
6 shortly, and I, we wrote a letter to Chancellor  
7 Klein to express our extreme frustration and anger  
8 over changes made to the admissions process for  
9 G&T programs and to offer some suggestions for  
10 improvement. Our primary recommendation was for  
11 DOE to set aside 10% of kindergarten seats in each  
12 community school district for G&T programs next  
13 year. In effect, setting aside 10% of seats for  
14 top scorers in each district uses a local norm for  
15 the top 10% rather than a national norm, which the  
16 Chancellor has already set for the top 10%. This  
17 would increase both the overall number of G&T  
18 students and increase diversity in G&T programs,  
19 which should more closely reflect each districts  
20 population.

21           Many experts caution against using  
22 standardized tests as the sole basis for admission  
23 to G&T programs and recommend instead that  
24 decisions be based on information from multiple  
25 sources. Critics also maintain that there is an

1  
2 inherent racial and class bias in standardized  
3 exams. Children of wealthier parents certainly  
4 have access to far more books and other resources  
5 and are more likely to be exposed to the concepts  
6 measured by these tests. More importantly, each  
7 childhood specialist point out that standardized  
8 tests are unrealistic for use with young children  
9 because of widely varying rates of development.  
10 Imagine, a 4-year-old child being taken from his  
11 or her parent or caregiver going into a room with  
12 a complete stranger and asked to answer a long  
13 series of questions, and it's not hard to  
14 understand why there may be issues with unreliable  
15 performance for very young children.

16           Since the test score is only a one-  
17 day snapshot of a student's performance, there's  
18 always a chance that a gifted child who is having  
19 a bad day or who has test anxiety will not do well  
20 on the exam.

21           For these and other reasons,  
22 Council Member Fidler and I suggested that it's  
23 better to cast a wide net and err on the side of  
24 inclusion rather than exclusion of possible gifted  
25 children in kindergarten G&T programs. For all

1  
2 grades above kindergarten, teacher recommendations  
3 can and should play a major role in deciding which  
4 students should remain in G&T programs. Today,  
5 the committee seeks to gain information concerning  
6 the current state of G&T programs in city schools  
7 and to review plans for changes in the admissions  
8 procedures for Gifted and Talented programs. The  
9 committee will also hear from experts, advocates,  
10 parents, unions, and others regarding their ideas  
11 about Gifted and Talented education and we'll  
12 explore recommendations for improvement in these  
13 areas.

14 I would now like to turn to my  
15 colleague, Council Member Lou Fidler of Brooklyn,  
16 who previously introduced legislation on G&T  
17 programs to make some comments on this issue.  
18 Council Member Fidler.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Thank you,  
20 Chairman Jackson, and because your remarks were so  
21 inclusive, I only want to hit--I'll hit on a  
22 couple of points and be very brief.

23 First of all, two-thirds of my  
24 council district is in District 22 in Brooklyn,  
25 where we got Gifted and Talented programs right a

1  
2 long time before Joel Klein came in. In the first  
3 year of this new policy, as you'll hear from Chris  
4 Spinelli, our CEC Chairman, later on, we went from  
5 an incoming class of 625 gifted and talented  
6 students in 25 locations to 110 at 8 sites--giving  
7 new meaning to the word downsizing.

8 I would need to say and need to  
9 mention that gifted and talented programs have an  
10 importance beyond education. I mean, certainly  
11 that's, you know, that's our primary focus and  
12 that's our primary focus here today. Every child  
13 should be challenged to the maximum of his or her  
14 abilities and when we talk about spreading the net  
15 as widely as possible, I think it is always better  
16 to err on the side of challenging a child and then  
17 stepping back if their potential is not there,  
18 than wasting the potential of a child who has not  
19 been challenged.

20 But in District 22, you could ask  
21 any real estate agent in my part of Brooklyn, one  
22 of the reasons that houses were sold in my  
23 community was because of the quality of the  
24 schools and the success that they were having.  
25 And we have dumbed down the Gifted and Talented

1  
2 programs in District 22, as just one example of  
3 why I have a problem.

4           Now as Council Member Jackson--as  
5 Chairman Jackson mentioned, in 2004, I introduced  
6 Intro 493, which would have required the  
7 Department of Education to set aside 10% of the  
8 seats in every school district, because we believe  
9 that there are gifted and talented children in  
10 every neighborhood of this city, every year. You  
11 need to know that that Intro was cosponsored by  
12 every single member of the Council in 2004 with  
13 one exception, and the public advocate--51  
14 sponsors supporting the principle that there are  
15 gifted and talented children in every neighborhood  
16 of this city and they need to be serviced.

17           The policies that DOE has  
18 implemented have set us back in reaching those  
19 goals. We've gone from two districts to seven  
20 without gifted and talented programs and I think  
21 you need to address--and I'm hoping to hear from  
22 you today--your recognition of the fact that the  
23 emphasis that is placed on testing and progress  
24 reports and report cards and all of that meshugaas  
25 disincentivizes principals, superintendents in

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2 various school districts from encouraging their  
3 kids to take these programs, that it is almost,  
4 you know, an oxymoron in logic. If you know that  
5 your school is not going to have a Gifted and  
6 Talented program, if you know your district isn't  
7 going to have a Gifted and Talented program,  
8 you're not going to export your most bright and  
9 talented students to other schools in other  
10 districts if you're progress is going to be  
11 measured by a test. That's point number one, and  
12 that is essential in the recommendations that  
13 Chairman Jackson and I sent to you.

14           Second, I want to just talk for a  
15 moment about my personal experience and I know my  
16 wife will probably kill me if she hears about  
17 this. With the issue of teacher evaluations and  
18 the ability for someone to recognize the  
19 subjective ability, subjectively recognize the  
20 ability and potential of a young person that might  
21 not have been reflected on a test when they walked  
22 into a room when they were 4-years old. My  
23 younger son Harry did not qualify for the Gifted  
24 and Talented program in his school, based upon his  
25 test. After he was in the first grade, on the

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2 recommendation of his principal and on his  
3 teacher, he was put into that Gifted and Talented  
4 program and I am very, very proud to tell you that  
5 he graduated from Edward R. Murrow High School  
6 number one in his class last year, challenged to  
7 the full extent of his ability, he is now  
8 completing his freshman year at the University of  
9 Pennsylvania. I don't know that that would have  
10 happened if Dr. Almeida [phonetic] and his  
11 principal had not recognized that potential in him  
12 and had the ability to move him into a Gifted and  
13 Talented program, whether he would have been able  
14 to meet the full potential as he has.

15           And last, and I hope you'll discuss  
16 this in your testimony as well, both of my  
17 children had the privilege of attending the Bay  
18 Academy, an intermediate school that is in  
19 District 21. This year, for some reason that I  
20 cannot fathom, again, attempting to fix something  
21 that was not broken as the Gifted and Talented  
22 programs in District 22 were, Department of  
23 Education has decided that only children from  
24 District 21 may apply to go to the Bay Academy. I  
25 don't understand it. It's a terrific school, it

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2 functions magnificently, I have constituents  
3 pounding my office door asking me why their child  
4 is being denied the opportunity to apply for the  
5 Bay Academy and you need to explain that to me as  
6 well.

7                   So I am anxious to hear your  
8 testimony. We all set standards and goals clearly  
9 on this one, the Department of Education, well-  
10 intentioned as it may have been, has clearly  
11 failed to meet the goals of increasing capacity,  
12 recognizing potential, and maintaining diversity  
13 in Gifted and Talented programs.

14                   [Pause]

15                   CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,  
16 Council Member Fidler, and before we turn to the  
17 Department of Education officials, I'd like to  
18 just call the vote on--for Council Member David  
19 Yassky on Resolution 1541, the recommendation of  
20 the Chair is an aye vote and there's a motion to  
21 table on Resolution 497 and the Chair recommends  
22 an aye vote on the motion to table. Call the  
23 roll.

24                   COMMITTEE CLERK: Resolution 1541,  
25 Council Member Yassky.



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2 COUNCIL MEMBER YASSKY: Aye.

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COMMITTEE CLERK: Now stands at 13

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in the affirmative, one in the negative, no

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abstentions. Resolution 497, Council Member

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Yassky.

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COUNCIL MEMBER YASSKY: I vote aye

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on the motion to table.

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COMMITTEE CLERK: Stands 11 in the

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affirmative, three in the negative, no

11

abstentions. Thank you.

12

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

13

And now we're going to turn to the Department of

14

Education officials, let me apologize for the late

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start. As you know, there was a hearing earlier

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on MTA, which is a major issue infecting New York

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City, not like this is--this is also a major

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issue, especially with the negative cuts that were

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announced today. So we were delayed in that and,

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obviously, you were here for the votes on the

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resolutions, and so I apologize for something that

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I did not have control over. But, with that, I'd

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like to turn to you, Deputy Chancellor, and you

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can introduce yourselves and your position and

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other people with you at the table.

1  
2 DR. MARCIA LYLES: Good afternoon,  
3 Chairman Jackson and members of the Education  
4 Committee. I am Dr. Marcia Lyles, Deputy  
5 Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at the New  
6 York City Department of Education. I am joined by  
7 my colleagues, Anna Commitante, Director of  
8 English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Gifted  
9 and Talented; Elizabeth Sciabarra, Chief Executive  
10 of the Office of Student Enrollment; and Jennifer  
11 Bell-Ellwanger, Senior Advisor to the Chancellor.  
12 We are pleased to be here today to discuss the  
13 Department's Gifted and Talented programs.

14 Before we delve into our most  
15 recent changes in G&T, I would like to provide the  
16 Committee with some additional background and  
17 context.

18 The DOE started to analyze the  
19 city's Gifted and Talented programs in 2004. Our  
20 initial analysis identified local application  
21 processes characterized by diverse and  
22 inconsistent methods of outreach and parent  
23 notification, identification, and placement.  
24 There was also little cohesion and clarity of  
25 curriculum and instruction. There was no focused,

1  
2 organized program for teacher and administrator  
3 professional development and little articulation  
4 of Gifted and Talented program standards. While  
5 there were indeed high quality programs in some  
6 school districts across the city, the landscape at  
7 the time reflected each local district's  
8 definition of what it meant to be gifted, what  
9 services gifted students needed, how to assess  
10 whether students were gifted, and how to assign  
11 and place gifted students into programs.

12 Another problem at the time was the  
13 insufficient process utilized by some districts  
14 when it came to notifying parents about Gifted and  
15 Talented programs. We heard too often from  
16 parents and community members throughout the city  
17 about the inadequate outreach efforts by  
18 districts. In some districts, parents were never  
19 told of their children's assessment results.  
20 Rather, they were advised only if their children  
21 were eligible or not. We heard that many parents  
22 did not fully understand what the district's  
23 assessment tools were meant to assess and why the  
24 district had selected the assessment that was  
25 being used. In 2005, some districts were using

1  
2 homemade interviews and assessments that had  
3 neither been standardized nor validated. Some  
4 districts were using the Stanford Binet, some  
5 districts were using OLSAT, others were using  
6 SLOSSEN, Structures of Intellect, and still others  
7 were using ECLAS or local assessments. Generally,  
8 there was no fair, coherent system that allowed  
9 all parents in a community to learn of the  
10 opportunities available.

11 As a city, we also faced a  
12 complaint from the federal Office of Civil Rights  
13 related to our G&T admissions process. OCR's  
14 complaint about Parent Access to Information on  
15 School Programs said it was not fair to use the  
16 Stanford Binet I.Q. test as the sole determining  
17 factor for eligibility. Since 1997, DOE has been  
18 working first with New York State Office of Civil  
19 Rights and then with the State Attorney General to  
20 resolve issues relating to equity of opportunity  
21 for all students in G&T programs.

22 Our initial analysis also displayed  
23 a highly fragmented system difficult for most  
24 parents to navigate, and challenging to assess.

25 We decided to develop a clear

1  
2 central policy for G&T programs that could be  
3 implemented over time and that would be applied  
4 consistently and fairly in all districts.

5 In the first year of  
6 implementation, 2005 to '6, DOE simply asked that  
7 all districts employ the use of multiple criteria  
8 to identify gifted and talented students. This  
9 meant that districts continued to use the  
10 assessments they had been using, but were required  
11 to add an additional assessment component. We  
12 asked districts to use two assessments so that  
13 they would be in compliance with the US Department  
14 of Education's guidance on the matter.

15 The DOE also issued a Request for  
16 Proposal to select two assessment instruments that  
17 would be used in future years to identify students  
18 for placement to public school Gifted and Talented  
19 programs. We had two goals: addressing the  
20 recommendations of the US DOE and using a single  
21 measuring stick in our city of giftedness. We  
22 received proposals from several large and well-  
23 known test publishers and organizations and  
24 awarded the contract to Harcourt Assessment, Inc.,  
25 which has since become Pearson Assessment, Inc.

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2 As we conducted the RFP process, we  
3 also began working with several local  
4 organizations and universities with expertise and  
5 knowledge in the field of Gifted and Talented  
6 education to provide focused professional  
7 development. Our goal was to improve G&T  
8 instruction.

9 A year later, the DOE required each  
10 school district to use the two assessments  
11 selected through the RFP process.

12 Though all districts were using the  
13 same two assessments, the testing processes and  
14 scheduling were handled at the regions and  
15 centrally the Office of Student Enrollment handled  
16 the placement process.

17 During the first year of  
18 implementation, which was 2006 to '7, of the  
19 central process, DOE implemented no eligibility  
20 criteria. The Office of Student Enrollment simply  
21 continued to offer students a placement in rank  
22 score order and using parents' choices for school  
23 programs, as long as there were available seats to  
24 fill. This meant that in districts where there  
25 were few programs, the pool of students placed

1 reflected students with very high scores.

2  
3 However, it also meant that in districts with many  
4 programs, students with combined G&T scores in the  
5 lowest percentiles were placed in Gifted and  
6 Talented programs. This was a disservice to the  
7 students, the parents, and the schools.

8           The data showed us that filling all  
9 available seats was not a good system, as this led  
10 to the placement of children into Gifted and  
11 Talented programs who were not ready for an  
12 accelerated educational program. This placement  
13 process of filling all seats also affected the  
14 instructional level of the class. If we believe  
15 that these programs should actually provide a  
16 service to students who need this kind of  
17 educational setting in order to learn well, then  
18 we needed to figure out which students would most  
19 benefit from the Gifted and Talented program  
20 placement. This was not an easy task and we spent  
21 some time looking into what other large urban  
22 school districts were doing and initially the  
23 decision was made to implement eligibility  
24 criteria at the 95th percentile for district  
25 programs and at the 97th percentile for citywide

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programs.

That first year, we also learned other lessons. For example, we found that the one of the assessments which required teacher evaluations was not practical in our system. Some private schools refused to comply, for example. It took a lot of time for teachers to evaluate each student by hand. Plus, we realized that while teachers who have daily contact with students are able to recognize traits of giftedness over time and can address the limitations of a single standardized assessment, some research has also shown that teacher recommendations are not always reliable. Two teachers will frequently rate the same child differently, or one teacher will frequently rate two children with equal abilities differently. This lack of reliability, often due to subjective assumptions and beliefs about students unrelated to their actual cognitive abilities, tends to favor students who are well socialized into the norms of the academic classroom, who are good at completing class assignments, and who behave well in class. Consequently, teacher recommendations



1  
2 may systematically overlook students with strong  
3 intellectual abilities who may be bored with the  
4 curriculum or the pacing of the class, who are not  
5 the teacher pleasers, and usually not the best  
6 behaved.

7           For these reasons, we decided to  
8 seek out an alternative assessment to replace the  
9 Gifted Rating Scale, or GRS. We realized that we  
10 needed two assessments that were objective and  
11 that could be administered at the same time and  
12 that would complement each other well.

13           A little more than a year ago, we  
14 worked to improve on the changes we had  
15 implemented in Gifted and Talented, creating a  
16 single citywide standard for gifted education and  
17 creating a single, centrally run admissions  
18 process. Our goals were to make sure that a  
19 parent could expect the same high-level  
20 instruction, no matter what neighborhood his or  
21 her family lived in, and to make these programs  
22 more accessible to families in all parts of the  
23 city.

24           We continue to use the OLSAT, an  
25 assessment that has been around for a very long

1  
2 time and is currently used throughout the United  
3 States as a tool for placement to Gifted and  
4 Talented programs. We selected the OLSAT, because  
5 it was the product that met the needs of New York  
6 City and it looked at students' abilities in a  
7 variety of areas, in both verbal and nonverbal  
8 domains. It can be administered by teachers after  
9 a short training session, and it was widely used  
10 and had been standardized with a large national  
11 sample.

12 We also, as you pointed out,  
13 started using the Bracken School Readiness  
14 Assessment, the BSRA, in the place of the GRS.  
15 BSRA presents six subtests and asks students to  
16 identify colors, shapes, letters, and numbers,  
17 make comparisons, and distinguish size.

18 We chose these two assessments  
19 because they measure two different cognitive  
20 dimensions of giftedness: general intellectual  
21 ability and general academic ability.  
22 Intellectual ability refers to a student's ability  
23 to think and reason with information, including  
24 verbal and arithmetic reasoning, recognizing and  
25 extending programs, reasoning through analogies,

1  
2 and classifying information. The OLSAT was  
3 designed to measure this general intellectual  
4 ability. Academic readiness refers to a student's  
5 ability to master age-appropriate academic  
6 content. The BSRA was designed to measure this  
7 general academic ability.

8           We also set a citywide standard for  
9 giftedness so that gifted would mean the same  
10 thing across the city. At first, we proposed  
11 setting the bar at the 95th percentile against  
12 national norms. We decided later in the fall to  
13 set the cut-off at the 90th percentile. We made  
14 this decision for two reasons: first, after  
15 listening to parents' feedback, we agreed that we  
16 could accommodate more students who might be able  
17 to handle the demands of the program. Second, we  
18 thought the 90th percentile would still maintain  
19 the high program standards and integrity. The  
20 students scoring at the 90th percentile and above  
21 would benefit from some curricular modification  
22 and advancement, while those in the top 3%, those  
23 children identified for citywide Gifted and  
24 Talented programs, will benefit from significant  
25 curricular modification and acceleration.

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2           Based on the feedback we received  
3 from some schools and teachers this school year,  
4 we've learned that this was the right decision.  
5 Educators are telling us that the students have  
6 been prepared to handle the demands of a  
7 challenging and often fast-paced instructional  
8 program.

9           A quick note on the assessments:  
10 it's important to remember that the perfect  
11 assessment instrument does not exist. Any test in  
12 use anywhere will most certainly have its  
13 advantages and its disadvantages, but we also know  
14 that it is only with a standardized assessment  
15 that we can be sure that we are fair in our  
16 decision-making, providing students with equal  
17 opportunity to access these programs. We  
18 understand and appreciate any test will fall short  
19 because we know that young children grow and  
20 develop at different rates and at different points  
21 in time. We also understand that there is no  
22 fixed or absolute definition of a gifted and  
23 talented child. While there are new theories  
24 concerning the developmental nature of  
25 intellectual ability, we also know that we have

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2 children that enter the New York City public  
3 school system with a great capacity for learning  
4 quickly and well. We want to provide these  
5 children with a more demanding and aggressive  
6 educational experience, and we also want to ensure  
7 that all students have some access to frequent  
8 enrichment and challenging learning experiences.

9           This is the reason the office is  
10 called Gifted/Talented and Enrichment. We believe  
11 that programs and services should exist along a  
12 continuum, so that all students receive the  
13 support they need. We encourage all schools to  
14 implement enrichment programs that provide  
15 students with challenges, and nurture their  
16 talents, abilities, and interests. We also want  
17 to support the district Gifted and Talented self-  
18 contained programs for students who require some  
19 daily instructional modification and or  
20 acceleration, and we want to support those top  
21 scoring students in our citywide Gifted and  
22 Talented schools, who will require the most  
23 instructional modification and acceleration.

24           At last count, we had about 170  
25 schools K to 8 that were actively implementing

1  
2 schoolwide enrichment programs. Many of these  
3 schools have committed time and funds to send  
4 their teachers to special weeklong summer training  
5 at the University of Connecticut that focuses on  
6 developing these programs. In 2004, only eight  
7 public schools in New York City availed themselves  
8 of this training; in 2005, 66; in 2006, 124; in  
9 2007, 93; and in 2008, 96. That is a total of 379  
10 public schools since 2004 in New York City, whose  
11 administrators and teachers spent an entire week  
12 of their summer vacation learning how best to  
13 offer exciting enrichment opportunities to all  
14 learners in their schools.

15           It has been suggested that we  
16 should set aside 10% of seats in each district for  
17 G&T programs. I wanted to briefly address this  
18 suggestion. In effect, this would take us back to  
19 the old days of local norms. While this may seem  
20 like a good compromise, what we will have is an  
21 inconsistent system of eligibility criteria once  
22 again. This will mean that the top 10% in  
23 District X will include students from the 99th to  
24 the 96th percentile, and the top 10% in District Y  
25 might include students from the 90th percentile to

1  
2 the 60th percentile. In fact, according to last  
3 year's numbers, at least 14 of our 32 community  
4 districts would admit students with composite  
5 scores below the 60th percentile. We are one city  
6 and parents should be able to expect that we hold  
7 our schools and students to a uniform standard.

8 We also have concerns about  
9 implementing programs in one-half or more of all  
10 elementary schools. We fear this will not yield  
11 high-quality programs that are actually providing  
12 an instructional service, but rather watered-down  
13 programs that are gifted in name only. If more  
14 programs are the recommendation, we suggest that  
15 these programs be enrichment programs. As we  
16 stated earlier, these programs can be easily  
17 implemented in schools and will encourage schools  
18 to serve the students in their own communities.  
19 This will also strengthen the instructional  
20 program for the entire school.

21 We recognize that today, although  
22 we've done a lot of outreach in the neediest  
23 neighborhoods, there is still disparity in G&T  
24 admissions around the city. Our challenge and our  
25 goal in the coming years is to close this gap. We

1  
2 have realigned our Office of Early Childhood  
3 Education to support our community-based  
4 organizations that provide pre-K services for the  
5 majority of our pre-K students. We understand the  
6 need to provide a strong, enriched developmentally  
7 appropriate pre-K experience.

8 Working with the Office of the  
9 Deputy Mayor, we are also targeting communities  
10 where we have an under-representation of students  
11 in G&T programs. And we have expanded full-day  
12 pre-K programs in our public schools to prepare  
13 more students for school. It's our duty to  
14 provide all of our students with curriculum  
15 programs that will meet their needs and will keep  
16 them engaged and challenged so that they can grow  
17 and learn. We are working on improving our pre-K  
18 enrollment and admissions process to help prepare  
19 all students by giving them access to quality pre-  
20 K programs. To prepare students for the  
21 challenges they will face in school, whether in  
22 gifted programs or general education programs, we  
23 are also piloting programs such as Core Knowledge,  
24 which we believe will provide our students with  
25 enhanced content and background knowledge,



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starting in kindergarten.

Plus, because we know that young students develop at different times, we are offering admission to G&T programs in kindergarten and Grade 1, expanding access to these options. We believe strongly that we have to give children in every community in our city access to these programs and we are committed to equitable opportunity for all students.

In conclusion, we have been working hard to improve our gifted programs. Over the past four years, we have created a clear, high citywide standard. We have also opened up access to these programs and we have worked with schools and educators to create enrichment programs in many of our elementary schools. We look forward to working with you in the future to improve these programs further. And my colleagues and I look forward to answering your questions now.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well thank you, Dr. Lyles, and clearly, with respect to this matter, I tend to--I've read as you read out loud, I followed you and I don't think that we see eye-

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to-eye when some of the goals and objectives that you are trying to achieve were not achieved. And so maybe we're going to ask some specific questions on that, but let me just ask this first question, if I may. On November 6, 2008, my colleague Lou Fidler and I we sent this letter to Chancellor Joel Klein to express our extreme frustration and anger over changes made to the admissions policy and the process for G&T programs and to offer some suggestions for improvement. To date, which is over five weeks ago, we have not received a response to our letter. Are you aware of the letter that I'm making reference to?

DR. LYLES: Yes, we are.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Can you tell us why we haven't received a response? Even knowing that this hearing was set today, and then tell us when we can expect to receive a response or, if you don't plan on responding, then say we're not going to respond. So maybe you can answer that question.

DR. LYLES: Well part of the conversation was when we knew that we were going to come before you today was to engage in

1  
2 additional discussion with you and then  
3 afterwards, we would go back and take a look at  
4 what took place today and respond to your letter.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So I guess, so  
6 you decided to wait until the hearing in order to  
7 see what happens in order to respond to the  
8 letter, that's what you're telling me.

9 DR. LYLES: Well, we hoped to  
10 respond to some of the issues, we suspected that  
11 you were going to raise some of these questions in  
12 the hearing and we would respond to them and then  
13 have further discussion around these  
14 recommendations that you've made in the letter.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So, with  
16 respects to the budget process and anything that  
17 we do, do you think it would be appropriate for us  
18 to wait until after we get all the information  
19 from you before we make our decisions? And let me  
20 just say to you, if that was the case, then  
21 decisions would not be made because the lack of  
22 responses from the Department of Education, it  
23 seems to be Standard Operating Procedure for the  
24 Department of Education, and as a Deputy  
25 Chancellor for Curriculum and Instruction, you

1  
2 need to be aware of that. You need to communicate  
3 clearly to your boss, I believe Joel Klein is your  
4 supervisor, or he's the Chancellor, that the lack  
5 of response is one that is not tolerated by this  
6 Committee and, if in fact, that is his Standard  
7 Operating Procedure--not if in fact it is, it is  
8 his Standard Operating Procedure--maybe then we  
9 should take the same response with respects to  
10 dealing with the issues that we have to deal with  
11 from a legislative point of view in addressing  
12 your issues and concerns from the Department of  
13 Education. We should not respond at all. And if  
14 that's the situation, then we'll just come to a  
15 stalemate from a legislative point of view and  
16 from a DOE point of view. I don't think that you  
17 would agree that that's an appropriate type of  
18 response for the City Council to take. Would you  
19 agree that's not an appropriate response?

20 DR. LYLES: Well I think we  
21 certainly want to have an open communication and,  
22 as I said, we will respond to the letter and I  
23 cannot speak to past lack of response, but I'm  
24 saying to you with this letter, we certainly will  
25 respond to it.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Then let me  
3 ask this question, Deputy Chancellor, Dr. Lyles,  
4 now that this hearing will be over this afternoon,  
5 when can we expect a response realistically? A  
6 day? A week? A month? A year? Now, of course,  
7 I'm being sarcastic, but I'm being realistic in  
8 that the lack of response five weeks later and  
9 there's no response and the response we get is,  
10 well, you know, we were having a hearing and so we  
11 were going to wait until the hearing in order to  
12 respond to your letter. Let me just say that  
13 seems sort of that's the type of excuses that I  
14 would receive from my children. I'm being very  
15 serious about that. You know, they try to give  
16 you an excuse to make an excuse in order to  
17 basically get around being direct and saying, I  
18 messed up. [Pause] So when do you think that we  
19 are going to get an answer to our letter?

20 DR. LYLES: Well, I'm going to go  
21 back and speak with the Chancellor and I'm sure we  
22 will give you an expeditious response, it will not  
23 be a year, a month, it will be very shortly.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. And let  
25 me just redefine that. When you say--in Brown

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2 versus the Board of Education, they said with all  
3 deliberate speed.

4 [Pause]

5 DR. LYLES: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And it was not  
7 very speedy. So when you say that we will be  
8 receiving a response as quickly as possible, can  
9 you be more specific? Within a week? Within two  
10 weeks? Within three weeks? I just want to try to  
11 pinpoint.

12 DR. LYLES: Well I don't, you know,  
13 the letter was to Chancellor Klein, so I don't  
14 want to speak specifically for Chancellor Klein,  
15 but the conversation that was had was that we  
16 would, after talking with you today, we would go  
17 back and we would compose a response to that. So  
18 when I say expeditiously, I am thinking within a  
19 week or so, but I do not want to be, you know,  
20 speaking for the Chancellor, but I know that he  
21 certainly intends to respond.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do you think  
23 if we have addressed it to you, Dr. Lyles, or the  
24 Deputy Chancellor for Curriculum and Instruction,  
25 and we would probably have received a quicker

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response? Since this is your area, this is Curriculum and Instruction--Joel Klein is not a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Do you think we would have got a quicker response in dealing with you?

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DR. LYLES: Well--

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Because I can--we can easily change the name up here and put Dr. Lyles on it.

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DR. LYLES: --well the issues that you have raised are really at the Chancellor's level, we are advising him. Just as you're taking a look--as I said, my colleagues each of these colleagues come from different divisions within the organization Anna Commitante comes from the Office of Teaching and Learning, Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger is the Advisor to the Chancellor around these issues, Elizabeth Sciabarra handles the student enrollment, so it is a cross-functional requirement and that is one of the reasons why we're going to get our guidance from the Chancellor on this one.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well I appreciate the diversity of the departments that

1  
2 are represented here today and we appreciate that,  
3 but we're hoping that, one, to get an appropriate  
4 response--

5 DR. LYLES: Absolutely.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --as quickly  
7 as possible--

8 DR. LYLES: Absolutely.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --and number  
10 two, to hopefully have some changes in the G&T  
11 programs in order to, one, I believe one of your  
12 goals was to increase the diversity, correct me if  
13 I'm wrong. Was that one of your goals?

14 DR. LYLES: One of our goals was to  
15 increase the access to G&T programs.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Now wait a  
17 minute, access. Was not one of your goals to  
18 increase the diversity of students--

19 DR. LYLES: [Interposing] We  
20 certainly wanted more students that are from  
21 under-represented communities to be in G&T  
22 programs, but the first goal that we set for  
23 ourselves last year was to increase the access,  
24 the number of students who were even taking the  
25 test.



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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. And so  
3 you achieved that goal.

4 DR. LYLES: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Because 16,000  
6 applied, right? But part of it also, was it part  
7 of that goal or was it a separate goal of  
8 increasing diversity?

9 DR. LYLES: That is an additional  
10 goal [crosstalk]--

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. And so  
12 that was a goal?

13 DR. LYLES: Right.

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And also a  
15 goal, my understanding was, to increase the number  
16 of students that were actually accepted into  
17 Gifted and Talented, is that correct or am I  
18 wrong?

19 DR. LYLES: No, that was not--we  
20 were saying that we wanted to raise the bar and to  
21 have a consistent standard, that was the number  
22 one goal. The number two goal was to increase the  
23 access because we found that there were  
24 communities in which students were not even  
25 participating in the tested process. Those were

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2 the two goals that we set forth and if you take a  
3 look at any of the materials that we put out,  
4 those are the two goals that we consistently set  
5 forth.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Let me turn to  
7 my colleague Lou Fidler who has been--we're going  
8 to--

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[Off mic]

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Lou, he said,  
11 you go first. We're going to turn to a colleague  
12 Lou Fidler because he has been as one of the  
13 leaders that have been on top of this for several  
14 years in the City Council, who co-authored the  
15 letter with me to Chancellor Joel Klein. Council  
16 Member Lou Fidler of Brooklyn.

17

COUNCIL MEMBER LOU FIDLER: Thank  
18 you, Mr. Chairman, and I share your frustration in  
19 not having had a response to our letter before  
20 this hearing. I think it would have been a more  
21 productive way to proceed for you to staked out  
22 your position and I will get to the one portion of  
23 your testimony in a moment that actually either  
24 mischaracterized or misunderstood one of the  
25 suggestions that the Chairman and I were making

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2 about the allocation of seats, but we'll get to  
3 that in a second.

4

5 I just want to start off with, the  
6 high point in this discussion was the Mayor's  
7 State of the City address in 2005 and the Mayor  
8 made a number of commitments at that time, and I  
9 want to just list a couple of them for you. The  
10 first was he was going to maintain all existing  
11 Gifted and Talented programs in the city of New  
12 York, that he was going to create more Gifted and  
13 Talented programs in historically underserved  
14 districts, and third, was that he would create--  
15 well he'd create them both--well he'd create more  
16 programs while maintaining the existing ones, in  
17 other words, to ensure there'd be more Gifted and  
18 Talented seats. So I guess my first question to  
19 you is kind of the general one, are those  
20 commitments still operative and do you feel you've  
21 maintained those commitments?

21

[Pause]

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DR. LYLES: I can't speak--I have to  
say I'm not totally conversant in the Mayor's  
State of the City address from 2005. However,  
with the guidance of the Mayor, part of what we

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2 have is we've shared and, as you also already  
3 indicated, our Gifted and Talented program has  
4 been evolving and we've made a commitment for it  
5 to evolve and what we have been committed to is  
6 indeed having a Gifted and Talented program that  
7 is a citywide standard. That has been the charge  
8 of the Mayor, it has not been to create more  
9 Gifted and Talented seats, but it is to provide a  
10 rigorous, accelerated, differentiated  
11 instructional program for our students who are  
12 Gifted and Talented. At the same time, it is also  
13 to ensure that all students have an opportunity  
14 for a rigorous instructional program. It is not  
15 [off mic] to say that there will be more all of a  
16 sudden gifted and talented children, but it is  
17 that we will indeed ensure that there are seats  
18 for any child that is indeed identified as gifted  
19 and talented and that if that meant opening up new  
20 places, we would do that. That is a commitment  
21 that the Mayor has made that we will follow  
22 through on.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Deputy

24 Chancellor, I would respectfully say that the  
25 Gifted and Talented program has not evolved, it

1  
2 has devolved. It has gone from a successful  
3 program in many communities to a mere shell of  
4 what it used to be and that is why we're having  
5 the hearing today and I think the first thing that  
6 we have to acknowledge is that there is a problem  
7 that needs to be fixed. I think in the name of  
8 standardizing a result, you have dumbed down and  
9 devolved a program that worked in many  
10 neighborhoods of this city to one that now works  
11 in very, very few and I think that's the first  
12 point that the Chairman and I particularly need to  
13 drive home.

14           You're here today because we're not  
15 meeting the standards and goals that were laid out  
16 in the Mayor's State of the City address in 2005  
17 and the only reason that Intro 493 was not acted  
18 upon by this Council at a time when it had 50  
19 sponsors was because of the commitments that were  
20 made in the State of the City address in 2005.

21 Now the fact of the matter is we all sit here with  
22 the frustration that there is mayoral control of  
23 the schools and not be municipal control of the  
24 schools because I can assure you that if there was  
25 municipal control of the schools, we probably

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2 would be entertaining Intro 493 at this hearing  
3 today.

4

5 So let's start off with, can you  
6 acknowledge that you have not met the standards  
7 and goals that were laid out in 2005 by the Mayor  
8 of the City of New York, who controls the schools  
9 of this city?

10

11 DR. LYLES: What I am going to  
12 acknowledge is that we have met the standards that  
13 have been outlined by the Chancellor and the  
14 Mayor. The standard is to provide access to every  
15 student who is identified as gifted and talented  
16 that was the standard set by the Mayor in 2005 and  
17 we have indeed provided access, we have guaranteed  
18 an offer for every student in his home district if  
19 he has indeed met the criteria established for  
20 gifted and talented.

21

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: There are so  
23 many problems with the few sentences you just  
24 uttered, I don't know where to begin. So let's  
25 start off with the identification of every gifted  
and talented child, do you have the statistics--

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
Excuse me, Council Member Fidler, before you

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entertain the questions to her, just let me take this vote--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --if you don't mind, just give me one second. We've been joined by our colleague Jessica Lappin of Manhattan, and we are voting on Resolution 1541 and the Chair recommends an aye vote and we're voting on Resolution 497, a motion to file, and the Chair recommends a yes vote on the motion to file. Clerk, call the roll.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Resolution 1541, Council Member Lappin.

COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Vote is now 14 in the affirmative, one in the negative, no abstentions. Resolution 497, Council Member Lappin.

COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: The vote now stands at 12 in the affirmative, three in the negative, no abstentions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you. Council Member Fidler.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Thank you,  
3 Mr. Chairman. Let's talk about identifying  
4 students and you do at one point frankly admit  
5 that it is almost impossible to say exactly what  
6 the standard would be, but isn't it a fact that  
7 the tests that you now have recognize and  
8 emphasize school readiness as opposed to  
9 intellectual capacity?

10 [Pause]

11 MS. ANNA COMMITANTE: I think the  
12 two assessments that we use, as Dr. Lyle mentioned  
13 earlier--

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
15 Can you just identify yourself--

16 MS. COMMITANTE: Oh, I'm sorry, and-

17 -

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --if you don't  
19 mind, so that they can recognize your voice on the  
20 tape and, you know, your title.

21 MS. COMMITANTE: Anna Commitante,  
22 I'm sorry.

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. That's  
24 okay, go ahead.

25 MS. COMMITANTE: What I wanted to



1

2 mention is that the readiness assessment would be  
3 the Bracken School Readiness Assessment and, as  
4 Dr. Lyle mentioned earlier, that is the test that  
5 has a value of 25%, however, the OLSAT is a  
6 recognized test of cognitive ability. Now it is  
7 true that I believe any kind of assessment that is  
8 given to children is going to look different for  
9 children who have not had certain early childhood  
10 experiences and exposure to language, but I think  
11 that holds true for any assessment that we could  
12 look at.

13

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: So let's  
14 take questions of race and culture out of this and  
15 let's just talk about economic opportunity and  
16 what it's like for a child in a home where perhaps  
17 there's only one working parent and the other  
18 parent is perhaps home nurturing a child through,  
19 and as opposed to a child that's in a home with  
20 two working parents where they don't get as much  
21 face time with their child to nurture them. Would  
22 that child, that second child not be at a  
23 disadvantage coming into this process?

24

[Pause]

25

MS. COMMITANTE: I think we're

1  
2 looking at children's exposure to language,  
3 experiences, that perhaps I think in any sort of  
4 assessment situation are going to make a  
5 difference.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Oh, so to  
7 paraphrase, the answer is yes.

8 MS. COMMITANTE: Yes. [Crosstalk]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Okay. I  
10 mean, you know, it wasn't a gotcha question, I was  
11 just kind of laying out the reality.

12 MS. COMMITANTE: It--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: So now isn't  
14 it also so that the recommendation that comes  
15 along with OLSAT was that the top 95th percentile  
16 and up, they consider to be gifted, isn't that not  
17 correct?

18 [Off mic]

19 MS. JENNIFER BELL-ELLWANGER: Right,  
20 Jennifer Bell-Ellwanger, good afternoon. Just to  
21 backtrack a little bit, both of the assessments  
22 that we are currently using are deeply based in  
23 research and have psychometric validity and  
24 reliability attached to both of those assessments  
25 with what they're measuring. We have technical

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manuals that we can also provide and we can give them to you as part of our written response so that you can take a look at the information contained in the technical reports, which also look at things like bias reviews and presenting items that may, you know, lean towards one group of students more so than another group of students and that's important when producing assessments that are fair and equitable.

Too, there was a question about whether or not they would be unbalanced to children who may not have had the experiences and that's why Dr. Lyles mentioned that if students are coming in at pre-K and then going into our kindergarten, we also have the opportunity to assess these students in kindergarten when we've had them for one year and provide the assessment at first grade as an entry point into our Gifted and Talented programs and that's important--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER:

[Interposing] That assessment is by test, am I correct?

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: But the two--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Yes?

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2 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: --but the--yes,  
3 but the two assessments together allow us to give  
4 a view of the whole child. One is the academic  
5 readiness, but the other piece on the OLSAT is  
6 looking at shapes and figures and putting--and  
7 problem solving--things that may or may not be as  
8 experience based in an academic setting.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: So let me  
10 rephrase the question since you didn't answer it.  
11 Why did you select 95% originally?

12 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: As we have  
13 stated here about the gifted and talented, the  
14 national US DE recommendations don't set a  
15 criteria, in some cases it's the top 3% of  
16 achieving students should be as gifted. We set it  
17 at 95 to begin with and as we looked at it  
18 further--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Why?

20 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Why? Because  
21 of the recommendations that it's the top 3 to 5%.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: So then you  
23 went to 90%.

24 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Right.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Why 90, why

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not 91? Why not 88? Why not 85? Why?

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Again, looking at saying the top 10 percentile of students in a national norm, we felt that it would extend the opportunity yet not water-down the standards so that we could modify the instruction between the 90th and the 99th percentile in a way that would meet the needs of those students. If we drop down further to 85, 80, and so on and so forth, you would have to--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER:

[Interposing] Based upon--

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: --modify it very [crosstalk]--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: --based upon what? Why? What's the difference--and I realize that there's a point at which we all draw a line at some point--

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: --but I'm trying to get my hands around, why 90, why not 88? Why not 85, since we clearly, clearly have empty Gifted and Talented seats because you're paying the schools for empty Gifted and Talented seats.

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2 Why?

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MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Okay.

4

5 89, 85? What's the evidence, what's the empirical  
6 data that says 90 is the right number, since your  
7 initial determination was 95 was clearly not  
8 working here?

9

10 absolutely right, we could say 85, we could say  
11 80, we could say as we had in some of our Gifted  
12 and Talented classes, students who scored in the  
13 14th percentile. A lot of this was based upon the  
14 research that we had around these assessments and  
15 what was happening across the country in Gifted  
16 and Talented programs. It was indeed, we were  
17 striving for a rigorous program, we certainly  
18 understood that this is not an exact science, but  
19 we based it upon what has been done across the  
20 country, what the recommendations were for in use  
21 of this data, and we felt that we could still  
22 offer a high-quality program and instructional  
23 program to our students, and that is why we  
24 selected the 90th percentile.

25

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: But the

1  
2 bottom line is that 90 versus 89 or 85 is somewhat  
3 an arbitrary selection and given the fact that we  
4 have reduced the number of children being served  
5 in these programs by such a significant level, I  
6 think we could probably argue that it was an  
7 incorrect selection. And so I think there's the  
8 recommendation that you should go back to DOE with  
9 is that you need to cast a wider net. That's  
10 number--that's point number one.

11 Second, let me ask you a question  
12 about the kids, and I think we were talking about  
13 access, I heard that word mentioned earlier--  
14 access. If you are a child in a school district  
15 without a program, what access do you have if you  
16 happen to be one of the lucky few who did take the  
17 test, did get into the 90th percentile, what  
18 access does that child have?

19 [Pause]

20 MS. ELIZABETH SCIABARRA: Well I  
21 think that--this is Liz Sciabarra, student  
22 enrollment--I think that access can be looked at  
23 in two ways. First, the access point that we hope  
24 to increase was actually having more children sit  
25 for the exam, which clearly we were successful at.

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2 Secondly, based on the eligibility criteria, there  
3 was a determination made where the program should  
4 actually be and that was reflected on the  
5 applications. Where there were instances, whether  
6 it was in the initial round where we didn't have a  
7 significant number of children selecting a  
8 particular program or after the fact when kids and  
9 parents may have opted out for whatever reason, we  
10 basically curtailed some of those programs and  
11 made offers to kids in other places. And so,  
12 though it may not appear on the face of it that  
13 there was access in every single school, our  
14 commitment was to grant access to all the kids who  
15 are eligible and wanted those seats.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Okay. I  
17 guess I'm going to have to ask this question  
18 differently again. If you are a student in  
19 District 16 in Brooklyn which has no Gifted and  
20 Talented program and you qualified because somehow  
21 you managed to find your way into the test room  
22 and you scored 90% or above, but there is no  
23 program in your school district, what happens?

24 MS. SCIABARRA: We'd offer you a  
25 seat someplace else.



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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Where?

MS. SCIABARRA: In a contiguous district or a contiguous [crosstalk]--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER:

[Interposing] And do you offer bus service to that child?

MS. SCIABARRA: If the child meets the mandates of the busing, he would get busing, if not [crosstalk]--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER:

[Interposing] They get bus service outside of--

MS. SCIABARRA: No--

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: --their school district?

MS. SCIABARRA: --no, they don't.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Oh, so--

MS. SCIABARRA: No, they don't.

COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: --that's the little fine point in that mandate. So I would submit to you, you've offered that child nothing because you have seven school districts in the City of New York without a Gifted and Talented program. I'd wager to say that if you looked at the economic circumstances of the average parent

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in those seven districts, you'd find they were amongst the seven poorest districts in the City of New York and to suggest that that parent is going to be able to find a way to get that child into a Gifted and Talented program in some other school district without offering a way to get that child to get to that program, that's not an offer, that's not a service, and that is not access. Would you acknowledge that that is a complete and total failing in this system?

DR. LYLES: No, I can't acknowledge that it's a complete and total failure. We have students who travel cross districts, parents get them up early in the morning, they take them on the subway, kindergarten, first grade up through high school, but kindergarten, first grade definitely to get them in schools and opportunities across without any transportation offered. It is not the ideal, it is not what we desire, but we have found that parents have indeed taken advantage, they want to get their students the best--their children the best education possible and they've taken advantage and they've found a way to do this. As I said, it is not our

1  
2 goal for parents to have to travel long distances,  
3 that certainly is not the goal. But even within a  
4 district, it is not necessarily guaranteed that  
5 this is going to be, you know, an easy thing,  
6 because even if they get transportation traveling,  
7 it can be very difficult and we recognize that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Deputy

9 Chancellor, once again, we have an absolute and  
10 total fundamental difference of opinion. I think  
11 an offer to a parent in an impoverished community  
12 that offers a seat to a child halfway across the  
13 borough--a kindergartener no less or a first  
14 grader no less--halfway across the borough, is not  
15 an offer at all. It is an absolute travesty in  
16 terms of wasting the potential of that child and  
17 as we look at the goal of increasing diversity in  
18 this program throughout the City of New York and  
19 we look at who those children are, I think that  
20 just points out another reason why you have failed  
21 to meet the standards and goals set out by the  
22 Mayor in his State of the City address in 2005.  
23 And the first thing you have to do is acknowledge  
24 it and that is why you're here today, because we  
25 think you failed and what's troubling to me is

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2 that you don't seem to think you have. And that's  
3 very troubling to me.

4 So let me move on to something  
5 else, you know, we've just acknowledged and, Ms.  
6 Commitante, you acknowledged, I guess when I  
7 paraphrased, yes and you agreed that there is a  
8 level of inaccuracy, uncertainty, lack of  
9 perfection in the testing process.

10 ANNA COMMITANTE: In any testing  
11 [off mic].

12 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: In any  
13 testing process, that's good, I'll agree with  
14 that. I want to go, Deputy Chancellor, to  
15 something you said in your testimony today about  
16 teachers. Now teacher evaluation on page two, the  
17 teacher recommendations are not always reliable.  
18 I guess like testing is not always reliable, and I  
19 just wonder whether or not we are sacrificing in  
20 the name of some need to have one size fit all,  
21 the value and experience of the teachers that we  
22 have that deal with these young people every day  
23 and might perhaps be in a position to recognize  
24 potential that the test did not. And I just want  
25 to ask you, Deputy Chancellor, why is it that you

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2 refuse to trust teachers?

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DR. LYLES: I would not characterize this as my refusal to trust teachers, I was a teacher for many years and I trust teachers very much. But as a teacher of many years, I also know the level of subjectivity that occurs with teachers and while no system is perfect, we know that it is a highly subjective process and we were trying to make it a more objective process. This is not about trust of teachers, this is about reliability, this is about objectivity, and this is about providing students with the same standard that they can be judged by.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Deputy Chancellor, we once again disagree, I think this is one more indication of something that we have seen over and over and over and over again at the Education Committee of the City Council that the system does not trust its teachers, does not empower its teachers in a proper way. I don't understand why you would think that a test that you acknowledge is not always reliable is the only measure, as opposed to a teacher who might have been exposed to a young person for 200 some odd

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2 days and sees something in that person that might  
3 just reflect a potential that hasn't been realized  
4 or tapped. I trust teachers, okay? And I think  
5 the DOE needs to trust teachers a little bit more  
6 as well. And, you know, I suspect that Council  
7 Member Recchia will ask about Bay Academy? Since  
8 I didn't get an answer to that question. If he  
9 doesn't, I'll come back to it--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: You could  
11 bring it up, Mr. Fidler. You can bring it up.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Well, all  
13 right, then I'll ask. I asked you about, you  
14 know, the policy change at Bay Academy, I realize  
15 that's a very limited issue here, can someone  
16 explain to me why the rules for Bay Academy have  
17 been changed?

18 MS. SCIABARRA: Okay. Bay Academy  
19 was part of the 1974 desegregation order for  
20 District 21, when that court order was vacated  
21 last spring, Bay Academy reverted to its original  
22 status which was a District 21 school. As a  
23 result, we are following A-101 Chancellor's Regs  
24 where it says that the students who live in  
25 District 21 or go to school in District 21 can

1  
2 apply to Bay Academy. There is also a swath of  
3 geography within District 22 where students can  
4 apply to Bay Academy. We have had discussions  
5 with the CEC, we've had discussions with the  
6 principal. In fact, Mrs. Nagler has expressed  
7 interest in reopening the discussion to have Bay  
8 Academy looked at the same way Mark Twain is  
9 looked at and, as we indicated to Mrs. Nagler and  
10 other community stakeholders, that this year,  
11 because of the way the court order was vacated and  
12 what we decided upon, that this remains intact,  
13 but certainly in the spring we are willing to sit  
14 down and talk to various stakeholders to look at  
15 Bay Academy and the way in which District 21 has  
16 been impacted by the vacating of the court order.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Well, you  
18 know, I have a concern about the way the rest of  
19 the districts have been impacted by the Bay  
20 Academy order. You know, and this regulation I  
21 would tell you that, as I said, I'm not aware of  
22 areas in District 22 that are eligible for  
23 application to Bay Academy because I have parents  
24 that are coming to my office saying why can't  
25 they, and I would just put this again under the

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2 category of it wasn't broke, why fix it. Bay  
3 Academy was a magnificent school, I don't know  
4 what Mrs. Nagler is saying to you, I know what  
5 she's saying to my office, she would like to go  
6 back to the old system where Bay Academy was able  
7 to attract students from all over the borough and  
8 to keep it the fine school that it is. I think  
9 Bay Academy is a reason that many, many, many  
10 people remain in Brooklyn, as opposed to moving  
11 elsewhere to seek access to quality education for  
12 their children and I, you know, I don't get it.

13 MS. SCIABARRA: Council Member, I  
14 could just tell you the one, 'cause I wanted to  
15 get the school number, Junior High School 43 in  
16 District 22, part of that school zone actually may  
17 apply to Bay Academy as well. So I mean, we can  
18 talk about this further.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: All right.  
20 Well, that sounds like an extraordinarily limited  
21 part of District 22, and it certainly isn't my  
22 part, I don't even where Junior High School 43 is,  
23 I suspect it may be in Manhattan Beach.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, it's on  
25 Brighton, Brighton Six--



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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER:

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[Interposing] Oh, there you go, so it's probably

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Recchia's [crosstalk]--

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Sea Breeze

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Avenue and Brighton 6th Street.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: It's 'cause

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it's [crosstalk]--

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It's housed in

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the [crosstalk]--

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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: It must be

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Recchia's school.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: It's housed in

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the building of 225.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Well, I will

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just sum up as saying this, I think I am more

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disturbed now after having heard your testimony

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and your responses to my questions than I was when

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the Chairman and I wrote this letter. You know,

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we have a fundamental difference of opinion as to

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whether or not this program is working better than

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it was four years ago. And I clearly think it is

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not, I think most members of this Committee think

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it is not, I think the Chairman thinks it is not,

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and you guys seem to think that everything is fine

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2 and all is well. When the number of students and  
3 the number of sites and the number of districts in  
4 which the programs aren't being provided increase  
5 and the number of students decrease, the number of  
6 sites decrease and the number of districts where  
7 the program is non-existent have increased, that  
8 should mean to me that you should understand that  
9 there is a problem, that the standards and goals  
10 that have been set out by the Mayor in his own  
11 State of the City address are not being met. And  
12 before we get to a discussion of how to fix those  
13 problems and I think that--no, I'm sorry before I  
14 conclude, I want to go back to one other thing, we  
15 did in fact suggest that at least 10% of the seats  
16 be set aside in a district, so your suggestion  
17 that in some districts only the top 3 or 4% would  
18 get seats under our proposal, that's just a  
19 misunderstanding or a mischaracterization of what  
20 we were suggesting. If in fact, 30% of the kids  
21 in a district belong in a Gifted and Talented  
22 program, then that district ought to be providing  
23 at least 30% of its seats for Gifted and Talented  
24 kids, all right?

25 Clearly there is a problem in many

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2 school districts in the City of New York, we  
3 aren't getting enough kids taking the test to  
4 logically expect a single class in the district, I  
5 refuse to believe, I refuse to accept that in  
6 those districts there just aren't talented and  
7 gifted children. I think it is clearly a problem  
8 that is systemic to the way the Department in fact  
9 administers all of its schools, with its progress  
10 reports and testing, you're going to have to find  
11 a way to get over that, and the only way to get  
12 over that is to force the inclusion of those  
13 programs in neighborhoods where parents will have  
14 local access and won't have to--principals won't  
15 be exporting their kids halfway across the borough  
16 out of their system, out of their testing, and out  
17 of their progress report cards. And that parents  
18 will be able to actually have a meaningful offer  
19 for those kids that might qualify with a wider net  
20 being cast for those young people.

21 I suggest that you take that back  
22 to the DOE, incorporate that into your response,  
23 I'd hope that response will be prompt, and I hope  
24 the action that will be taken will be significant,  
25 so we can reverse this devolution of an important,

1  
2 critically important educational and social policy  
3 program in the City of New York.

4 [Pause]

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,  
6 Council Member Fidler. Council Member Domenic  
7 Recchia of Brooklyn.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Now it's my  
9 turn, huh? Good afternoon. First, I want to  
10 just, you know, I've been sitting here listen to  
11 Lou Fidler, Rob Jackson, and I understand what  
12 you're trying to do--you're trying to make one  
13 test for all--one cookie-cutter for everything,  
14 okay? But the beautiful thing about districts is  
15 creativity, and what's good for the upper West  
16 Side, okay, and what those parents want, may not  
17 be what the parents in South Brooklyn want. And  
18 what you're doing here is, by implementing the  
19 standardized test, okay, you're taking away the  
20 creativity for those school districts and saying  
21 this is the way it is, okay? And I just want to  
22 know why--why are you doing that?

23 [Pause]

24 DR. LYLES: You know, we do clearly  
25 see it differently, we do not look at us taking

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2 away any of the creativity of schools, I mean,  
3 that or districts. We believe very definitely  
4 that schools will continue to have opportunities  
5 to serve their students in creative ways which  
6 will meet the needs of their parents and the  
7 communities. What we do believe, though, it  
8 should not be a geographic determination as to  
9 whether or not you're a gifted by the fact that in  
10 one district you could be in the 20th percentile  
11 and your gifted, in another district you're in the  
12 90th percentile. We think that we have to have  
13 clear expectations for all parents, we have to  
14 give true signals to parents and their communities  
15 and their children about what their children are  
16 actually achieving. We have found, and we have  
17 data that found for us, that children who were in  
18 Gifted and Talented programs that did not adhere  
19 to a citywide standard, indeed, four years later  
20 when they were testing in terms of a standardized  
21 assessment, an unbelievable number of those  
22 students were not even testing in the level three  
23 and four. This we think is saying to us that we  
24 need to make sure that we provide clear  
25 expectations and that parents have a standard that

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2 they can understand. We also found that--and I  
3 just, you know, part of the reference around  
4 having a clear standard in something that is not  
5 subjective, one of the issues around the teachers  
6 and using teacher recommendations, we found that  
7 there were places where teachers did not want to  
8 be involved in that and subsequently that put at a  
9 severe disadvantage children who were in  
10 classrooms where teachers did not do this. Many  
11 of our students come from pre-K programs, pre-K  
12 programs they are not under--they're under the  
13 DOE, but we could not mandate that teachers give  
14 this kind of recommendation for students. We  
15 wanted, again, not to inhibit anybody's creativity  
16 and we still work with our schools we talked about  
17 the enrichment programs that many of our schools  
18 have, we want to support that, but we also want to  
19 support those children that we believe are truly  
20 able to compete in a competitive classroom with a  
21 rigorous instructional program.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: But what  
23 you're doing here is that you have districts that  
24 have no programs whatsoever, okay? And for those  
25 children in that district that makes and that

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parents, okay--there's no busing involved, okay?  
I'm sure if there are children that have an 88 or  
an 85, okay, and that means you could get a class  
of a gifted, why not have that a gifted program  
for that community? Why are you cutting it out?  
You know, because you're basing on a one-day test,  
okay, the kid could truly have a bad day, and  
that's why the teachers' input is something that  
should be taken into consideration.

DR. LYLES: First, let me just, you  
know, and I think I need to really premise this,  
and I said it in the testimony, but I agree that  
there are gifted and talented children in every  
one of our communities. I was superintendent in  
the District 16, I certainly believed and worked  
very hard to support all of the children and  
support the Gifted and Talented program that was  
there, so that's not the issue. The issue,  
though, for us is, how do we indeed make sure that  
those children are receiving the necessary  
supports and we have provided them with access to  
that? What's the magic number that we will cut-  
off? As I said in the testimony, just taking  
looking a look at, we took this 10% bar that was

1  
2 referred to, we already know we would go as low as  
3 the 60th percentile and lower in at least 14 of  
4 our districts, and is that truly a Gifted and  
5 Talented program or are there children who are  
6 very bright who should be in their schools equally  
7 stimulated, equally challenged to get the most and  
8 to achieve their potential? I think that that's  
9 part of what we are grappling with. We are not  
10 saying that we have arrived, that we are where we  
11 want to be. We recognize that there is a great  
12 deal of work that we still need to do, but we  
13 definitely believe that we are moving in the right  
14 direction and our challenge is indeed to address  
15 those children who are in the pipeline, if you  
16 were, those children who haven't had those same  
17 experiences and how do we accelerate that for  
18 those children? We recognize that is our  
19 obligation. You wanted to add something, Anna?

20 MS. COMMITANTE: I just wanted to  
21 add that comments were made about our not trusting  
22 teachers. If you recall the first year of this  
23 implementation, we utilized the Gifted Rating  
24 Scales, which is a teacher recommendation. We had  
25 tremendous difficulty getting the teachers to



1  
2 return the forms and then parents were angry at us  
3 because their forms were not returned to us, some  
4 were never returned by the due date, some were  
5 never returned, we had entire schools that refused  
6 to complete the evaluations. So, operationally,  
7 it was a complete disaster for us that year.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: So it was  
9 the teachers fault.

10 MS. COMMITANTE: Well, I'm not  
11 blaming anyone, I am just telling you what  
12 occurred. [Pause] And also it's important to  
13 note that many teachers did not want to be in that  
14 position where they were making this decision,  
15 parents were putting a lot of pressure on the  
16 teachers--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:  
18 [Interposing] They're not making--

19 MS. COMMITANTE: --they were putting  
20 a lot of pressure on principals to complete the  
21 form in a certain way.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: No.

23 MS. COMMITANTE: This is reality,  
24 this is what happened.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: No, let me

1  
2 tell you reality, reality is the forms weren't  
3 getting filled out because the principals didn't  
4 want to lose those kids, they didn't want to lose  
5 they're good kids to another program in a gifted  
6 school--that's why they weren't filling it out.  
7 And you're going to tell me that if Department of  
8 Ed wanted forms filled out, those principles would  
9 not, and those teachers would not?

10 Teachers are horrified, they're  
11 scared today, they're scared in this system.  
12 They're like robots, not out of line, and you talk  
13 away about not taking away creativity? You wanted  
14 to take away the GLOBE program in the P.S. 200 and  
15 the parents had to fight to keep that program.  
16 And you were taking it away. [Pause] So I don't  
17 understand, and when you say you don't want to  
18 take away creativity, you are taking away  
19 creativity. And I can go down on different  
20 schools and different programs and what the  
21 problems are and you're going to tell me schools  
22 can't fill out forms? Teachers can't fill out  
23 forms? I could understand if they're coming from  
24 a private school, that's another issue. But the  
25 issue in reality is that principals, just like the

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principals do not give out the gifted

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applications, notifying children that they could

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take the gifted test. What are you doing about

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that?

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MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Well to that

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point, first, we were really primarily referring

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to our private schools that we--especially in our

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pre-K programs, those are really outside of the

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DOE and our parochial schools, that's really where

11

we had the most difficulty with the return of the

12

Gifted Rating Scales, we were not implying that it

13

was at--you know, I think that that was a jump.

14

On your--you had another point--I'm

15

just sorry, could you just backtrack, Councilman

16

Recchia? You had a question about--now I've

17

lost...

18

[Pause]

19

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I forgot.

20

MS. COMMITANTE: The principals not

21

giving out [crosstalk]--

22

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Yeah, the

23

principals--

24

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Oh, that's--on

25

the outreach, yes, that's actually that was to be

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2 [crosstalk]--

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COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:

4

[Interposing] The outreach, right, and the

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principals don't give out the forms--

6

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Right, and--

7

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: --for the

8

gifted programs.

9

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: And that's why

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we try and get the applications out in so many

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different ways: we advertise that in local

12

newspapers, we advertise that through--

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COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA:

14

[Interposing] And how much money--

15

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: --publications.

16

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: --and how

17

much money do you put in advertising?

18

[Pause]

19

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: I don't have

20

that budget, yeah.

21

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Could you

22

please get that to the Chairman of this--

23

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Sure, of

24

course.

25

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: --

1

2 Committee? Because two years ago, there was no  
3 money to advertise, and you know what? I came up  
4 with the money to advertise, okay? And last year,  
5 there was very little advertisement. So I think  
6 you should break down in each District, all right,  
7 about what's going on, and I really think you have  
8 to take a hard look back at what's going on in  
9 these Gifted and Talented programs. And because  
10 first you were at 95%, I testified that I believe  
11 it should be at 80, 85% and then you came down to  
12 90%. And, in my opinion, the reason why you came  
13 down from 90%, because very little children would  
14 be in the 95th percentile in the City of New York.  
15 But I think I've said enough on the elementary  
16 school, now we'll get back to the middle schools,  
17 okay?

18 Outset, Liz Sciabarra, excellent,  
19 she's doing a great job, she has the toughest job  
20 in New York City, I wouldn't want to have her job.  
21 But, you know, we're trying to work on the issue  
22 with Bay Academy. When Mark Twain--when the court  
23 order--when you were going back to court for the  
24 court order, Department of Ed came to see me,  
25 okay? And I was told, and I asked specifically,

1  
2 what would change in the school and what wouldn't  
3 change, and what would happen to the rest of the  
4 schools in my district. And I was told that  
5 nothing would change, the only thing that would  
6 change, that we were just getting rid of quotas.  
7 Well let me tell you what has changed ever since  
8 the court order went out the window. One, the  
9 busing for seventh and eighth graders are gone and  
10 it was promised from the Department of Ed at a  
11 public hearing that the busing would be back for  
12 the seventh and eighth graders, for those children  
13 that are attending this year, okay? Because it  
14 wasn't fair, but that the future seventh and  
15 eighth graders would not have the busing. Today,  
16 there's no busing for the seventh and eighth  
17 graders, parents are in an uproar about this.  
18 That's number one.

19           Number two, the Department of Ed is  
20 taking away \$300,000 that Mark Twain got from the  
21 state for Mark Twain. It was earmarked, they  
22 received it every year, and you're taking away  
23 that money. So and then Bay Academy, no one ever  
24 talked about Bay Academy when they were taking  
25 away the court order. And this is why I believe

1  
2 that Bay Academy should stay the same as Mark  
3 Twain. Now Liz Sciabarra came to our middle  
4 school fair, because I asked her too, very  
5 receptive. She spoke to the principal, she spoke  
6 to all the principals at the school, and she's  
7 doing, I mean, a very, very good job, but I'm  
8 asking you, Deputy Chancellor, to please give us  
9 back Bay Academy to the way it was on the same  
10 level as Mark Twain, 'cause it means a lot to the  
11 people in the City of New York.

12 In addition to that, we have to  
13 address the middle school crisis in this city and  
14 we have to figure out a way and I think that you  
15 really have to, you know, figure out what is going  
16 to happen to all these children that want to take  
17 the test for all these different middle schools  
18 throughout New York City. [Pause] And I think we  
19 have to figure out a way, and are you working on  
20 that and where are we?

21 MS. SCIABARRA: Just a few things on  
22 middle schools, so the current G&T policy is  
23 specifically for elementary schools, we have not  
24 tackled a citywide policy for screen programs and  
25 or G&T at the middle schools.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Thank God,  
3 let's keep it that way.

4 MS. SCIABARRA: Okay. Well so one  
5 of the things that we have done through the  
6 issuance of our directories and everything else is  
7 try to get the word out to those students who are  
8 eligible. So where testing does go on, students  
9 can in fact test. I mean just from where I sit, I  
10 think there needs to be somewhat more cohesion,  
11 you know, with that and I would agree that we need  
12 to look at it more broadly, specifically since we  
13 have new middle schools, you know, and so on, so I  
14 think we need to look at that and I think we've  
15 talked a little bit--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Right.

17 MS. SCIABARRA: --about that. But  
18 there is no, it is not the same type of policy  
19 that we have in place at the middle school that we  
20 have for elementary school so...

21 [Pause]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Okay. Well  
23 I'm done, I think I said enough.

24 [Pause]

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you,



1  
2 Council Member Recchia. I just have a couple of  
3 questions and I'm going to try to move through  
4 them as quickly as possible. But I gave some  
5 statistics in my opening statement regarding the  
6 number of students broken down based on in the  
7 school system in which a kindergarten, first grade  
8 student population was 17% white, 41% Hispanic,  
9 27% black, and 50% Asian. This year's G&T class,  
10 while one of the goals was to increase diversity,  
11 that did not happen. So my question I guess is  
12 considering those statistics, and I don't believe  
13 you disagree with those stats. First, let me ask  
14 you, do you agree or disagree with the stats? The  
15 stats all that I cited come from you.

16 DR. LYLES: Then we agree, if they  
17 came from us.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I don't know,  
19 I'm asking the question, I don't make the  
20 assumption that you agree, you may say I disagree  
21 and then I just want to know. So what are you  
22 doing then to increase the diversity of children  
23 in gifted and talented, knowing that one of your  
24 goals was to increase diversity and that was not  
25 achieved?

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[Pause]

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DR. LYLES: Okay. So I am going to reiterate because this is indeed something that we want to do. We are looking to support and bolster our pipeline; we are looking to, as we said, we are working--the Office of Early Childhood has been reposition that only serves our pre-K students in our CBOs and that is to improve the quality of the programs in our CBOs. The majority of our pre-K students are serviced through our CBOs and we know that this is critical that we enhance their instructional offerings.

This is, I mean, and here is, again, a cross-functional with the Office of Early Childhood has been working with the Office of Gifted and Talented to take a look at how could we align and provide more preparation for those students and in particular in those areas that are underserved and geographically, it comes out to ethnicity as well.

Secondly, as I said, one of the things we are looking at is also that we've increased our full-day programs for our students and I'm saying we recognize this--

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You mean a  
3 full day [crosstalk]--

4 DR. LYLES: Pre-K programs, I'm  
5 sorry.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --pre-K.

7 DR. LYLES: Full-day pre-K programs  
8 and what we recognize is that the longer those  
9 children have to be exposed and to work with those  
10 same kinds of concepts that some of the children  
11 had before they even entered school, they will be  
12 in a better position to take that test. And that  
13 is why we are keeping the opportunity for students  
14 to enter our Gifted and Talented programs in  
15 kindergarten as well as first grade because we  
16 recognize they are not all entering at the same  
17 developmental readiness level.

18 Additionally, we are collaborating  
19 with, again, as I said, with the Deputy Mayor,  
20 we've sort of pinpointed those places where we  
21 recognize that the students are not indeed getting  
22 into in those communities, that they're not  
23 getting into, you identified seven districts, we  
24 look at those communities and that's how we're  
25 taking a look at how are we going to work with

1  
2 those communities? We are providing intense  
3 professional development in those areas so that we  
4 can also really address that. This is not  
5 something that we are satisfied with by any means.  
6 Okay?

7 Now I have to say that I really  
8 have--I have a commitment that I have to go, so I  
9 can take one more question.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well let me  
11 just say that I have a series of questions and so  
12 I apologize, but I don't know whether or not I can  
13 just ask one more question.

14 DR. LYLES: Okay.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: In fact, I  
16 don't want to, if we don't have to, reschedule in  
17 order to continue. I don't want to use the  
18 process of me submitting questions to DOE when I  
19 expected to have a public hearing on this  
20 particular matter. So I ask you to stay, see  
21 whether or not, you could postpone your  
22 appointment and stay as long as possible and, if  
23 not, if necessary to reschedule, than I will.

24 DR. LYLES: Well, you know, I have a  
25 commitment, you know, I was scheduled from one to

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three, I know it was not your fault, but I was here at quarter to one ready to stay for two full hours and I've really tried to be accommodating. I have a group of advocates that I committed to working and listening to their concerns, and I really have an obligation. My colleagues can stay for 10 minutes or so beyond that, but I really do have commitments that I made to people. You know, I had scheduled, blocked this from one to three to, not only make the testimony, but to answer questions.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well let me just respond in general, I say to you as the Deputy Chancellor for Curriculum Instruction and to DOE overall, hearings of the Committee of Education last from four to five hours, and so please do not schedule two hours for a hearing. Hearings last from four to five hours, knowing that the Department of Education has approximately the first two hours, but hearings last that long. So I respectfully request that whoever is coming in front of us be prepared to stay the distance.

With respects to your colleagues being able to stay an additional 10 minutes,

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2 additional 10 minutes are not going to be  
3 responsive to the questions that we have. And so,  
4 with that, I'm not going to hold you up any  
5 longer, I'm going to reschedule this hearing in  
6 order to continue. I will take testimony from  
7 advocates and I, hopefully, ask maybe whoever your  
8 colleagues, especially the Directors, should stay  
9 and listen to those individuals that are giving  
10 testimony so that they know what is being said,  
11 and not to say, oh, you make the decision, we're  
12 all going to leave because we know what they're  
13 going to have to say. So I respectfully request  
14 that you leave appropriate people here to listen  
15 to the advocates and I will invite you back, you  
16 and your colleagues back, in order to continue the  
17 questions that we have of you.

18                   But since you responded to the  
19 first part of my question, let me just finish that  
20 question by saying that can you please give us a  
21 breakdown of the race, ethnicity, and  
22 socioeconomic status of the students who were  
23 tested this year compared to last year? Because,  
24 as you said, one of the goals is diversity, so  
25 with the 16,000 students that applied, their race,

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ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of all of the students that actually were tested. And compare that to the previous year. Do you have those statistics?

DR. LYLES: Not here, but we will provide [crosstalk]--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing] I mean, but overall, you do have them.

DR. LYLES: Yes, we do.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Oh, okay.

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Well just one point of clarification--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yes ma'am.

MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: --we have them for those students who enter our school system, but as part of the application, we don't collect race, ethnicity, that's not a type of question that you ask on a special selection application. So we can provide that information to you for those who took the assessments and are now currently enrolled in our schools, whether they enrolled in as a kindergarten student or in the Gifted and Talented program, but we cannot provide that information for those that tested in another

1  
2 pre-K and, for whatever reason, did not enter the  
3 public school system in the fall.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But of all the  
5 people that were in the public school system or--  
6 couldn't you add those criteria or as questions on  
7 the actual application? The applications are not  
8 discriminatory, because if you're saying--and I'm  
9 sorry, you're shaking your head no--

10 DR. LYLES: Only because I'm  
11 sensitive from an admissions standpoint--

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Right.

13 DR. LYLES: --that all our  
14 applications are race neutral.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yes.

16 DR. LYLES: Right.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: But your  
18 criteria is not subjective, it's objective, it's  
19 based on test criteria and nothing else, that's  
20 what you're telling us. Isn't that correct? So  
21 you're not basing your decision based on  
22 subjectivity, so it's appropriate to ask a  
23 question in order to determine--you're trying to  
24 reach a goal and one of the goals is to increase  
25 the diversity and if, in fact, you don't know the



1  
2 racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic status of 16,000  
3 students, how do you know you're going to achieve  
4 your goal of diversity? I ask that question then.

5 [Pause] Hello?

6 [Off mic]

7 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: It was on, now  
8 it turned itself off. That is a fair question,  
9 again--

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I thought it  
11 was too.

12 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: For current--

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Especially  
14 when your decisions are not subjective at all,  
15 it's all objective criteria.

16 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: What we can  
17 provide which gives a very good view is for all of  
18 our students that are currently enrolled in the  
19 New York City public schools, regardless of what  
20 type of program. That will provide the bulk  
21 majority of our test takers.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: No, that will  
23 not, that will not. The test takers were 16,000  
24 and the number of students that were enrolled was--  
25 - what was it, about 1,500 or something like that?

1  
2 So how can you say that will take into affect the  
3 majority of the students that took the tests when  
4 16,000 took the exam? I'm just trying to  
5 understand your logic of your answer.

6 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Because if  
7 they--

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And I'm not  
9 gifted and talented either.

10 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: --because many  
11 of those students, although they did not enter a  
12 Gifted and Talented program, they were indeed  
13 enrolled in a kindergarten or first grade program  
14 in the public schools.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well what does  
16 that have to do with Gifted and Talented?

17 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Because we'll  
18 know, we can match the race ethnicity for all of  
19 those students who have entered into our system in  
20 the fall.

21 DR. LYLES: So--

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Wait a minute  
23 it's--

24 DR. LYLES: --no, let me, let me--

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --Dr. Lyles

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[crosstalk]--

DR. LYLES: --let me try to explain-

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --I'm just  
trying to understand--

DR. LYLES: --so the issue is if--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --okay, let  
me--

DR. LYLES: --they took the test--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Go ahead.

DR. LYLES: --and then they entered  
the school system--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

DR. LYLES: --whether or not they  
entered a Gifted and Talented program, if they  
entered the public school system--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Crosstalk]

DR. LYLES: --we have that data, so  
we have their ethnicity data that you're asking  
for. So although 16,000 students took the test,  
no, not all 16,000 entered, but--

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
So lets assume 13,000 into the public school  
system--

1  
2 DR. LYLES: [Interposing] Right, we  
3 have the data on those students who entered.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So, in  
5 essence, you can go back and determined that by  
6 their, I guess, by their ID number or by their  
7 name--

8 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: [Interposing]  
9 Right, by their demographic information, yes.

10 DR. LYLES: Right--

11 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --what have  
12 you, so forth, like that?

13 DR. LYLES: --absolutely.

14 MS. BELL-ELLWANGER: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Okay.  
16 All right, well, with that, I'm just going to--  
17 rather than just rush the questions or send them  
18 to you in writing, I'm going to reschedule, and I  
19 apologize that the fact that we started late, and  
20 I'm going to hear from advocates and others, and  
21 if any one of those want to come back, they can  
22 come back also. But if you have to go and you  
23 can't stay, then I'm going to--

24 DR. LYLES: [Interposing] I do have  
25 to go, but--

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I understand.

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DR. LYLES: --you know, and I

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understand your process and I hear you, so when,

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you know, the four hours I can block out four

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hours, it was just not what I blocked out.

7

However, and it's just a matter of I don't know

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what your questions are, if there are questions

9

that need data, need backup information, it would

10

be helpful if we had that beforehand so that we

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could come with that, as opposed to when you ask

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then say, well we'll have to get that to you.

13

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well thank you

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very much, Dr. Lyles, and your directors. I don't

15

know what the game plan is since they were only

16

supposed to stay another 10 minutes and it's

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already been five minutes, so I'm going to then

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move to the advocates, and ask that you come back

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with Dr. Lyles. Okay? Thank you very much and I

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apologize that we have to bifurcate this hearing

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process for the Department of Education.

22

We're going to go to advocates and

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unions and parents, and if in fact any of you want

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to come back at that later time, you can do that

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also, but, if not, we're going to take the

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2 testimony now, is that okay? [Off mic] [Pause]

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Okay. Council Member Bill de Blasio, we have two resolutions in front of us: Resolution 1541, the Chair recommends an aye vote, and Resolution Number 497, which is a motion to file, and the Chair recommends a motion to file, an aye vote on that. Clerk, please call the vote.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Resolution 1541, Council Member de Blasio.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE BLASIO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I vote aye on both.

[Off mic]

COUNCIL MEMBER DE BLASIO: Oh, I'm sorry, I vote aye on that then.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Vote on Reso 1541 is now 15 in the affirmative, one in the negative, no abstentions.

Resolution 497, motion to file, Council Member de Blasio.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE BLASIO: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: That currently stands at 13 in the affirmative, three in the negative, and no abstentions. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: This one here?

2

FEMALE VOICE: Yes.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

4

And we're going to call Karen Alford, the vice president of elementary schools for United Federation of Teachers.

5

6

7

[Pause]

8

MS. KAREN ALFORD: Hello? Okay, I'm on. Good afternoon, my name is Karen Alford and I am the vice president for elementary schools for the United Federation of Teachers. I believe you have our comprehensive testimony.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I do.

14

MS. ALFORD: Okay. I'm going to

15

highlight some points from the testimony that I think are of great importance.

16

17

Thank you, Chairman Jackson and the members of this distinguished committee, for the opportunity to share our views on the Gifted and Talented program admissions policy. Everyone can agree these students deserve appropriate programs. We do have concerns with the current Department of Education program and policies around G&T, which we believe relies too heavily on test scores and

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1  
2 is beset with implementation issues that frustrate  
3 parents and hamper opportunities for their  
4 children.

5 Parents are very concerned about  
6 the loss of successful gifted programs in schools  
7 and neighborhoods and we have heard from parents  
8 who feel left out of the decisions regarding their  
9 own children.

10 It's clear that an admissions  
11 policy that relies solely on scores from two  
12 exams, the Bracken School Readiness Assessment,  
13 BSRA, and the OLSAT, standardized test scores are  
14 somewhat shortsighted. Instead of accomplishing  
15 the DOE's goal of expanding access, the opposite  
16 occurred.

17 On Staten Island, parents of  
18 educators lobbied vigilantly--[coughs] excuse me--  
19 for years to get Gifted and Talented programs into  
20 their schools, finally obtaining a minimal program  
21 with one class in each early elementary grade in  
22 three schools. Once the new policies took effect,  
23 they saw long and hard-fought for gains  
24 diminishing just as their gifted program was  
25 emerging.



1  
2 Historically, P.S. 193 in District  
3 22 in Brooklyn embodied the best of what you would  
4 want in a Gifted and Talented curriculum. The  
5 parents, teachers, and administrators were fierce  
6 advocates for the program, but since the  
7 introduction of the new BSRA and OLSAT entrance  
8 criteria, P.S. 193's gifted classes have not only  
9 lost seats, they are turning into test preparation  
10 mills yielding to high-stakes test.

11 In District 26 in Queens, the new  
12 policies have reduced seats, and with programs  
13 offered at only select schools, several parents  
14 are left with choosing to send their very young  
15 children out of the neighborhood to crowded gifted  
16 classes or not entering them in the programs they  
17 sought.

18 Last year, unfortunately, in  
19 District 21, program offers did not reach some  
20 parents until the weekend of June 13th. Parents  
21 had only one week to make this important decision  
22 in the life of their child.

23 In District 20, there were  
24 instances where applications included both  
25 kindergarten and first grade, where only first

1  
2 grade was available. The DOE overbooked some  
3 kindergartners resulting in classrooms above the  
4 25 student cap. The DOE must provide better  
5 implementation and take steps to ensure this does  
6 not occur again.

7           Currently, there must be at least  
8 10 children qualified for a program to exist in a  
9 grade in a district. If an insufficient number of  
10 students meet the quota, there is no program. For  
11 example, there are no Gifted and Talented programs  
12 in seven districts.

13           The UFT is here today to recommend  
14 a responsible approach that takes into account  
15 both the need to have clearly defined admissions  
16 criteria and our fervent commitment to providing  
17 gifted children, especially in traditionally  
18 underserved communities, with exceptional and  
19 accessible programs.

20           Teachers and parents must provide a  
21 voice and the creation of Gifted and Talented  
22 programs in collaboration with the Community  
23 Education Councils--the CECs. The DOE needs to  
24 fully engage CECs on all policy decisions, and  
25 roll out plans for Gifted and Talented programs,

1  
2 and translate all program advisories as necessary  
3 for parents where English is a second language.

4 [Pause]

5 Young children should not have to  
6 travel to another neighborhood, district, or even  
7 borough, to participate in Gifted and Talented  
8 programs. As Council Member Fidler and other City  
9 Council members have recommended in the past, we  
10 would like to see the DOE apportion 10% of the  
11 classroom seats for each district for Gifted and  
12 Talented programs. Additionally, it would make  
13 sense to add children who neared the testing cut-  
14 off so there could at least be a program in each  
15 school. Our Union president Randi Weingarten made  
16 UFT's position clear as far back as 2005. Our  
17 goal is to see that every neighborhood and every  
18 school have programs that meet the needs of gifted  
19 and talented children. We believed that then, and  
20 we believe that now. Thank you.

21 [Pause]

22 [Cough]

23 FEMALE VOICE: Excuse me.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well first let  
25 me thank you for coming in and representing your

1  
2 union as the vice president for elementary  
3 schools. I know, I believe you were sitting here  
4 during the testimony of the Deputy Chancellor, Dr.  
5 Lyles--

6 MS. ALFORD: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --and the  
8 other directors, as you know we're going to  
9 continue the questions on them at a later date and  
10 so I hope that you will listen to what they have  
11 to say. Also, we have quite a number of  
12 testimonies that are for the record that were  
13 people that were going to testify and if you want  
14 to see what they have to say in order to have  
15 input at a later date, we'd be glad to provide  
16 those copies for you.

17 MS. ALFORD: Great, thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: So thank you  
19 very much for coming in.

20 MS. ALFORD: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And next we're  
22 going to hear from Robin Aronow for the--

23 FEMALE VOICE: School Search [off  
24 mic]

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --School

1  
2 Search NYC; we're going to hear from Annmarie  
3 Hunter--

4 FEMALE VOICE: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --Parents  
6 24/81 Parents for Enrichment, I believe;  
7 Christopher Spinelli, he's the president of  
8 Community Education Council in District 22; and  
9 Helen Paradise, a District 6 parent. Can you  
10 please come forward? [Pause] And we can start  
11 off with Erin Aronow and you can introduce  
12 yourself and you may begin your testimony.

13 DR. ROBIN ARONOW: Good afternoon,  
14 my name is Robin Aronow and I am from School  
15 Search NYC. I am honored that you invited me to  
16 speak today. I have been following the New York  
17 City Department of Education's Gifted and Talented  
18 admission process for about eight years now in my  
19 capacity as a private consultant to families  
20 researching schools pre-K-through 9, both public  
21 and private, in addition to having gone through  
22 the process myself with my own children about 15  
23 years ago. I now speak with parents about  
24 admission processes and help pass along the  
25 Department of Ed's information to families and

1  
2 preschools with whom I work in Manhattan, and so I  
3 am most knowledgeable about the situation here in  
4 Manhattan.

5 I would like to acknowledge the  
6 DOE's effort on behalf of Gifted and Talented  
7 programs despite, you know, many issues which have  
8 been brought up today. First, I do believe that  
9 there's something to be said for uniform criteria  
10 across the city, I think it makes it easier for  
11 parents understand, I think it makes it easier for  
12 parents to transfer from one district to another.  
13 I also agree with the DOE's stance on providing  
14 Gifted and Talented programs for those children  
15 whose level of intellect suggests that such a  
16 program would best serve them and was in agreement  
17 with the cut-off being lowered from the 95th  
18 percentile to at least the 90th percentile.

19 Finally, I'd like to compliment the  
20 DOE on its improved communication with parents.  
21 Parents can often get their questions answered by  
22 staff members in the G&T office, the website, the  
23 latest handbook, and at Information Nights, both  
24 in English and in other languages.

25 The results of the 2007 to 2008

1 admission season pleased some families in some  
2 districts, but left many without G&T options.  
3 While the hope of the DOE was to increase the  
4 ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of those served  
5 by G&T programs by increasing outreach and  
6 expanding choices, in fact the results show in  
7 many cases a decrease. Unless the outreach was  
8 significantly improved, the results should have  
9 been expected, as in the past there was no cut-off  
10 and hypothetically any child could have received a  
11 placement.  
12

13 So the main questions to me become,  
14 are the present G&T programs serving all the  
15 students they should be? Is the DOE doing  
16 sufficient outreach? And how do we define a  
17 gifted and talented child?

18 In terms of outreach, while I am  
19 pleased that the DOE is making more use of the  
20 Internet, there needs to be very direct outreach  
21 to our underserved communities, many of whom do  
22 not have Internet access. I would recommend--and  
23 I guess we heard a little bit about it today--but  
24 more intimate information sessions. The ones that  
25 were held were quite large, overcrowded standing

1  
2 room only, at least in the areas that I attended,  
3 and I think it's better when they're done on a  
4 district level versus a borough level. And there  
5 needs to be a outreach to pre-K public school  
6 communities, including the CBOs, and to social and  
7 religious organizations. Special attention should  
8 be paid to outreach to the directors of these  
9 program serving economically disadvantaged  
10 children, who I have heard them voice skepticism  
11 about G&T programs, and yet they are the ones who  
12 will be the main referral source to many families.

13           Then, after these underserved  
14 communities learn about these programs, they have  
15 to be kept up-to-date with deadlines, program  
16 changes, testing information. It cannot be just  
17 savvy parents who know how to seek out this  
18 information.

19           Second, we must question whether  
20 the testing measures being used are the best  
21 indicators of giftedness. It's wonderful that the  
22 DOE is using two measures, but the BSRA is a  
23 readiness test and the OLSAT is a school ability  
24 test. There is no express or verbal component in  
25 these test, usually considered an integral part of



1  
2 giftedness. The BSRA simply asks children to  
3 point to a picture identifying letters, colors,  
4 numbers. First off, there are gifted children who  
5 may not be able to identify these items at age  
6 four. However, in general, those children with  
7 highly educated parents and in private nursery  
8 schools will have much more exposure to these  
9 types of activities.

10 As for the OLSAT, some of the  
11 pictures are hard to decipher--I know you all--I  
12 saw you got copies of it. Some are life  
13 experience oriented and some have more than one  
14 right answer, and asking a child one of the what  
15 doesn't belong questions, that child may choose a  
16 higher level answer than the accepted answer, but,  
17 because there's no opportunity to explain answers  
18 and exhibit one's verbal skills, the child is  
19 marked wrong. In addition, and I may stand to be  
20 corrected, I have been told that most of the  
21 questions can only be asked once. If a 4-year-old  
22 happens to be daydreaming, that child is out of  
23 luck. This may help explain the anecdotal  
24 information I've heard about G&T classes are  
25 disproportionately enrolled with girls--that would

1  
2 be a statistic I would love to hear when you  
3 further go ahead, if we could find out what the  
4 gender breakdown is.

5 And, anyway, at this stage it may  
6 explain why there are more girls because they do  
7 tend to be more focused.

8 In terms of the GRS, I just want to  
9 make a quick statement on that, that was where  
10 teachers were involved in the process. I can tell  
11 you that in the private nursery schools that  
12 teachers hated completing those, there was a lot  
13 of pressure put on them to give kids high scores.  
14 The results were given back to parents afterwards  
15 and then they came in and wanted to kill the  
16 teachers on the last week of school because the  
17 results didn't come in until June. So, while I do  
18 agree that it would be nice to have some sort of  
19 subjective measure, that one had its problems.

20 Finally, I have seen innumerable  
21 cases of children scoring in the high 90s on the  
22 Stanford-Binet I.Q. test that's used by Hunter, or  
23 on the WPPSI I.Q. test used by the private  
24 schools, and that same child scores as low as 29  
25 percentile on the OLSAT. It is hard to explain to

1  
2 a parent that her child qualified for Hunter or a  
3 top private school, but not for a DOE Gifted and  
4 Talented program.

5 In conclusion, I respectfully make  
6 these additional recommendations: one, I think we  
7 need to provide more comprehensive outreach,  
8 especially to underserved communities. Two, we  
9 need to make the process more intimate. Parents  
10 miss having someone truly informed in the  
11 community, the Office of Student Enrollment staff  
12 members often give out very contradictory  
13 information. Three, the website needs to be  
14 updated more regularly. Information coming soon  
15 with an exclamation point gets frustrating when  
16 it's up for weeks or months at a time. After test  
17 results come back, they should post a new  
18 Frequently Asked Question section on the website.  
19 Four, we should reevaluate the measures being used  
20 and whether they are capturing the multifaceted  
21 attributes of giftedness. Five, and I guess I  
22 didn't realize this, but they are planning on  
23 guaranteeing everyone a seat in first grade, last  
24 year they didn't do that, they only guaranteed it  
25 in the entry level, but it sounds like this year,

1  
2 they're guaranteeing it in first grade as well. I  
3 think that is important because I think we need  
4 kindergarten teachers recommending children be  
5 assessed, but I do want to reiterate that there is  
6 an obstacle of principals not wanting to lose  
7 their students for fear of lowering scores on  
8 high-stakes testing. Six, despite the education  
9 the teachers are getting, I do think they need to  
10 spend more time deciding what's being taught in  
11 the G&T classes. I have heard from many, many  
12 parents complain that the classes are not  
13 significantly differentiated from the general  
14 education classes and that their children's needs  
15 are not being met within the Gifted and Talented  
16 programs. I'd like to make sure that there are  
17 learning specialists available for gifted  
18 children, as some of those children do exhibit  
19 learning issues and many are not gifted in all  
20 areas of academic work. Eight, I think we need to  
21 clone the citywide schools, there are not enough  
22 to meet the needs of the highest achievers. The  
23 DOE did away with on-sites to eliminate another  
24 sort of subjective measure, but I believe that  
25 just because a child scores 99 percentile does not

1  
2 mean that that child can take advantage of the  
3 program. Nine, parents need to be given more than  
4 a month's notice about when the date of testing  
5 is. Last year, they had anywhere from two days to  
6 two weeks, and we're still waiting now to find out  
7 when the testing dates will be. Ten, children  
8 should be tested in their own district. Last  
9 year, kids from Harlem were tested in Chinatown,  
10 and vice versa. Eleven, they need to leave  
11 sufficient time to mail and or e-mail test  
12 placements, so hand-delivered letters are not left  
13 on apartment foyer floors. Twelve, they should  
14 move up the date of notification of test results  
15 placement. If SAT scores can be delivered in two  
16 weeks, why should the G&T scores takes six to  
17 eight weeks, bringing, us to June. Thirteen, I  
18 think it's their responsibility to promote new  
19 district options or less desirable options, and  
20 allow more time for touring schools. Fourteen,  
21 they definitely need to reevaluate the attrition  
22 model, which did not work this year in terms of  
23 good estimates of how many families would decline  
24 a placement so late in the process. Many  
25 desirable schools went unfilled. And lastly, they

1  
2 need to improve the quality of zoned schools in  
3 each district so that Gifted and Talented is the  
4 appropriate educational option for a child and not  
5 just a way out of an unsatisfactory zoned school.

6 Thank you.

7 [Pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.

9 Annmarie Hunter.

10 MS. ANNMARIE HUNTER: Good

11 afternoon, I'm Annmarie Hunter from the 24/81  
12 Parents for Enrichment. I'm here on behalf of my  
13 son, the Riverdale family seated behind me, and  
14 the 35 or so kindergarten or first grade children  
15 in Riverdale who have been overlooked by the  
16 current Gifted and Talented system. I know that  
17 the DOE officials who were here before say it's an  
18 evolving process and there will be seats where  
19 children are--where they're needed. I can tell  
20 you that's not so, it's not happening, and they're  
21 not willing to discuss it really.

22 The families that I represent, we  
23 found each other and we've shared our stories and  
24 frustrations, but we've also come up with a plan  
25 to reclaim classroom space and in the

1  
2 neighborhood's Whitehall building to make room for  
3 the Gifted and Talented program that needs to  
4 grow. We've spoken to local principals, Council  
5 Member Oliver Koppell--who I'm disappointed won't  
6 hear his constituents here left. DOE ASBO  
7 officials, and we urge them to increase our local  
8 Gifted and Talented programs in our area.

9           If you look at District 10 testing  
10 results from 2008, you'll see that 671 children in  
11 District 10 is in the Bronx and it's a very large  
12 and overcrowded and diverse district, I'm sure you  
13 know.

14           CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The largest  
15 district in the entire city.

16           MS. HUNTER: Yeah, it's pretty big.

17           CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Big, bigger  
18 than some school districts--

19           MS. HUNTER: Probably in the  
20 country.

21           CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --in New York  
22 State.

23           MS. HUNTER: Oh. Well 671 students,  
24 kindergarten, first grade, took the test, 136 of  
25 those incoming kindergarten and first grade

1  
2 students scored a 90 or above, and that's a 20%  
3 success rate, that's pretty high. A lack of  
4 kindergarten programming, will grandfather 25  
5 students or so from last year into the first grade  
6 program without--and that's one class essentially--  
7 --without the District 10 testing for this year.

8 We will have a bottleneck of  
9 students at Riverdale who have achieved the  
10 requirements needed to be placed next year. There  
11 are two first grade entry points available in  
12 District 10, one at P.S. 24 and one at P.S. 54.

13 P.S. 24 is already one of the most  
14 diverse and dynamic elementary schools in the  
15 city. P.S. 54 was closed this year due to the  
16 lack of viability by Riverdale parents who didn't  
17 want the school or the commute for their child.  
18 P.S. 54 will continue to be left by the wayside by  
19 Riverdale parents, it's not seen as a viable  
20 entrance point.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Where's it at?

22 MS. HUNTER: It is on Webster  
23 Avenue.

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What street?  
25 What's the cross street on Webster? [Pause] Near



1

2 the Bronx Zoo [crosstalk]--

3 MS. HUNTER: [Interposing] Yeah,

4 right near the Fordham--

5 [Off mic]

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. So

7 basically--

8 MS. HUNTER: [Crosstalk]--

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --around

10 Fordham and Webster.

11 MS. HUNTER: Fordham and Webster,

12 I'm sorry, I--

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. No

14 that's okay, I just wanted to know where the

15 geographic--'cause I know the Bronx pretty well

16 and I just wanted to know where it was. Okay.

17 MS. HUNTER: Okay. I'm sorry, it's

18 probably centrally located, I guess for our

19 district. But it will be left by the wayside by

20 Riverdale parents because it does take in the

21 morning--besides being a failing school, it will

22 take an hour or so to get there in the morning and

23 commuting in the Bronx is not the same as

24 commuting in Manhattan.

25 While there is no uniform

1  
2 definition for gifted, childhood educators  
3 estimate that range between 2 to 5 or 8% of all  
4 students. We know that there are no United States  
5 or New York laws mandating Gifted and Talented  
6 programs, the DOE provides the test to root out  
7 bright children, and we're not asking for  
8 something our sons and daughters have already not  
9 achieved.

10 We see the Gifted and Talented  
11 programs are considered a form of special  
12 education and it is the responsibility and the  
13 moral obligation of the public school system to  
14 meet the needs of their children, their students.  
15 Our children and as parents we followed the rules  
16 of the DOE in terms of testing and the way you  
17 apply, and we have the numbers there, there is  
18 just not any back up on there and to show that  
19 they're going to demonstrate having the places for  
20 our children.

21 There have already been about 40  
22 programs across the city that have been closed due  
23 to lack of interest, two in the Bronx that I know  
24 of--actually three now that you include P.S. 54.  
25 We ask and we urge that the DOE follow those

1

2 numbers again and find out where the programs  
3 should be added and should be made to be a viable  
4 location that will continue being viable. I can  
5 tell you the realities of what they claim--what  
6 they said being a parent is awfully different than  
7 hearing what they had to say was very painful to  
8 hear that there's going to be a spot for every  
9 child. My son--who's here and he's been very  
10 patient today--he actually got into a very good  
11 school, but, you know, you can't commute more than  
12 an hour and a half to school, you can't, and  
13 that's on a good day. We believe that that  
14 whatever benefit of being in the gifted education  
15 would be erased by the amount of time and the  
16 fatigue of commuting.

17 We ask that they follow the results  
18 and demographics to boost Gifted and Talented  
19 programs where they are most needed. Your  
20 examination will lead you to Riverdale, a  
21 neighborhood that has had more students test for,  
22 and qualify for, Gifted and Talented programs in  
23 the Bronx. [Pause] And they say--this topic is  
24 quite a flashpoint in our area because it is a  
25 crowded school, PS 24--and they say that'll take

1  
2 children from outside the zone, and I can tell you  
3 right now that that's not necessarily true. There  
4 are over 15 students in the kindergarten class and  
5 seven first grade students who are currently in  
6 the school already who are not taking up seats,  
7 you know, for, in addition to the Gifted and  
8 Talented program for first-grade, there are seven  
9 additional children there who could not get into a  
10 program, who are seated in a regular class, and 15  
11 kindergarten students who are waiting for  
12 placement in P.S. 24 and there already the  
13 students and already zoned ineligible to be in  
14 that school already.

15 [Pause]

16 Sorry, just one moment. So we're  
17 just asking as these things go by, these things  
18 you be an [off mic] and advocate for us, we want  
19 Riverdale to be at the top of the list, considered  
20 for new sites for Gifted and Talented or for a  
21 citywide program. It's an honor to have our  
22 children test so high and we only hope that  
23 there'll be programs to support what they've  
24 achieved.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well let me

1  
2 thank you and your colleagues of the--what is  
3 24/81--

4 MS. HUNTER: Yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --Parent  
6 Enrichment?

7 MS. HUNTER: There's 37 children  
8 involved and--

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well thank you  
10 for forming a parents group in order to support  
11 one another and to do your research. And I'll be  
12 glad to--if you can put your testimony in writing  
13 and e-mail it to appropriate staff, so we can have  
14 that in written form as part of the record.

15 MS. HUNTER: Absolutely, and I will  
16 be back at the next meeting. It's just convenient  
17 [phonetic] that the DOE gets to leave at the time  
18 I know so--

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, you  
20 know, it wasn't really--

21 MS. HUNTER: --I know it's not  
22 really--

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --part of our  
24 fault, you know, in that--

25 MS. HUNTER: Oh, of course not.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --the DOT  
3 situation--DOT--the MTA situation--

4 MS. HUNTER: That's unfortunate too.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --they overran  
6 and what have you and so forth. And Oliver would  
7 be here, you know, we have a budget negotiating  
8 committee, we have a Democratic caucus with the  
9 budget the way it is, we're meeting like 24/7 to  
10 deal with issues that we have to address at a  
11 stated meeting on Thursday, so...

12 MS. HUNTER: Oh, of course, I  
13 understand. So thank you for your time I  
14 appreciate your consideration.

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well thank you  
16 and thank your son for the patience that he's had,  
17 I mean, I haven't even noticed him at all sitting  
18 way up here.

19 We've also been joined by Joseph  
20 Piro, right? And he submitted his testimony on  
21 the record, but he wanted to actually talk about  
22 his testimony, so he's going to join us also.

23 But now we hear from Christopher  
24 Spinelli, the President of Community District  
25 Education Council 22 and that's in Brooklyn.

1  
2 MR. CHRISTOPHER SPINELLI: Yes,  
3 thank you, Chairman Jackson, members of the City  
4 Council.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
6 Oh, I'm sorry, Christopher, we've been joined by  
7 our colleague Letitia James of Brooklyn. Go  
8 ahead.

9 MR. SPINELLI: And, again, my name  
10 is Chris Spinelli and I am the President of the  
11 Community Education Council for District 22, which  
12 takes in a big portion of Brooklyn, from the  
13 southeast portion of Brooklyn all the way up into  
14 Flatbush.

15 What I was most disturbed at--and  
16 I've already submitted my testimony, and I'm not  
17 going to sit here and read it 'cause it's six  
18 pages, because it does go back a long way as far  
19 as Gifted and Talented and the actual history of  
20 Gifted and Talented in District 22. But what I  
21 was most disturbed with listening to the testimony  
22 of the DOE was that I actually heard Marcia Lyles,  
23 who is the Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and  
24 Learning say that we're moving in the right  
25 direction, and I don't really understand how

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anyone looking at the statistics, which have already been elaborated on in this hearing, can say that we're moving in the right direction.

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In District 22, where we did welcome over 600 children into a kindergarten program every year in all corners of a very diverse district, a district that is 46% African-American, 14% Latino, 14% Asian. We had a Gifted and Talented program in every corner of the district, in 25 different sites. Where we would normally be able to offer a Gifted and Talented curriculum to children across a broad spectrum of Brooklyn, we now only have--we have little over a hundred children who were accepted under this current admissions policy. So there are 500 some odd children now, and primarily in the poor parts of the district, who now do not have access. So if the first goal of the DOE was to increase access, I had to giggle back there because there's really no way to increase access by removing 500 seats out of the district.

24

Unfortunately, the fact that the DOE left is just indicative of the way that they've dealt with Community Education Councils

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1 from our inception and with parents as a whole.  
2 They really are not concerned with parent input  
3 and I would offer up as evidence of that the way  
4 they even conducted the Gifted and Talented  
5 hearings. We had the CEC in District 22 had put  
6 forth a resolution back in 2005 and resubmitted it  
7 back in 2006 specifically regarding the Gifted and  
8 Talented program, because we were concerned that  
9 there were changes underfoot, there were rumors  
10 there were changes. So we really wanted to put a  
11 resolution out there to say, before there are any  
12 changes, first come out to a district where the  
13 Gifted and Talented program has been well  
14 developed over 30 years, had excellent marks, and  
15 does very well statistically and is one of the top  
16 districts in Brooklyn and the only district in  
17 Brooklyn that's not a district in need of  
18 improvement, as defined by No Child Left Behind.  
19 So the resolution basically said come out to our  
20 district, take a look at why these programs are  
21 working, and possibly use this as a template and a  
22 best practice to then export out to parts of the  
23 city in districts that were not so successful with  
24 the Gifted and Talented program. Not only did  
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2 they not do that, and not only did they, of  
3 course, never respond to either of those  
4 resolutions, but they then just submitted a  
5 policy.

6           Once the policy was submitted, of  
7 course, there were a couple of public hearings,  
8 there were public hearings in each of the five  
9 boroughs. The day that the public hearings ended,  
10 the next day, the panel for educational policy  
11 voted for the exact policy that was submitted with  
12 no change. So I don't really understand how any  
13 of the testimony, the hours of verbal testimony,  
14 or the pages of written testimony from any of the  
15 boroughs was really taken into account.

16           My concern is that there seems to  
17 be almost an outright contempt for Gifted and  
18 Talented education at the Department of Education.  
19 They have been looking to dismantle it and this, I  
20 can only see this current admissions policy as one  
21 way to go about that. It's just as subjective as  
22 any other way, to admit children into a program.  
23 Unfortunately, when the Chancellor and the Deputy  
24 Chancellors have stated many times that Gifted and  
25 Talented programs are only for fortunate or for

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2 the elite or for certain neighborhoods or for  
3 parents who are savvy enough to make a phone call  
4 to their local legislator, who would, I assume,  
5 would be City Council members to get their  
6 children into Gifted and Talented programs, that's  
7 not a very good way to start out improving a  
8 program or to look at, you know, how valuable a  
9 program is.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You know, they  
11 say that in order to try to use that, in essence,  
12 this is a bad way and even though that's not  
13 necessarily true as with respects to that parents  
14 are calling us to get in Gifted and Talented  
15 programs, but they try to paint, you know, us and  
16 others that they say as a reason why they're  
17 moving forward with the program. And so sometimes  
18 some people don't call them on it and take them to  
19 task for not telling the truth.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Mr.  
21 Chairman, the day that the DOE accepts a  
22 recommendation that I make will be the first.

23 MR. SPINELLI: Well, I mean, it's  
24 unfortunately very demeaning to the children that  
25 are in the program as well when the Deputy

1  
2 Chancellor comes out to our district and says that  
3 it's statistically impossible that there be so  
4 many Gifted and Talented children in our district.  
5 It's extremely demeaning to the children who are  
6 currently in the district and who've done very  
7 well and, again, as far as across the city, we're  
8 one of the top performing districts in the city,  
9 for them to come back and for the Chancellor  
10 himself to have said in an e-mail to me that it is  
11 statistically invalid that there would be so many  
12 gifted and talented children in District 22 and  
13 that program in District 22 cannot be categorized  
14 as a success. So, you know, I wonder what their  
15 definition of success is if you have a program  
16 that's been working for 30 years and producing  
17 results, that's something that needs to be fixed.

18 I would say my recommendations for  
19 the most part regarding Gifted and Talented  
20 program would be that it go back to the districts  
21 for administration. A lot of this, in large part,  
22 is because of mayoral control, there's very little  
23 input of parents and of Community Education  
24 council members, I see from this hearing, also  
25 from City Council Members, they seem not to listen

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2 to you anymore than they listen to CEC presidents.  
3 But when we had districts, districts could be  
4 responsive to needs in their communities.

5           The DOE is looking once again to  
6 put template, a cookie-cutter, which is good for  
7 the entire city and not necessarily for any of the  
8 districts in Brooklyn. And also we need to give  
9 the districts and district superintendents funding  
10 for Gifted and Talented, which they don't  
11 currently have, and also authority over their  
12 districts and not keep them all over the map as  
13 the senior achievement facilitators not even in  
14 their own districts. And I would also agree with  
15 your recommendation that teacher recommendation  
16 must be part of the Gifted and Talented assessment  
17 because there will be children who are not good  
18 test takers, who may be having a bad day, who, at  
19 the age of four or five, may not have the skills  
20 going in to pass a rigorous set of exams, but who  
21 truly are gifted and talented. It should be up to  
22 a teacher to look at that child after having that  
23 child for a year and making a recommendation.

24           One more point that I want to make  
25 before closing, one thing that was not said by the

1  
2 DOE--and I would ask that you add this to your  
3 list of questions that you ask them--is what's  
4 going to happen to all of those programs across  
5 the city where there are eight and nine children  
6 currently in those programs, because that has not  
7 been said exactly what's going to happen. I know  
8 that they are not going to allow a class of eight  
9 children to progress from kindergarten through  
10 fifth grade. So at some point those 110 children  
11 in my district, which are spread across eight  
12 different sites, are going to be collapsed down,  
13 and that's going to become a big issue about where  
14 exactly how that process works, and I have  
15 absolutely no confidence in any system that the  
16 DOE has set up. And, again, based upon this  
17 hearing, it was just horrifying hearing the kind  
18 of laissez-faire attitude that they had up here  
19 and that they actually think they're moving in the  
20 right direction and they've achieved results.

21 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well let me  
22 thank you for coming and representing your  
23 district. And, obviously, you know, Lou Fidler  
24 and you have talked many, many times on this  
25 particular matter and, you know, we will continue

1  
2 to fight, to ensure that all of the children that  
3 are gifted and talented are being served in New  
4 York City.

5 MR. SPINELLI: I appreciate that and  
6 I certainly hope that that's the case.

7 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.  
8 Next we want to hear from Helen Paradise, District  
9 10 Parents.

10 MS. HELEN PARADISE: Good afternoon,  
11 everybody and thank you very much, the Chairman  
12 Jackson and the Council, for putting this hearing  
13 together.

14 It's very important for us because  
15 I am part of this 24/81 group, Parents for  
16 Enrichment group. But, however, I represent the  
17 first-graders and for us I want to stress one  
18 thing first, we tried to send the proposal to DOE,  
19 we sent it on the 11th of November, 2008, we never  
20 heard back; we sent it to several politicians as  
21 well and some people in DOE, nobody got back to  
22 us. So we are using this panel to address our  
23 issues. And I want to make one correction to the  
24 first testimony [off mic] represent current fifth-  
25 graders who tested last year. Last year, we were

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2 guaranteed a seat in the program as well.

3 [Off mic]

4 [Pause]

5 MS. PARADISE: Yes.

6 [Off mic]

7 [Pause]

8 MS. PARADISE: Okay. But in any  
9 case, we had this guarantee from the DOE.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

11 MS. PARADISE: And also I want to--  
12 [pause] yeah, that was no response in this  
13 proposal. Okay. What I want to tell you, I want  
14 to give you very quick statistics on District 10  
15 and then we're going to hold [crosstalk]--

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
17 Sure, just move your mic a little bit closer to  
18 your mouth, if you don't mind, your mic.

19 MS. PARADISE: Okay.

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: There you go.

21 MS. PARADISE: Like this is good?

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Yeah, much  
23 better.

24 MS. PARADISE: Okay. So District  
25 10, as you mentioned, is the largest district in



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New York City and the total enrollment between kindergarten to the 12th grade is 58,147 students. The first grade only is about 4,161 students. Last year, 671 students in the first grade were tested, we're talking about access to the program, 54 kids pass this test. Out of 54, 27 got placement in only one program available in the district, with all the guarantees. The second program was closed.

I laughed when Council Fidler was speaking about the accessibility to the programs and I even wrote down his quote, that's not an offer, that's a complete failure of the program. They gave us a choice of the school, which Annmarie Hunter mentioned, it was across the Bronx, on the other side of the Bronx, which will take about two hours in the morning traffic. For us, it was not an acceptable choice, so we rejected this. We spoke to Anna Commitante [off mic] responded many times, it's your fault, you rejected the program. We want to state, we never rejected the program, we rejected the offer because we don't consider this was an offer.

Just to give you the statistics of

1  
2 this first grade class, which we have the G&T  
3 class in P.S. 24, you talked about diversity.  
4 District 10 has the following numbers and this is  
5 from the DOE website.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: The entire  
7 district you're talking about?

8 MS. PARADISE: The entire district,  
9 yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

11 MS. PARADISE: Black 22%, Hispanic  
12 66%, Asian 7%, white 5%. In District 10, G&T  
13 program based on purely our calculations, not the  
14 statistical data that provide you with the right  
15 numbers, black 3%, Hispanic 7%, Asian 21%, and  
16 white 69%.

17 I understand the failure of the  
18 program on two issues on access and diversity  
19 failed, and I understand that all attention of the  
20 press and of politicians to the issue of the DOE  
21 failure. They changed one big thing last year it  
22 was a test. Of course, the test is being blamed.  
23 As parents of children who took the test, we  
24 disagree the test was incorrect. We know the test  
25 has a maximum objectivity in terms of testing

1 children without teachers' impact. A year ago, it  
2 was different and we saw a lot of bias from the  
3 side of the teachers, parents have pushing, some  
4 private schools give better scores to children  
5 whom they prefer, there were lots of things like  
6 this. This test was objective, so we don't have a  
7 question about the test. We believe that DOE  
8 failed based on the placement, the placement that  
9 was done based by score and what happened in our  
10 district in particular, the cut-off was not 90, it  
11 was 95. Most of the kids who got 95 and plus got  
12 in the program, so all children who scored less  
13 than that, and probably most of those kids from  
14 other areas of the Bronx and District 10 who did  
15 not have this wonderful skills to be coached by  
16 their parents all the time, they scored below 95,  
17 they did not get in because offers to all the  
18 parents, most of the children lived in Riverdale,  
19 denied the placement of the school.

21 [Off mic]

22 [Pause]

23 MS. PARADISE: One on Webster  
24 Avenue. The school is in a dangerous area, some  
25 people pulled statistics of the area, they decided

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2 not to send children to the school. P.S. 24,  
3 where children are currently studying, did not  
4 advise parents to accept the offer.

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6 So, of course, the school was  
7 closed and we believe the placement itself was so  
8 poorly done that they did not consider  
9 geographical areas. If geographical areas were  
10 considered, people who are currently 24 and  
11 probably reside in that part of the Bronx, would  
12 have accepted P.S. 54. Both programs were  
13 supposed to be filled, we have 54 children who  
14 scored on the test, 27 in each class, and these  
15 children are now denied the access.

16

17 My last point here, what we're  
18 writing to DOE right now, and this letter will  
19 come out this week or early next week, we want to  
20 request to reinstate the second-grade G&T, which  
21 we're currently denied. They said they would  
22 never continue with the program anymore, it was  
23 our fault we rejected it. We want to reinstate  
24 the second-grade for all those kids who passed the  
25 test without retesting again, the same thing they  
26 did to kindergarten last year. So all those 27  
27 children--and we have hard time identifying them,

1  
2 we only know that seven families live in  
3 Riverdale, probably other families live nearby, we  
4 don't know where they are--DOE refused to produce  
5 statistics to us. So we want these kids to go  
6 back to the program next year. The second-grade  
7 is not as far and the funds were already delegated  
8 to the program. That was our major thing that we  
9 want to [crosstalk]

10 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And you  
11 submitted that request to DOE?

12 MS. PARADISE: Not yet, we were  
13 waiting for the hearing. We wanted to hear--

14 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And are you  
15 going to give that to Oliver Koppell also? I  
16 assume he's the Council Member--

17 MS. PARADISE: [Interposing] You've  
18 got the initial proposal, which has all our  
19 issues--

20 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

21 MS. PARADISE: --we just want to  
22 reiterate these points for the first-graders and  
23 [crosstalk]--

24 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Can you please  
25 forward it to our staff also? Both the--

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MS. PARADISE: We absolutely will.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --the original

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and the--

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MS. PARADISE: Yeah.

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --subsequent

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letter you're going to send.

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MS. PARADISE: We'll do that.

8

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Thank

9

you. [Pause] hear from Joseph Piro of Long Island

10

University, AGATE, Gifted and Talented Education--

11

MR. JOSEPH PIRO: Right.

12

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --is that

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correct? Okay.

14

DR. PIRO: Thank--

15

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Before you

16

begin, Joe, is there anyone else hear that wished

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to testify?

18

[Off mic]

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[Pause]

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CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: You can sign a

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slip and speak after him. Okay? Anybody else,

22

would you like to testify? You guys okay in the

23

back there?

24

FEMALE VOICE: Yes.

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. Joe, go  
3 ahead, please.

4 DR. PIRO: Thank you, Mr. Jackson,  
5 and thank you, Council Members, for inviting us to  
6 give testimony this afternoon.

7 My name is Joseph Piro, I'm an  
8 Assistant Professor at Long Island University and  
9 I am also a member of the Board of Directors of  
10 the Association of the Gifted and Talented  
11 Education here in New York State. I'll cut my  
12 remarks short because I know we've spent a lot of  
13 time covering a lot of this ground and we've also  
14 submitted a 12-page testimony in which many of the  
15 points will be explicated. But I did want to make  
16 just a couple of points concerning some of the  
17 events that happened this afternoon and some of  
18 the issues that were being discussed.

19 For the admissions programs--for  
20 admissions into programs for the gifted in grades  
21 K and 1 in the Department of Education, we have  
22 heard that they are using two instruments. The  
23 first one is the OLSAT, the OLSAT 8 actually to be  
24 precise, which is the Otis-Lennon School Ability  
25 Test and they also are using the Bracken School

1  
2 Readiness test, which is called the BSRA. The  
3 choice of a testing instrument to identify talent  
4 in the making is one that most school districts  
5 across the country make and they customize it  
6 according to their means and to their needs. The  
7 Department of Education undoubtedly has its own  
8 rationale for the test selection, which is the  
9 OLSAT, which they have made, and I just want to  
10 underscore the fact that in many school districts  
11 across the country, there really--the issue of  
12 grappling with the test to identify gifted and  
13 talented students is a problematic issue. As it  
14 has been suggested before, there is no test that's  
15 perfect, there are pros and cons of a number of  
16 tests and, in fact, in our testimony we've  
17 attached something at the back, we've listed  
18 potential instruments that might be investigated  
19 to either replace or be given in addition to the  
20 OLSAT, if that's what needs to happen.

21 In terms of our recommendations, we  
22 basically have one or two. Frequently, the best  
23 identifier of gifted children is observable gifted  
24 behavior. So first, we suggest the inclusion of a  
25 performance activity as an addition to the



1  
2 criteria in New York City, which can be utilized  
3 for entrance into a kindergarten and first grade  
4 program. Observing candidates for a gifted  
5 program as they participate in individual and  
6 group classroom activities that parallel the  
7 typical kindergarten classroom can yield valuable  
8 clues to how well the child responds to challenge,  
9 and permits a more behaviorally-based admissions  
10 process, as opposed to a very test-based  
11 admissions process. Among these observations  
12 could be how the children interact with their  
13 peers, how they interact with teachers, and this  
14 can be included in the data point. We also  
15 recommend that the city--the New York City  
16 Department of Education create its own set of  
17 exemplars that are locally developed, tested, and  
18 assessed that provide clear direction and  
19 guidelines against which gifted behaviors can be  
20 referenced.

21 Just a word about why teacher  
22 recommendations can be a little problematic, and I  
23 know that it was discussed at length today and I  
24 know some of the Council members asked about  
25 teacher recommendations. Just a little bit of

1  
2 research to perhaps shed a little bit of light on  
3 this, in various studies of teachers of the gifted  
4 and teachers of children who are not gifted, when  
5 they're presented with a question who are the  
6 gifted kids in your classroom, very frequently  
7 teachers will respond to the kids who perhaps do  
8 their homework, raise their hand, participate in  
9 the class, when the profile of a gifted child can  
10 be very different--they can be risk-taking and  
11 they can be quite ornery in the classroom. So for  
12 teachers to identify students--that has been some  
13 of the research that has kind of spoken about  
14 teacher recommendation and why it may not be  
15 terribly reliable.

16 In addition to using an appropriate  
17 identification instrument, we also suggest that a  
18 modified case study approach that gathers  
19 information about a child from parents, other  
20 caregivers, as well as teachers, be considered and  
21 that the profile of children's strengths be  
22 accumulated in one portfolio. Consideration can  
23 be given to each child's intellectual achievement  
24 as evidenced by scores on any identification  
25 instrument that the DOE selects, along with

1  
2 observational data provided by experts who have  
3 viewed the child in simulated classroom  
4 experiences. All of this value-added cumulative  
5 data can then be adequately reviewed and assessed  
6 so that an informed, comprehensive admissions  
7 decision can be made.

8 [Pause]

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Council Member  
10 Fidler.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: Doctor, I'm  
12 a little confused--

13 DR. PIRO: Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: --by your  
15 testimony. You mentioned a number of times  
16 somewhat subjective criteria or methodologies,  
17 behavioral models, and yet you call attention to  
18 the imperfections of teacher involvement, which is  
19 exactly based upon that, I would assume it is the  
20 teachers observations of a child. And would, you  
21 know, and would you agree that since, obviously  
22 you think that there is a benefit to some of the  
23 behavioral approaches that training teachers or  
24 instructing teachers on what the criteria for  
25 making the assessment of a child being gifted and

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2 talented child is, would kind of meet most of that  
3 objection. So if that were being done, if DOE  
4 were to spend a little bit of time saying, you  
5 know, listen, the kid that sits with their hands  
6 folded in the front row and always does their  
7 homework may not be the gifted and talented child,  
8 it may be that kid who's in the back, who won't  
9 sit in his seat, but, you know, shows other sparks  
10 or other, you know, measures, that that's the  
11 child you want to identify. Would that not make  
12 teacher evaluation an important tool?

13

DR. PIRO: I think you're 100% on  
14 target. That if professional development is given  
15 to teachers to train them on how to spot talent,  
16 on how to recognize potential gifted students,  
17 that certainly would be a step in the right  
18 direction. I didn't mean to imply that teacher  
19 observations were invalid, I was just presenting  
20 some of the research in which the context--in  
21 which teacher identification has been subjected.  
22 But I agree 100% that training teachers to know  
23 what to look for, for gifted children would be a  
24 major benefit in their identification.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: And I'm no

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longer confused, so thank you.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I have a question for you--

DR. PIRO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --with respects to, were you sitting through the entire hearing--

DR. PIRO: I was.

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --process? Okay. And you heard the statistics that we, you know, concerning one of the goals was to increase diversity and that was not achieved and I ran off the numbers. And my question to you is this, do you have an opinion on how the Department of Education can increase diversity, knowing that they are only going to be using, at least right now, those two standardized examinations in order to test, in order to place students in Gifted and Talented programs?

DR. PIRO: Well I think that you could suggest several measures to have this diversity happen. For example, instead of looking at a cut-off score which we like to call an entry point score--

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2 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Instead of a  
3 cut-off.

4 DR. PIRO: --as opposed to a cut-  
5 off.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

7 DR. PIRO: And I think that that  
8 implies something totally different in terms of  
9 the Gifted and Talented program. The word cut-off  
10 implies either you're in or you're not, and that  
11 really shouldn't be the case, but having an entry  
12 point is certainly something that many school  
13 districts do around the country.

14 Instead of looking at an entry  
15 point score as an entity, perhaps you could take a  
16 look at the subtests of the OLSAT and take a look  
17 at the pattern of the child's achievement on the  
18 subtests of the OLSAT. So if the cumulative score  
19 is not within what they would consider to be the  
20 gifted range, but a pattern of scores shows in  
21 specific areas that the child has potential, that  
22 perhaps that child should be given consideration  
23 for entrance into a gifted program in spite of the  
24 fact that he or she has not achieved the entry  
25 point score, they should be given opportunities of

1  
2 performance. The best identifier of a gifted  
3 child is gifted behaviors.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And I'm sorry,  
5 Robin, you're still here, I didn't ask this  
6 question of you, because obviously this is your  
7 area of expertise also, and so, but I'd be curious  
8 as to your response also.

9 But also a second question--and you  
10 can come back up if you wish--my second question  
11 is, with respects to experts in the field--and I'm  
12 not an expert at all, I don't even consider myself  
13 near an expert, I'm just a legislative and an  
14 advocate and trying to find out on why--the test,  
15 the standardized tests, people have said that they  
16 discriminate against minorities and also children  
17 of lower economic status, and as a result of that,  
18 those individuals will score less than those from  
19 more middle income or higher income families that  
20 are exposed to many other aspects that lower  
21 socioeconomic children are not. Do you have an  
22 opinion on whether you agree or disagree that  
23 those standardized tests discriminate against  
24 minorities and or socioeconomic status? And I ask  
25 that question of both of you.

1  
2 DR. PIRO: Well I think that, in  
3 terms of discriminating, one of the questions you  
4 have to consider is not so much what tests you are  
5 using, but how the test is being used.

6 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Explain that  
7 [crosstalk]--

8 DR. PIRO: If the test is being used  
9 as the sole criterion for entrance into a gifted  
10 program, you certainly can make the case that it  
11 becomes problematic in terms of discriminating  
12 against those children who, for whatever reasons--  
13 and they've been gone over for much of the  
14 afternoon--will not perform at their optimum best  
15 that day and that time. If the test is but one of  
16 several criteria in which a gifted child's  
17 profile, and not snapshot, is maintained, then  
18 certainly with a number of data points to  
19 consider, a more comprehensive examination of the  
20 child's potential can be made. You don't want  
21 test, especially with the population here in New  
22 York City, to become a test of language, and for  
23 many of these I.Q. type tests like the OLSAT and  
24 the Bracken, they don't become so much a test of  
25 ability, they become a test of language, for



1  
2 whatever reason, because they are of necessity,  
3 very language laden.

4           So that's why I had mentioned  
5 before that certainly if we're looking at a  
6 modified case study approach where you have a  
7 number of data points that are carefully  
8 considered by a talent task team, who are  
9 conversant with gifted and talented children and  
10 the research behind their education, you certainly  
11 are cutting down on the possibility that you might  
12 have undue discrimination against some child  
13 because he or she did not perform well on a  
14 certain day in a test.

15           CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well, one  
16 thing is performing well and another is that it  
17 discriminates against minorities--

18           DR. PIRO: Yes.

19           CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --I'm talking  
20 about blacks and Latinos and children from lower  
21 socioeconomic status. So, and what you are  
22 addressing like a child is having a bad day and,  
23 you know, so forth and so on, which is one thing,  
24 and that can happen with any child, but I was  
25 mainly focusing in on with respects to blacks and

1  
2 Latinos, especially when you look at the numbers,  
3 what was in the Gifted and Talented program the  
4 year before, what is as a result now.

5 And I have another question and I  
6 can go on, but I know we have a program here at  
7 5:30 but I do want to hear Ms. Aronow's response  
8 to my question and then we have one more guest.  
9 And since you're both Ph.D. and I believe you're a  
10 Ph.D. also in the areas of both, this is your  
11 specialty.

12 DR. ARONOW: I have to say, I'm--

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
14 Press the button please, if you don't mind.

15 DR. ARONOW: It's not particularly  
16 my specialty.

17 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Oh, okay.

18 DR. ARONOW: Knowing what's going on  
19 in New York City and Manhattan--

20 MALE VOICE: Mic's off.

21 [Pause]

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [off mic]

23 DR. ARONOW: Sorry. Knowing what's  
24 going on in Manhattan with the families in  
25 Manhattan and how they're dealing with the testing

1  
2 situation, that I can tell you about, but I've had  
3 a lot of experience with this for many years now.

4           When the Department of Ed decided  
5 to use the OLSAT, the private nursery schools  
6 immediately went online, found out that there were  
7 prep tests available for it, bought it for their  
8 children, and made it available to their children.  
9 I believe that it was possibly for this reason  
10 that the Department of Ed then made it available  
11 for everyone. There are other instances like this  
12 where well-educated, more wealthy parents--and I  
13 can't really speak to the ethnic part of it, but I  
14 do think it is more of a socioeconomic situation,  
15 where those families are going out and prepping  
16 their children in a way that those families who  
17 are not educated enough don't have the time to do  
18 that and I think that this is having somewhat of  
19 an impact. So that's something for us to, you  
20 know, keep in mind in the process.

21           CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: All right.

22 [Pause] Okay. Did I have any other question?

23 [Pause] I do have other questions, but I don't  
24 know if you're going to come back at the next time  
25 when we'll finish questioning the Department of

1

2 Education, but--

3 DR. ARONOW: If you start on time.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: I so hope, I  
5 so hope we will, but let me thank you both for  
6 coming in and giving testimony, and if you have  
7 any other suggestions for improvement, please  
8 forward that to us. But also if you have some  
9 specific questions that were not asked the DOE  
10 that you think we should be asking them, please  
11 submit those to us also. And thank you both for  
12 coming in and spending the time, and I'm sorry  
13 that we took so long.

14 DR. PIRO: Thank you.

15 DR. ARONOW: Pleasure.

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Thank you.  
17 And last but not least, Xi Chang, Chong or Chang?

18 MS. XI CHANG: Chang.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Chang from  
20 the--I'm a parent, and I believe in Riverdale,  
21 also.

22 [Off mic]

23 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: 24/81--

24 MS. CHANG: Parents.

25 [Off mic]

1

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Parents

2

Enrichment.

3

MS. CHANG: Yes.

4

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Is that the

5

name of that?

6

MS. CHANG: Yes.

7

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

8

MS. CHANG: You know, I didn't

9

prepare to talk today, but when I was listening--

10

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

11

Just introduce yourself again, what's your name?

12

MS. CHANG: My name is Xi Chang, my

13

daughter is in the first grade in 24, P.S. 24 in

14

Riverdale. When I was listening, I want to say

15

something 'cause first I want to say about the

16

test. My daughter has been tested two times,

17

first time when she was four and now--I'm sorry,

18

I'm just--two times. The first time she--'cause

19

there's no program in my neighborhood, so we were

20

trying to enter the Anderson and other school we

21

definitely not consider because it's impossible

22

and--

23

CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]

24

What do you mean it's impossible?

25

1  
2 MS. CHANG: It's impossible for us  
3 to take her to such a, you know, far away school.  
4 And I have to say one neighbor from--one of my  
5 neighbor got her child into that TAG school, she  
6 resigned her job because she needed to take the  
7 kids to school and to pick her every day. I  
8 cannot do that--

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: What school?  
10 Fifty-four you mean or another school?

11 MS. CHANG: No, the TAG.

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. I'm  
13 sorry, what--

14 MS. CHANG: You know, I'm--yeah TAG  
15 is another citywide because--

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

17 MS. CHANG: --there's no program for  
18 kindergarten in Bronx.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

20 MS. CHANG: And the second time my  
21 doctor--the test results was nonverbal, she got  
22 98, and the verbal, she got 60. So, but luckily  
23 the end score, she was 91 and so she got in, but I  
24 have questions about the results.

25 I feel my--'cause I know my

1  
2 daughter, she is very talented and so I said, so  
3 do I trust which one, 98 or 60? I said, I don't  
4 believe this score, so I contact DOE, I said I  
5 need you to review and that, you know, I was on  
6 the phone and she knows, the person I talked to,  
7 she knows that I'm Chinese, you know, I don't  
8 speak good English, but I said my daughter's  
9 English is better than mine. When she was four,  
10 she was creating her own rap, you know, don't say  
11 she doesn't know and, you know--and she said,  
12 because your English is not so good, you know,  
13 maybe the verbal test is not good. But I have to  
14 say on that day, because of the test, you know,  
15 the test when their 5-years old they have six or  
16 five children in the same room and taking the test  
17 for 4 1/2 hours.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: In the same  
19 room?

20 MS. CHANG: In the same room for the  
21 test.

22 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

23 MS. CHANG: Oh, there's one child,  
24 if that child, you know cannot sit still or making  
25 some noise, it's impossible for other kids to make

1  
2 the answer right and I just learned, the questions  
3 they answer question only read one time. So if  
4 you didn't catch half of the sentence, you're  
5 totally, totally gone. And for a 5-year-old,  
6 sitting in the same room for five hours, it's  
7 impossible, it's impossible.

8 And I'm so proud of my daughter and  
9 she got in, but, you know, we, of course, we  
10 cannot go to the P.S. 54, so she's still there.  
11 And now according to--

12 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
13 She's still where?

14 MS. CHANG: She is in the [off mic]  
15 program, she didn't get into--

16 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: [Interposing]  
17 At P.S. 24.

18 MS. CHANG: At P.S. 24.

19 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

20 MS. CHANG: And right now she--I  
21 feel she definitely feel bored 'cause the teacher  
22 complained to me 'cause she talks, she is  
23 bothering other kids because everything she does  
24 is so fast.

25 And also if, you know, according to



1

2 DOE, she will miss the chance forever because if  
3 they don't reopen this program, it's impossible  
4 for her to get in the program.

5 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: And that's why  
6 you guys are asking for them to open up a Gifted  
7 and Talented--

8 MS. CHANG: That's true.

9 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --in the  
10 second grade based on the results of the first  
11 grade, is that correct?

12 MS. CHANG: Right, yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay.

14 [Off mic]

15 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Right. Okay.

16 MS. CHANG: Yes, thank you very  
17 much.

18 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Well let me  
19 thank you for coming in as parents. Obviously,  
20 this is extremely important to you and to your  
21 children, and you all were here during this  
22 testimony, and I hope that you come back when we  
23 continue this hearing--

24 MS. CHANG: I will.

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: --with the

1

2 Department of Education.

3 MS. CHANG: Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Do we formally  
5 adjourn or do we... [Pause] Yeah, we'll just  
6 call another hearing on it to continue.

7 At this point in time, because we  
8 did not complete our questions from the Department  
9 of Education representatives, we have committed to  
10 come back, to hold an additional hearing to  
11 complete the testimony from the Department of  
12 Education and the question-and-answer period and  
13 hopefully that will be soon, and we will also  
14 continue testimony of any other members of the  
15 public or advocates that are here.

16 But for the record, we received  
17 other testimonies for the record and let me just  
18 read those into the record. For the record, we  
19 received testimony from the Committee of Education  
20 of the Council of City of New York, from James H.  
21 Borland Ph.D. Professor of Education and  
22 Coordinator of Programs in Gifted Education at  
23 Teachers College, Columbia University.

24 [Off mic]

25 CHAIRPERSON JACKSON: Okay. And

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2

that's it. So with that, this hearing is

3

adjourned at 5:25 and we will continue the part on

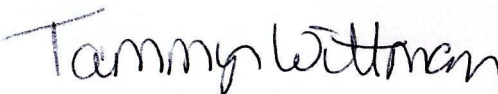
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Gifted and Talented in the future. Thank you.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tammy Wittman, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Handwritten signature of Tammy Wittman in cursive script.Date January 1, 2008