

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER
EDUCATION

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B E F O R E: Inez D. Barron
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Inez D. Barron
Laurie A. Cumbo
Alan N. Maisel
Ydanis Rodriguez
Eric A. Ulrich

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

Leonardo Vargas-Sanchez

Chloe Rollock

Durga Sreenivasan

Victoria Meng

Eliza Kuberska

Aruna Das

Andrea Soonachan
University Dean for K-16 Initiatives
CUNY

Sabra Pacheco
Director of Admissions and Special
Projects
Hunter College
CUNY

Hridmita Hasan

Clementine Roach

Mia Montrose

Brianna Gallimore

Annabelle Medina

Charlotte Ritz-Jack

Aesam Sharafaldin

Diana Kennedy

Matthew Barron

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Recording to the PC
begin.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Recording to the cloud
all set.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Backup is rolling.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: And good morning, and
welcome to today's remote New York City Council
hearing on the Committee on Higher Education. At
this time would all council members and council staff
please turn on their video. To minimize disruption,
please place electronic devices on vibrate or silent
mode. If you wish to submit testimony you may do so
at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is
testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you, Chair Barron.
We are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: [gavel] Ah, thank
you. Good morning, and thank you for joining us for
our virtual oversight hearing on the topic of, of the
policy, admissions policy for CUNY Early College high
schools. I'm Council Member Inez Barron, and a proud
alum of CUNY. Thank you to everyone who is here to
testify today. I especially want to thank the
students from Hunter College High School, the High
School of American Studies, and Macaulay Honors

Program, whose activism and self-advocacy inspired today's hearing. These students have been organizing for the diverse, inclusive, and equitable educational environments they deserve. And we should all be grateful for their commitment and contributions. The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the various admission policies at CUNY-affiliated Early College high schools, also known as early colleges. Early colleges are security schools that offer students the opportunity to earn both a high school diploma and an associate's degree, or up to two years of transferrable college credit at no cost to the student. Early college curriculum blends college prep and college-level courses, making college education more accessible and attractive to students, and particularly to low income and students of color, groups historical underrepresented in higher education. These programs are premised on the idea that students who are traditionally the least likely to earn a post-secondary degree need early and engaging experiences with college that reflect a broader institutional attempt to address the significant racial and economic disparities that exist in our public education system. On January 29,

more than 30 elected officials signed on to a letter from the speaker and I calling on the CUNY chancellor and Hunter College president to address concerns about racial and economic segregation at Hunter College High School. Despite Hunter College High School's mission to "reflect the city" by admitting and educating a "culturally, socioeconomically, and ethnically diverse" student population, the school's student body is less than 3% black, about 6% Latinx, and 9% low-income students. In comparison, the city's public school population is 66% and Latino and 73% low income. Yet the pool of New York City students scoring in the top 10% on both the state ELA and math test is 27% black and Latino and 47% low income. Based on this data, a sizeable population of high-achieving black, Latino, and low-income students are being screened out due to Hunter College High School's reliance on a single admission exam. As worrying as Hunter College High School's demographics are, racial and economic disparities are not isolated to just one school. The city's public school system, which is the largest in the country, and also has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most segregated school systems, moreover the COVID-19

pandemic has only worsened the issue, issue. Black, Latino, and low-income students have disproportionately faced poor access to quality remote or in-person learning, family strain from unemployment, and serious COVID health threats when compared to their white and better economically off peers. Hunter College High School chose to delay its entrance exam in response to the pandemic. In our letter we asked CUNY and Hunter College to do more. This is the time to reform admission policies to better serve all the students in New York City. Our demands include 1) suspend the Hunter College High School admission test this year in recognition of the serious equity impacts in the pandemic, 2) implement an alternative admission policy system for 2021 to admit, to admit a high-achieving but more racially and economically diverse class that looks like New York City, and 3) work with school integration experts to identify and adopt permanent change to the admission system that balances equity with excellence. Though, though these demands were directed at Hunter College High School specifically, all CUNY-affiliated high schools should strive to implement a pro-diversity admission system that

forces an equitable, racially, and economically diverse learning environment. Today's hearing will hopefully allow us to learn from a variety of admission models. I look forward to testimony from programs who have successfully maintained a diverse student population as well as those that have struggled in this area. Before I conclude my opening remarks, I want to acknowledge that this is Black History Month. And in the spirit of celebrating the countless contributions of African Americans who have made up our city and country, I'd like to take this time to acknowledge some notable black alumni of Hunter College High School - Ruby Wallace Dee, class of 1939, an Oscar-nominated actor, writer, and civil rights activist, known for her roles in *Do the Right Thing* and *Raisin in the Sun*, and just want to say I had the distinction of meeting her on several occasions, and she and her husband were very gracious to do several book signings for young people on various occasions. And she also was offered herself as a part of the mass protests for the killing of Amadou Diallo. Ron H. Brown, the class of 1952. Mr. Brown was the first African American appointed to the post of Secretary of Commerce in President Clinton's

Administration, and the Ron Brown Scholar Program was established in his honor to provide academic scholarships, service opportunities, and leadership experiences for young African Americans. Now in preparing for this hearing I would like to thank Joy Simmons, my chief of staff, and Indigo Washington, my director of legislation and CUNY liaison, Chloe Rivera, the committee's senior policy analyst, Michelle Paragrín, the committee's finance analyst, and Frank Perez, the committee's community engagement representative. And I want to offer a great welcome to Emi Briggs, the committee's new counsel, who will be moderating her first hearing today. I would like to acknowledge the members of the committee that are here with us. I saw Council Member Alan Maisel, and we did have Council Member Brad Lander as well. As others join I will acknowledge them. And at this time I'll turn it back to our moderator.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining the Committee on Higher Education for this, oh, I'm sorry. Thank you, Chair Barron. Ah, my name is Emi Briggs, as I was just introduced. This is my first hearing. Um, I am counsel to the Committee on Higher Education at the

New York City Council and I will be moderating today's hearing and calling panelists to testify. Um, before we begin, please remember that everyone will be put on mute and I will call on you to testify. After you are called on you will be unmuted by a member of our staff. Note that there will be a few seconds' delay before you are unmuted and we can hear you. For public testimony I will call up on, call up individuals in panels. Please listen for your name. I will periodically announce the next few panelists. Once I call your name a member of our staff will unmute you, the Sergeant at Arms will set a clock, and give you the go-ahead to begin your testimony. All public testimony will be limited to three minutes. After I call your name please wait for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin before starting your testimony. For today's hearing we are going to begin with a panel of students, followed by testimony from the City University of New York. This panel will be followed by council member questions, and the second panel will include a representative from CUNY, followed by council member questions, and then public testimony. The first panel of public testimony in order of

speaking will be Leonardo Vargas-Sanchez, Chloe Rollock, Durga Sreenivasan, Victoria Meng, Eliza Kuberska, and Aruna Das. I apologize for the pronunciations. I tried to put them phonetically. Um, so I will now call on Leonardo Vargas-Sanchez to testify.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

LEONARDO VARGAS-SANCHEZ: Ah, my name is Leonardo Vargas-Sanchez. I'm currently a junior at Hunter College High School, a CUNY Early College high school, which I was admitted to in seventh grade, passing the senior entrance exam. I'm also part of the 6.2% Latinx, 9% low-income [inaudible], which is only a fraction compared to New York City's public schools 40.6% Latinx, 72.8% low-income population. My experience at Hunter has been a long uphill battle in more ways than one, even before I entered the brick prison as an admitted student. Since sixth grade I was considered gifted and a lot of my peers, who were also gifted, wound up being pretty competitive about [inaudible] Hunter, getting [inaudible] and paying money for test prep materials. I had none of those options available to me. Even on the day of the test I was late due to train delays

and took the test on a make-up day. Struggles due to class were there from even before I was a student at Hunter. Socially, I faced my fair share of micro aggressions and assumptions based on race, especially early on in my Hunter career due to 2016 election. Academically, I've always felt like there a pressure put on me due to my socioeconomic status other people don't have. Most of Hunter's student population are well off enough to afford things like tutors outside of class, recreational materials for college and the like. My ability to afford things like that has heavily hindered my performance at school. There is not only a pressure to excel at the classes you do have, but to excel extracurricular as you [inaudible] taken as well. I was a member of the track team at Hunter for a few years. While I was quite comfortable with the extra few hours it took to go to practice, the coaches usually had to buy equipment with money from their own pockets. This usually ended up with a few people, at the very least, not having the necessary equipment during the training or meets. Students were encouraged to pay for their own shoes and gloves. This usually cost around \$100. Outside of track, my apartment was never one that was

too conductive to study. The walls were thin, even for our neighbors, and there was always a risk of power outage. I've always been really busy when it comes to helping out around the house as well. So studying and doing homework mixed in with all of that wound up burning me out, either making me too tired to concentrate or forcing me to stay up until the early morning hours. Even there, there would still be work I would be forced to do on the commute to school. Early on, my grades plummeted from what they were before I was admitted to the school, causing more conflict with my family, later pressure, and even greater burnout. Even among the students, my grades were causing people to look down at me. There were multiple times when people questioned my position at the school, saying it was a fluke or that it should have been impossible to [inaudible]. There were efforts made by the school early on to combat this imposter syndrome, a term they used to address it. But those efforts fell flat. This [inaudible]-led workshop stopping after seventh and eighth grade, many students would continue to judge people based on their academic success, influenced by their biases of

socioeconomic background as a result of their
[inaudible]...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

LEONARDO VARGAS-SANCHEZ: While they
might not consciously realize they are perpetuating
harmful stereotypes, it exaggerates a culture
unwelcoming to the [inaudible] and low-income student
population. As senior year edges closer, the immense
pressure and stress of attending an appropriate and
prestigious four-year college is only becoming more
prominent. As a low-income student that pressure is
compounded. [inaudible] is ingrained in Hunter
culture, manifested in the expectation of attending
[inaudible] or an impressive private college. The
financial gains of having a college degree would come
up along with getting scholarships just so low-income
families won't have to bear the immense debt colleges
[inaudible] students. Especially now with everything
going on with COVID, a student's home circumstances
make all the difference in their work efficiency.
Not only is a good internet connection necessary for
attending classes and taking tests, but a student
needs a good-enough workspace, enough room to work
and enough solid area to focus, given the

administration isn't providing these resources for low-income students or taking these concerns into consideration. The more socioeconomically diverse student body, the administration would have to provide these resources. These issues would affect more students. In addition, the student body would be exposed to different experiences and a lot of prejudices that upper-class students have would be challenged and resources would be more widely available. In general, accessibility would be expanded, allowing students like me to feel like they can belong and they can succeed.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Leonardo. I will now call on Chloe Rollock.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHLOE ROLLOCK: Hi. My name is Chloe Rollock. I'm a senior at Hunter and a co-president of both our black and Latinx student organizations. I would like to preface my statement by saying how appreciative I am of the education I've received at Hunter. Both my teachers and classmates have contributed so much towards making me the lifelong learner I am today. But there is an equity crisis at

Hunter and it has existed at our school for decades.

As Chair Barron stated earlier, our student body is

2.4% black, 6.2% Latinx, and 9% low income,

demographics highly unrepresentative of our city's

talent. These demographics, however, are not just

numbers. Like Leo, my experience has been marred by

feelings of isolation, affirmative action remarks,

and the constant pressure to prove not only my own

worthiness, but also the worthiness of those from my

communities at schools like Hunter, at a school like

Hunter. As a public school, we must create an

environment that is conducive to everyone's education

and well-being, and I strongly believe that neither

can be achieved in a segregated high school.

Hunter's segregation can largely be attributed to our

current admission system. Since the '70s, Hunter has

had the same two-step admissions process. Students

first qualify by the fifth grade state test or an

equivalent, and then are admitted by our own homemade

admissions test. Although the same admissions

process brought in much more, a much more diverse

student body in the '70s and '80s, the heightened use

of test prep in our city, among other things, has

served to disadvantage low-income students and

drastically alter our school's demographics. Unlike the [inaudible] schools, which are bound by the state's [inaudible] under law, our admissions process is completely decided upon by the Hunter College and CUNY administration. However, despite decades-long, decades-long calls by community members to change our admission system, the Hunter administration has taken no steps towards reform. In 2003 and 2010 faculty both, in both years faculty put together action items and recommendations to increase equity within our admissions process. Both efforts were discontinued after proposals were heavily rejected by our administration. Now in June of 2020 students came together to write a 27-page call for immediate change in our school's climate curriculum, faculty diversity, and admission system. Our document publically challenged the Hunter community to reflect on the chasm between our stated institutional mission to reflect the city we serve and a reality of exclusion and systemic bias. Our letter received 1895 signatures, leading Hunter to hire new faculty of color and [inaudible] curricula review and reform groups. Yet admission still did not change. Despite lacking support by our administration to change

admission, students formed HCHS4Diversity, an equity advocacy group, and work with parents, alums, and teachers to research top admissions models across the country, connect with experts, and finally create proposals for short-term and long-term reform to the Hunter system. We shared these [inaudible] with the Hunter administration in mid July yet received no formal response. After hosting a protest of around a hundred people in September calling for immediate suspension of the Hunter test for the pandemic year we were finally able to meet with Hunter College president, Jennifer Raab, to...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHLOE ROLLOCK: ...[inaudible] yeah, sorry. To discuss the dual health and equity crisis at hand. In this meeting, thank you, in this meeting President Raab agreed to pay for an integration expert to do initial consult...

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Continue, you can finish.

CHLOE ROLLOCK: After weeks of meeting with various experts, we found two consultants that graciously offered to work with Hunter immediately. However, despite proposing these two experts to the

Hunter College administration and providing a scope of work on October 22, which can be found in our table of contents, number 18, we still have not received any tangible follow-up and from what I've seen Hunter has not announced its admissions process for 2021. As a public institution with the stated mission to reflect the city we serve, and serve as a model for combining excellence and equity, Hunter must do better. It has been nearly eight months since we initially called for change, and while our community has taken many strides to combat cultural and educational issues within our school, it is in the hands of the Hunter administration to take decisive action and rid our admission system of exclusionary practices. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Chloe. I will now call on Durga Sreenivasan.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

DURGA SREENIVASAN: Thank you so much. Hi, my name is Durga Sreenivasan and I'm a senior at Hunter and president of our student government and one of the leaders of HCHS4Diversity. Again, we are asking that the Hunter administration one, suspend

its test this year, two, replace it with pro-diversity alternative, and three, work with integration experts and students to create and commit to a permanent pro-diversity admission system for coming years. These demands are backed by the 884 community members who signed on to our November letter to the Hunter administration, as well as 37 New York elected officials in a letter to Jennifer Raab and Chancellor Felix Matos, spearheaded by Council Member Inez Barron, among others. We worked with integration experts to create proposals for admissions changes, recommended experts for them to consult with, and looked at models at other schools which have shown us that real solutions are feasible, including socioeconomic weighting to expand diversity, which is used in the Chicago Exam high schools. And with the heightened equity emergency brought on by the pandemic, top schools like Thomas Jefferson, Boston Latin, and Lowell High School are suspending their test for this year and adopting interim pro-diversity alternatives. As you can see outlined through pages six through 28 of our submitted testimony, many of our continued proposals and communications have received little to no

response from the Hunter administration. We heard that an HCHS task force would be created by Hunter College at the end of August, along with a subcommittee for the campus schools. But the task force only met for the first time this February, five months later than promised. Some students involved with HCHS4Diversity were invited to join the task force, and while we are grateful to be on this new task force we still have not been told that our aim is to attain a more diverse class of Hunter students. After the lack of response regarding the 2010 proposed changes to increase diversity through admissions, it is crucial that the administration make a commitment to adopting a long-term pro-diversity model. This long history of inaction at the administrative level is why Council Member Barron penned her letter, along with 36 others, elected officials, including Speaker Corey Johnson, asking for the commitment to change from Hunter College. Public Advocate Jumaane Williams wrote his own letter, holding Hunter College accountable and demanding the administration reform admissions to expand diversity. Chancellor Felix Matos claims that CUNY is a, is, is an educational Ellis Island that

1 provides a gateway to high-quality, affordable
2 education and upward economic mobility to New Yorkers
3 of all backgrounds on the home page of the CUNY
4 website. Why isn't our high school doing the same?
5 We are here today to hold CUNY accountable to ensure
6 that the first free public university in our nation
7 upholds its mission statement and truly reflects the
8 city they serve by admitting and educating...

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You can conclude
12 your remarks.

13 DURGA SREENIVASAN: Thank you, Council
14 Member. We are here today to hold CUNY accountable
15 to ensure that the free, the first free public
16 university in our nation upholds its mission
17 statement and truly reflects the city they serve by
18 serving and admitting, um, a population of students
19 who are cultural, socioeconomically, and ethnically
20 diverse. In the lack of diversity within Hunter
21 College High School, CUNY fails to uphold this
22 mission statement. In light of the pandemic, there
23 is no time to spare in addressing the equity
24 emergency at our school. Now that the task force has
25 been created, it is crucial that the school is held

accountable for making changes, remaining transparent, and ensuring that this year's admissions and the admissions for years to come are equitable. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Durga. I will now call on Victoria Meng.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

VICTORIA MENG: Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Victoria Meng and I am an alum of Hunter College High School. For the last eight years I have also been an English teacher at Hunter, which means that I have been one of the graders of Hunter's entrance exam. For the last five years I have also served as one member of the committee that writes the ELA section of the entrance exam. So while I only represent my own opinions, I believe that my experiences as a former student and test taker, a current teacher and test writer, and a long-time member of the Hunter community can be relevant to today's topic. As the test writer and proctor, I think that using one exam to admit the incoming classes verges on being logistically impossible. As an educator and citizen, using this exam this year, when some students have

lost significant education for the entire last year, seems unconscionable. To those who ask us to keep things the same, the truth is that it is already impossible to keep things the same. The pandemic has ensured that Hunter's entering class will be demographically different, no matter what at this point. In general, using one admissions exam is not congruent with Hunter College High School's mission statement, which asks us to pursue both excellence and representation. This test is designed to force errors, so that we can select for the very small number of students that we can admit. Not all tests work like this. For example, the purpose of a driving test is to find out whether one would be safe on the road. There is a cutoff for qualification. In fact, most academic tests are designed to check for mastery and qualification. I see the fact that there are more students who can excel at Hunter than the number we can admit as an opportunity. I'd like to make an analogy. The Hunter test is like the Olympics, where it is indisputable that all medalists are great athletes. However, we have also all known great athletes who have missed medals due to one poorly timed injury or a bad day. More importantly

for the equity comparison, it is arguable whether the Olympics represents the best way to discover and foster global athletic talent. In fact, one could argue that there are some events where only athletes from countries that have made significant investments had a chance. Alternately, one could approach the Hunter admissions system from qualification instead of a forced error model and then use additional criteria to choose a class from all those who are capable of meeting Hunter's academic demands.

Speaking as an alum, a teacher, and a test writer, I am confident that we do not have to lower standards to admit a diverse class. There are CUNY and Hunter administrators who are working on this problem, and I believe in their passion and capability to serve our institution. Hunter teachers have and are also...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

VICTORIA MENG: Sorry, ah, with our, may I finish?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, you may.
Please continue.

VICTORIA MENG: Thank you. Um, Hunter teachers, ah, have also started our own research initiatives, including submitting an extensive

[inaudible] report 10 years ago to call on admissions reform for equity. We understand that Hunter's admission is a complex and long-standing problem and it is embedded within other systemic inequalities. It is both a symptom of and contributes to widespread discrimination and therefore it is an issue of public interest. I believe it will take multiple constituents working from many angles to make positive and sustainable change, just as other selective schools elsewhere in the country have done. And that's why I'm here to speak in support of my students' work. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Victoria. I'd like to now call on Eliza Kuberska to testify.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

ELIZA KUBERSKA: Thank you. Thank you for creating the platform for students' voices. My name is Eliza Kuberska and I have been teaching mathematics for 19 years in New York City, 18 at Hunter College High School. I'm here representing myself in support of students' calls to improve the admission process to Hunter College High School. The pandemic has deepened the performance and the

knowledge gap between those who have quiet spaces to study with seamless Wi-Fi connection and those who do not. We have a duty to address this gap by enriching and diversifying our admission process. I have been privileged to teach students whose work ethic, ability to solve mathematical conundrums, and creativity have inspired me to be a better teacher and a human. As an educator, I clearly have benefitted from the results of the entrance exam as the students are excellent. Over the years through conversations with my students, I gained anecdotal evidence that a few of them started prepping for the entrance exam in the third grade. In contrast, free prep programs for students in a lower-income bracket begin in sixth grade. That translates into a gap of at least 100 hours. Would 100 hours extra of practicing piano for a talented musician make a difference? The pandemic only has increased the disparity. I came from Poland to the US in '92. My mathematical knowledge acquired in a high school located in a small Polish town put me a year ahead of my New York City classmates in an honors math class of the IB program. Hence, I am aware of the power of learned material and its optical illusion in the

context of giftedness. Though I was more knowledgeable, I was not more talented. For at least two decades New York City fostered a culture of tutoring that clearly has benefitted the wealthy and it is visible in the demographics of the entering class. How can we address it as a public institution? While Hunter has a single-test admissions policy, another giant in public education, namely Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Virginia stepped aside this year from the singular approach and now describes their admissions process, and I quote, "Students will be evaluated on their GPA, a student portrait sheet where they will be asked to demonstrate a portrait of a graduate attributes and 21st skills, a problem-solving essay, and experience factors, including students who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, special education students, or students who are currently attending underrepresented middle schools." In addition to GPA and state exam results, Boston Public Schools chose to use a combination of ZIP codes that indicated median income in their selection process since their admissions working committee "found that using geographic...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

ELIZA KUBERSKA: ...[inaudible] May?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes [inaudible].

ELIZA KUBERSKA: Thank you. Thank you.

Quote "found that using geographic measures like ZIP codes or census tract in the admissions process resulted in socioeconomic, racial, and geographic diversity that is more representative of the city overall." When Hunter College High School was founded in 1869, and it was known as Female Normal and High School, women did not have voting rights in most countries in the world. In 1955 when it officially took its form as a lab school for gifted girls, many countries still did not allow women to cast votes. The school enabled social mobility for those with no public voice, but with much talent. Should we not do it again? This time players have changed. Statistical on COVID indicates that the pandemic has impacted people of color the most. To outweigh the monetary influence of private tutoring that prepares students well for the exam, we need to diversify the process. In my opinion, an entrance exam may be necessary, but is insufficient to be a sole factor in the admissions to Hunter College High

School. Considering public health and logistics, it may not be even possible to offer it this year. Currently we are living in a divided world. We should not further deepen the gap by not adapting to the changed reality. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Eliza. I will now call on Aruna Das to testify.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

ARUNA DAS: Hi. My name is Aruna Das and I'm a junior at Hunter, involved with Hunter College High School for Diversity, the student [inaudible] for admissions reform. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak today. I'll talk a little on the four main reasons why the Hunter test can't take place in any form this year. So, one, as you all know, we're in the middle of a pandemic. Many New Yorkers still haven't received their vaccines and we don't want the Hunter test to turn into another super-spreader event. Roughly 3000 students come in from across the city to take the Hunter test, which is three hours long and has always been administered indoors at Hunter College's 68th Street campus and our school building on 94th Street. We call our school building the brick prison because it has

1 practically no windows. It's a disastrous place to
2 administer a three-hour test. This year would also
3 require more proctors than ever and put those
4 proctors at risk. Not all of our faculty have been
5 vaccinated yet. My second point is that it would
6 further disadvantage low-income students. We've
7 already heard that the test places obstacles for kids
8 from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. But we have
9 reason to believe that this year will have more
10 obstacles than ever. I'm sure that all of you know
11 that, ah, of all students low-income students have
12 been the worst hit by the pandemic. Lack of access o
13 safe learning environment to stable internet to
14 technology to steady meals to learning resources that
15 they would have had in school have all taken their
16 toll. These students are falling behind through no
17 fault of their own. If the Hunter test, which tests
18 above-grade-level material, is used as an admissions
19 factor in 2021 it will admit a class of students, ah,
20 socioeconomically skewed like never before. It's not
21 just because of disparate access to education.
22 There's also a \$70 fee to take the Hunter test.
23 That's more money than it takes to take the SAT.
24 While Hunter does offer a reduced fee of \$25, the
25

1 paperwork is nightmarish. The reduced fee waiver
2 requires income documentation as well as a separate
3 reduced fee application. The labor-intensive process
4 of applying for aid may discourage many families.
5 And Kweller Prep, a popular Hunter prep outfits, ah,
6 website recommends against it because it's just not
7 worth it. The test fee could be more of a barrier
8 than ever because many families are unemployed or
9 struggling financially in New York City due to the
10 pandemic. Administering the test online would also
11 disadvantage kids with limited access to technology
12 and the internet. Stable internet connection is
13 never guaranteed and high-quality internet costs
14 money. My third point, as, as a student I can also
15 tell you that administering a secure virtual Hunter
16 test is really difficult and it would have to rely on
17 the honor system.

18
19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 ARUNA DAS: May I continue?

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, you may.

22 ARUNA DAS: Thank you. And my last point
23 is that in any case the traditional way of qualifying
24 for the Hunter test has been rendered moot by the
25 pandemic. Public school students qualify through

1 their fifth grade state test scores, a system that
2 already, as you've heard, has its flaws. But this
3 year students won't have taken the state test in
4 fifth grade. Using their fourth grade state test as
5 a metric would only serve to exacerbate the exclusion
6 of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
7 Private school students have to take the separate
8 test to qualify for the Hunter test itself, which is
9 obviously not a realistic system this year. I could
10 go on and on, but as you can see there are so many
11 reasons why the test shouldn't take place this year.
12 We receive so much support from faculty, students,
13 alumni, and parents. They all recognize that it's
14 imperative that we act now. As my fellow teachers,
15 not my fellow teachers, my teachers and fellow
16 students have already said, the infeasibility of the
17 Hunter test during the pandemic year gives us an
18 opportunity to trial alternative admissions processes
19 that are safe and equitable. I hope that CUNY will
20 recognize this opportunity and work with us to make
21 Hunter a school that represents New York. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
24 testimony, Aruna. Ah, before I turn to Chair Barron
25 for questions, I'd like to remind, ah, council

members to use the raise hand function on Zoom to indicate that they have a question for this panel, and I'll turn it over to you now, Chair Barron.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Ah, thank you so much to this panel. We felt that it was critical that we hear from you so that you can give us your perspective as students and as faculty members as to what is happening on the ground so that when the administration deliveries their testimony we'll have, ah, primary source material to ask them about what their intentions are moving forward. Um, I particularly was interested in the, the, the fact that the test is designed to have forced errors, and if you could speak just a little about that, ah, Ms. Meng, if you could talk about that just a little bit. Can you unmute Ms. Meng? Thank you.

VICTORIA MENG: Yes. Um, ah, so there are different ways to think about the purpose of testing and, um, because we have so few seats our test is designed to have a very widespread of possible performances. Um, and what that means is that then one could go down the score list and say, OK, here is where we can admit for, for example, 175 students. Um, but that is only one way to think

about how tests work. To take an absurd example, if I were to, um, give a grammar test to 100 students and all of them failed, um, I can't take the top 10 scorers and say you get As. That, that would be not, not pedagogically sound. Um, on the other side it doesn't make sense to say, ah, all of my students did receive 90 points or higher on my grammar exam, but only the top, you know, three will get As. Um, so, so the Hunter test, the way that it's designed is partially due to how few students we can admit. But I, I do think that at this moment of, of, of reconsideration, um, it's possible to actually say who are qualified, how do we design a test that shows that these are students who can, who can actually do well at Hunter and then, ah, it, it doesn't have to be a test. It could be the state test. It could be grades. There could be multiple paths for entry, right? Any, various, ah, ways to say what's our total pool of students who qualify, and then we've solved one, we've met one part of our mission statement, which is excellence, and then to meet the other side of our mission statement from this pool, how can we admit a diverse student body?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK, right. OK, great, thank you. Ah, and the first two students, I think Leonardo and Chloe, you're particularly, AHA, testimony focused on the isolation, I believe was a term that was used, the pressure, ah, the lack of ability to easily afford, um, equipment if you were going to be participating in some of the sports that had those kinds of things, and the lack of resources perhaps due to poor connectivity, that impact what's going on in the learning environment, not just in the school, but at home as well. So if either one of you could just briefly, ah, talk about whether or not you feel Hunter is aware of that and what resources they are providing in that regard. Have you made that known to them? And if, ah, have they responded in any kind of way to that? Just briefly, because I do want to allow my colleague, ah, Council Member Lander, to ask questions as well.

LEONARDO VARGAS-SANCHEZ: Um, I think the responsibility is falling a lot more on the teachers themselves than the administration. Um, because speaking personally from like my own experience, um, at least during the pandemic that's going on right now, um, I've, I've met with more teachers one-on-

one, um, and I met with a lot more teachers one-on-one just so I can, um, at least get some study time or somewhere to like where I can get the resources available, um, to study. And before all of that, um, before the coronavirus the most help I could get was, um, usually taken up by other students because it's all, it's all together. Um, I, I think that in general it's student help that students get from the school has to follow unlike more the individual teachers which is stressful for those teachers, um, from what I can see, because like 20 students coming to one teacher, um, every day is very overwhelming, um, and I think that the school can do a lot better and they, there are some efforts to do that with like writing centers and, um, math centers and stuff like that. But they don't see as much traction and they also suffer from the problem, ah, where students need individualized attention towards their own problems in school.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK, great. Um, I'm gonna turn it back to the moderator because I would like for her to acknowledge my colleague, and, ah, have, have him, ah, pose his questions. I know he's got to bounce around a couple of places.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Barron. And I will now call on Council Member Landers. Um, I believe Council Member Maisel was here, but he does not appear to be here anymore. So Council Member Landers.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: I think he's muted. OK.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you. They let me unmute. Ah, Chair Barron, thank you so much for convening this really important hearing and of course for providing space for student voice, ah, first and, ah, students especially, ah, alumni and faculty as well, but students especially thank you. I just want to appreciate your organizing, your courage. I know this is not easy to do. And I was actually looking back at my notes and I see that 10 years ago this spring the Hunter College High School commencement speaker was a young man named Justin Hudson, ah, a black student at Hunter, who spoke really courageously at commencement in a hard way, calling out these issues long before, you know, Nicola Hannah Jones and, you know, the work that some of us have done in a long tradition of having the courage to call out systemic racism when you see it,

ah, and to show up and fight and, you know, progress was not made at that time, and progress was not made a couple of years ago in a renewed effort, um, but I believe you are making progress. We have to push harder and Chair Barron is leading the way and we have your backs. Um, change can be made before next fall's admissions progress, process, and beyond. Um, but it's your organizing that is really leading the way here, just without any doubt, and I just want to praise the detailed research you've put into it, the thoughtfulness of approach, the openness to dialogue and engagement. But the fierce and insistent organizing, it is in the tradition of winning civil rights and it's hard and courageous. Um, when, when Justin gave that speech he said, um, if you truly believe that the demographics of Hunter represent the distribution of intelligence in this city then you must believe that the Upper West Side, Bayside, and Flushing are intrinsically more intelligent than the South Bronx, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Washington Heights, and I refuse to accept that. And you guys refuse to accept that. You know that from who you are and the students you talk to that what our city can be is one that recognizes the intelligence from

across all those neighborhoods and builds a genuinely inclusive, multiracial, Hunter College High School, and a genuinely inclusive, multiracial NYC democracy. And we're in your debt to and, um, and I'm really glad that you are pushing. So, um, we've got a long hearing. We want to get, ah, hearing from and pushing on the administration. So, um, I won't ask you more questions, but I really just want to honor, ah, your organizing. So thank you very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Council Member Lander. Um, seeing no other council members waiting to ask questions, I will now turn back to the chair for additional questions. Ah, Chair Barron?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much. Ah, I do have a few other questions. Do you feel that the administration is honestly grasping and looking to make a change. Just gonna get straight to it. Because I did hear you say that there was a task force, but there's been a lack of response to the issues that were raised in the task force. So any one of you, I'll, I'll go to the students. I think Chloe has her hand raised. Can you unmute, thank you.

CHLOE ROLLOCK: Thank you. Um, so I just wanted to first say that I think like a really big issue like that, I, I think has been brought up so many times by especially like leaders in our black and Latinx and our low-income communities, they have spoken to how demoralizing it is to be a student in an underrepresented community at Hunter because it, we, throughout the school climate and everything, like it is just so fervent that people, people make remarks that just like put you down and say that you don't deserve to be here, even if it is, isn't explicit. And I think we, as administrators we have, we've gone to them for a long time and we have gone to them for, it's been since June, that's like eight months, nine months, and we've been asking for them to just publicly say that we need to make changes and publicly commit to making changes and reforming our admissions system and they have done none of that. They haven't made a public statement saying that diversity is important our school and diversity is one of our main goals, and by not making it public and by not saying that this important to us and this is one of our main concerns it sends a message to the rest of the school community that diversity isn't an

important piece of the Hunter community and of Hunter's, Hunter's educational goals and everything like that. And, yeah, I just wanted to say that. I think it, I think it's really telling and I really do hope that things change.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And, and Durga, as the, ah, I think you said you were the president of the student body. What kinds of ongoing, ah, programs or town halls or interactions are a part of what happens at Hunter College High School to raise the kind of awareness that needs to take place, or the kind of dialogue? Can you unmute, can you unmute Durga? Wait, Durga. Can you unmute Durga? One second. OK.

DURGA SREENIVASAN: Thank you. Um, yeah, so through HCHS4Diversity is where we've been hosting a lot of the community engagement, um, and teach-ins and using our platforms to create, ah, room for discussions, and I know many of our teachers, um, we're working with them to, to host like dialogue, etcetera, in their classroom, and I know like Ms. Meng and other teachers have been really, um, forward about making sure the these dials happen and that we are, and, um, also discussing internally with the

1 administration about what can be done, so like just
2 through their seminar workshops and, and other
3 initiatives that, um, are own, like our new amazing
4 APs, um, and others are, are leading efforts at our
5 school. Um, and one other thing I wanted to say
6 about your previous question, um, is that we are,
7 again, as you know, really asking for a proactive
8 stance for the administration to set the standards
9 and to, to, to make it clear that our commission in
10 the task force is to create this pro-diversity
11 admissions, that that is what we're looking for and
12 that that is the goal, um, of what we will be doing
13 this work for. Um, like, ah, I know Council Member
14 Brad Lander just brought up, like the, the 2010
15 efforts, many have put so many hours into creating
16 models and there are so many that exist as well, um,
17 so the administration taking a proactive stance,
18 saying that we, this is what we are seeking, um, is
19 really, really key right now.

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK, great. I think
22 that concludes my questions. I just want to echo the
23 comments of my colleague. I applaud you for being
24 active, not sitting on the sideline and just
25 complaining amongst yourselves, but reaching out and

1 making sure that things are change and raising your
2 voice and educating others, and for being committed,
3 because it's a battle that is going to take a lot of
4 ongoing work. It doesn't happen overnight.
5 Revolutions never do. And, yes, you're fighting not
6 just against what is happening at Hunter College High
7 School, but that's just a reflection of what's
8 happening across this city and across this country,
9 and people don't want to have change. They don't
10 want to, ah, make the adjustments, even when it's
11 within their power to do that. But we want to
12 encourage you. Ah, we're gonna continue to work with
13 you. And we believe that we will be able to get that
14 change that we need. We know that much of the change
15 that came last June, as was reflected in the budget,
16 was because of the pressure that was applied and the
17 dialogue that had to take place to get the results
18 that we wanted. So we're gonna continue to work with
19 you. We appreciate all of my colleagues as well who
20 have signed onto the letters, and we're gonna
21 continue to move forward. Thank you so much for your
22 testimony.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
25 Barron. We will now turn to CUNY. Now from the

administration we have Andrea Soonachan, who is the university dean for K-16 initiatives, and for questions we will have Sabra Pacheco, the admissions director at Hunter College Campus School. I will now administer the oath to the administration. When you hear your name, please respond once, once a member of staff unmutes you and, OK, so University Dean Soonachan.

DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this committee and to respond honestly to council member questions?

DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Director Pacheco...

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this committee and to respond honestly to council member questions?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I will now call on University Dean Soonachan.

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Thank you.

Good morning. Um, I'm Andrea Soonachan, university dean for K-16 Initiatives at CUNY. I want to start by thanking you for this opportunity to speak with you today about CUNY's Early College high schools. These schools are reflective of the spirit of innovation and commitment to education that CUNY embodies. I joined CUNY's, ah, central administration a year ago after almost 20 years supporting college access and success for New York City's young people, through community-based organizations, research settings, and the New York City Department of Education. Along the way, I was able to earn a doctorate in education. Like millions of New Yorkers, I have CUNY to thank for much of this. My father immigrated to New York from the West Indies and worked his way through an engineering degree at City College. His degrees opened doors for him, empowered him to fight the bias that he often experienced as he rose through his career, and gave my family entry to economic security and a life well beyond what he ever imagined for himself. New York City has been a place of community and opportunity for my family, and I've dedicated my career to

ensuring our city remain a place where all students can envision and achieve their brightest possible future. Early college high school degree are public schools that partner with institutions of higher education to blend rigorous college prep curriculum with the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit while in high school at no cost to students and their families. The program is designed to scaffold the transition from high school to college with additional supports and make sure students are ready to jump into courses rather than needing remedial education when they arrive. Research has shown that dual enrollment improves college transitions, persistence, and completion, especially for students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. The City University of New York's Early College Initiative, CUNY ECI, was established in 2003 to develop and support early college high schools in New York City. Today CUNY ECI is responsible for 20 early college high schools that serve over 10,000 students. They are partnered with six community colleges, Borough of Manhattan, Bronx, Hostos, Kingsborough, Queensboro, and Laguardia, and seven senior colleagues, Brooklyn

College, City Tech, City College, Hunter College, Queens College, York College, and the College of Staten Island. Hunter College High School, which has been the focus of our conversation so far this morning, is not one of these 20 schools. ECI provides guidance, project management, and financial resources to create and maintain early college schools. We have four different models across the city. There are six 6-12 schools that offer integrated academic experiences and supports beginning in middle school and allow students to begin taking college courses as early as ninth grade. Students may earn up to 60 college credits or an associate's degree in liberal arts. There are two 9-12 schools that provide accelerated academic programs, including four years of rigorous math and science credit. These students have a substantial head start when applying to college, spending their last years of high schools on the partner college campus. There are two 9-13 schools, which offer an optional fifth year for increased college exploration the opportunity to earn an associate's degree in liberal arts. And there are 10 9-14 schools, known as P-TECHs, which stands for Pathways in Technology

for Early College High School. These students are provided a pathway to complete their high school diploma and associate's degree, and workplace preparation for in-demand jobs in technology, manufacturing, health care, and finance. The ECI model was designed to serve low-income youth, first-generation college-goers, English language learners, and other groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education. In 2019 our diverse student population of approximately 9200 students included over 40% that identified as Latinx or Hispanic, nearly 35% who identified as black, 13% as Asian, and the remaining 10% identified as white, native, or unknown. The population was 48% female and 52% male. As evidenced by census tract, 31% of all ECI students come from neighborhoods with the lowest average income and 25% come from neighborhoods with below-average socioeconomic status. 6.4% of students were English language learners and 16.3% of students had an individualized education plan. Our students' academic preparation upon entering high school is wide ranging, as evidenced by their eighth grade exams. In 2019 nearly 50% scored a 1 or a 2 on their ELA exams, while nearly two-thirds, 65%, scored

a 1 or 2 on math exams. While fully representing the ethnic, racial, demographic, and academic diversity of our city students, ECI students graduate from high school on time at a higher rate than similar students. In 2019 the high school graduation rate across our schools was 88.9%, exceeding the New York City DOE average of 77.3%. Impressively, they managed this with a course that also includes college-level classes, earning an average of 29.3 college credits upon graduation, catalyzing their post secondary momentum. We have found that these credits on average put them a semester closer to graduation by the end of their second year. Further, they are well-equipped for college course work with 87.7% and 77.9% demonstrating English language, um, and math proficiency, respectively. Among graduates of the Class of 2019, nearly 65% stayed with CUNY in one of two ways. Over 20% enrolled in their grades 13 program and the rest, 42.4%, matriculate into CUNY on their own. We have also found that ECI alumni are more likely to remain enrolled after two years. Another 24% of graduates go on to SUNY or other public and private colleges. Of note, two schools offer the opportunity to earn an associate's degree

by the end of 12th grade. 45.2% of graduating students at Hostos Lincoln Academy of Science and nearly 80% of students at Kingsborough Early College Secondary School graduate having earned their design. The New York City Department of Education Office of Enrollment, the department's admissions method, support our schools. Our schools have two types of admissions methods. Ten of our schools, Hero High School, City Polytechnic, P-TECH, Manhattan Early College for Advertising, B-TECH, Energy Tech, Inwood Early College for Health and Information Tech, Port Richmond High School, Academy for Careers in Television and Film, and Bronx Academy for Software Engineering, are educational option or open admission. That means every applicant is assigned a number as in a random lottery. Programs with open and educational options admissions methods use students with randomly assigned numbers, and they also use admissions priorities to make offers. When there are more applicants than seats, students are admitted in order by their randomly assigned numbers. If a program also uses admissions priorities, all applicants from the first priority group are admitted before any students from the second priority group,

regardless of their randomly assigned numbers. The other half, 10 of our schools, Hostos, Lincoln Academy of Science, Brooklyn College Academy, Kingsborough Early College Secondary School, Manhattan Hunter Science High School, York Early College, Middle College High School at Laguardia, Queens [inaudible], International High School at Laguardia, and City College Academy of the Arts, are screened for their high school admissions. Six of these 10 schools are 6-12 schools that have no screening for their middle school admissions, and very limited seats for ninth grade entry. Our screen programs evaluate applicants for admission based on the program's selection criteria and assign a ranking to applicants based on that evaluation, starting with the top-ranked applicant as number one. Ranked applicants receive orders, offers, in ranking order. If a program also has admissions priorities, offers are made to ranked applicants in a priority group order. Our program selection criteria includes academic records, interviews, essays, and more to evaluate and rank students. The selection criteria that a program uses is called and the way that the programs explain these criteria is called a rubric,

student informations that apply to the rubric to determine a ranking order. Prospective students learn about our schools through a variety of ways. The DOE publishes a high school directory each year with a range of information, including admissions, program offerings, clubs, and sports. Each community school district publishes a similar directory to provide information on a district middle schools. To increase diversity, school admissions are based on ranked choice and lottery systems. Last year one of our schools, Manhattan Hunter Science High School, launched a diversity initiative through the DOE's Office of Enrollment to give priority to applicants eligible for free and reduced lunch based on family income for 69% of seats. Each year our schools are encouraged to participate in district, borough, and citywide fairs, where they share informational materials with families and dates and times for open house tours. Schools also do direct outreach to elementary and middle schools in their districts and promote their schools on social media and their websites. ECI schools expect that all students will have the opportunity to earn college credits while entering school. We have forged in making strong

relationships with partner colleges, faculty, and administrators, who collectively aim to ensure access and success for all of our students. Their shared attention to curriculum development, community outreach, as well as staff recruitment and professional development have led to greater numbers of students completing high school and entering the college ready with nearly a year's worth of credit earned to, to their name and at no cost to them. We are proud of the accomplishments of the staff and students who have achieved so much through the Early College Initiative and look forward to continuing this work alongside our partners. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Dean Soonachan. Ah, before I turn to Chair Barron, I'd like to remind council members to use the raise hand function on Zoom to indicate that they have a question for this panel. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very much. Ah, I do want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Majority Leader Laurie Cumbo. And I have lots of questions for the panel. First of all, I want to thank you for coming and sharing your testimony with us. And since the student panel that preceded you

1 was specifically talking about Hunter, ah, I want to
2 begin with those questions. I also see we've been
3 joined by Council Member Rodriguez. I want to
4 acknowledge him. He is a member of the committee as
5 well. So in terms of Hunter College High School what
6 is the relationship between CUNY and Hunter College
7 High School? Ah, I think you're muted. I don't hear
8 anything.
9

10 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Oh, I think
11 [inaudible]. My, my colleague, ah, from Hunter
12 College High School, Sabra, is here. Maybe she can,
13 ah, address questions about Hunter.

14 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Can you hear me now?

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

16 DIRECTOR PACHECO: OK, sorry about that.
17 Thank you, um, Madam Chair. Um, so Hunter College
18 High School, I guess in the simplest terms, falls
19 under the governance of, um, CUNY and, ah, the
20 college. That's the nature of the relationship
21 between the school and, and CUNY.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. Who has
23 jurisdiction over the admission policy for Hunter
24 College High School?
25

1 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Well, the admissions
2 policy itself, ah, would, would, again, fall under,
3 and anything that, ah, as falling under the
4 governance of CUNY and under the college means that
5 ultimately, ultimately, ah, any major changes or
6 major overhauls to the system would, um, be done with
7 guidance, under guidance and direction from, from
8 those two entities.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: How would that
11 happen? What would be the steps to change the
12 admission policy to get into Hunter College High
13 School? Because this is just very too broad for me.
14 I'm just, you know, it's not targeted and specific
15 enough for me to get a clear understanding. What
16 would be the steps to change the admission policy for
17 Hunter College High School?

18 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Well, I think one of,
19 one of the most important steps is what we're in the
20 process of doing now, right? So in response to much
21 of what the students have testified to today,
22 including our faculty, in response to their
23 suggestions and, and proposals and, um, expression of
24 their passion about this topic, in response to that
25 the president of Hunter College, ah, convened a

1 presidential task force, and that task force
2 specifically is a task force to advance racial
3 equity. It's a college-wide task force. But
4 specific, since the campus schools falls under the
5 college, we have our own sort of, um, subset of that
6 task force, which is in and of itself its own task
7 force, and the president of the college has
8 specifically, um, um, asked us to look into three
9 specific areas with respect to the campus schools.
10 Ah, so the task force will examine, um, admissions,
11 curriculum, and climate, and suggest, ah, create
12 goals and a work plan to accomplish, you know,
13 strategies to accomplish those goals. So that is the
14 first and probably biggest step to us enacting any
15 sort of change. It's going to start with this task
16 force. As the students mentioned, it has just
17 started to work.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And what is the
20 timeframe that this task force is expected to
21 complete its work?

22 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Ah, in, in my opinion
23 I hope the task force is something that, that, um,
24 continues its work for quite some time. Ah, this is
25 a really large issue. I don't think this is one that

1 can be resolved in a matter of, you know, months.
2 Um, the task force is beginning its work now. Ah,
3 the expectation is that we have some semblance of
4 strategy, goals and strategies by the end of this
5 semester in June, but with the hopes that we, it will
6 continue its work through the next academic year.

8 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: What, OK, that's,
9 that's troubling. Normally when this council
10 establishes a task force they have a start date and
11 an end date, so that the recommendations that come
12 out of that task force can begin to be examined and
13 implemented. So now if we're talking about a task
14 force which doesn't have, ah, an end date and wants
15 to just be ongoing, I mean, there might be another
16 kind of entity that would take place afterwards. But
17 to say, well, it's gonna take time, we need to move
18 on, is not in any way, um, comforting or addressing
19 the issue of when can we think we would have a change
20 in the policy. So it's very, you know, amorphous and
21 it's gonna keep going. We have these great
22 objectives, but, ah, ah, it's troubling that you
23 don't have an end date to make recommendations and
24 then have those recommendations, um, reacted to and a
25 plan come from that.

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Um, Madam Chair, I, I should probably be more clear. I thought I mentioned that, ah, the initial suggestions and proposals from the task force are expected in June. That's the end of our semester, so June, um, with the hopes, though, that the work of the task force will continue through into the next academic year.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So in June we can expect to have a list of recommendations from the task force that will address the three major areas you talked about, admissions, curriculum, and climate?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Your question is should we, do we hope to have, ah, suggestions and recommends from the task force? I would hope that we do. Many other people who offered testimony here today are members of that same task force. So it is my hope that all of us together, um, the, both the faculty members and students who are here, ah, offering testimony today. It's my hope that we will have something, ah, in writing submitted to the president of the college in June.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So, again, that, that's my point. It, you know, it's a hope, but it's

not a definite time that we can say by June. It's much more, um, indefinite.

DIRECTOR PACHECO: My plan is June. Ah, we also have to get the input of those who are, who are here today who are a part of that work. So, um, I'm confident that we will have something to submit in June.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And when those recommendations come forth, what's the next step? I'm trying to get to how we're going to change the admission policy at Hunter College High School, which only has 2% black students and, and 6% Latino. So I, I'm not comfortable or pleased to know well, you know, we're gonna do this. Once those recommendations come, which we hope will come in June, what would be the next step? If those recommendations from the task force come and say, listen, there should be, there should not be one single standardized test which we create at Hunter College High School, ah, that we use to select students for administration. So if in fact that is one of the recommendations that comes forth, then what happens to that recommendation? What's the weight of the recommendation? Because unfortunately

1 the city has a history, the city, not Hunter College
2 High School, but the city has a history of having
3 task, I'm probably the oldest one here, so I remember
4 the Turner Commission Report and it was a great
5 report and it sat. So unless these task force which
6 have great participants on them and come up with very
7 thorough, ah, recommendations based on a lot of work
8 and research, unless they are empowered to know that
9 something's gonna happen, not just a report, we'll be
10 back again talking about how Hunter College High
11 School has continued to decline in having, ah,
12 students that represent the city as a part of that.
13 So once those recommendations come forth, what would
14 be the weight that they would have and what can we
15 expect will be implemented based on those
16 recommendations?

18 DIRECTOR PACHECO: It's hard to answer a
19 question with respect to what will occur after the
20 recommendations are received, when the
21 recommendations haven't been received yet. Ah, the
22 task force, in fact the subcommittee, the admission
23 subcommittee of the task force, convenes in a matter
24 of hours today. Ah, and that's it's first order of
25 business. Ah, I can perhaps get back to you with

1
2 that, ah, with a more substantial answer after the
3 task force itself has a chance to, particularly that
4 subcommittee, has a chance to meet today to flesh out
5 its goals and, ah, its strategic plan for getting
6 there.

7 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. Um, if in fact
8 Hunter College, Hunter College High School, comes
9 with the recommendation for additional kinds of
10 criteria to be used, who has the authority to put
11 that into place? I know you said it's under the
12 guidance of the, ah, CUNY and the college, but who
13 has the ultimate authority to decide what happens?
14 Who makes the decision? Who has to approve it? Does
15 it have to go to the Board of Trustees? Is it
16 simply, ah, something that happens at the college
17 level?

18 DIRECTOR PACHECO: That's a good
19 question. Ah, since I'm not, I don't want to
20 misspeak. Ah, there are a lot of different parties
21 involved. As you mentioned, trustees and, and CUNY,
22 overall CUNY itself and the college. I don't want to
23 give you the wrong information. I can get back to
24 you on who specifically has the ultimate authority.
25 I do believe it's a combination of those groups.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. I, I would like to have that, ah, response. Ah, my, my counsel will, ah, usually what we do at the end is formalize questions, and, and because that's, that's the heart, you know, with doing all this work, but to what end, through what process, who has the authority, who can say is it the president herself? This is what it's going to be. Is it the president in conjunction with the CUNY chancellor? It is the president plus the chancellor that sends it to the Board of Trustees? It's just too vague. It's just very vague and, and we would like to get something definitive, whatever documents, ah, have that information we would love to see what those are. Um, I have many, many more questions but I want to allow my colleagues to ask their questions as well. So I'll turn it back to the moderator and then, um, I'll come back with more questions. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Barron. I will now call on council members with questions in the order they have used the raise hand function in Zoom. So that currently will be Majority Leader Cumbo, followed by Council Member Lander. Council members, if you would like to ask a question

and you have not yet used the raise hand function in Zoom, please do so now. Also, remember to keep your questions and answers to five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will maintain a clock and a member of staff will unmute you. You may begin after I call you and the sergeant gives you the cue. So we will now hear from Council Member, ah, Cumbo.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You're muted.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: OK.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Thank you. Thank you, Chair Barron. Um, my question is in regards to something that was spoken on during the testimony. Um, Andrea, I apologize. On my Zoom I can't see your full last name, it abbreviates it. So you were talking a bit about the, um, I guess the pipelines to CUNY in terms of some of the, um, educational programs that lead into it. So in my district we have a school called Medgar Evers Preparatory High School. And it's one of the leading high schools in the city, and it's certainly a pathway for Medgar Evers College and others. Now, I understand the issue that they're facing now is that although Medgar

1 Evers Preparatory High School is considered an early
2 high school, it's being treated in the instance that
3 I'm talking about as a middle school. And so the DOE
4 has removed the screens, um, or the testing
5 application process, um, in order to get into Medgar
6 Evers Preparatory High School, Early High School, and
7 the school is very concerned that students will not
8 be prepared, like that, that the pipeline to Medgar
9 Evers High School, to Medgar Evers Preparatory High
10 School, um, and then to the college is going to be
11 disrupted once those screens are removed because of
12 the rigorous curriculum of that particular school.
13 Has there been any conversation or discussion around
14 removing the screens, I believe there are six early
15 high schools that do have the screen, that previously
16 had the screen process, but now will no longer have
17 that screen process, and they are concerned if the
18 removal of those screens will impact, um, the level
19 of academic course work that's needed to go to high
20 school and then to the college. Are you aware of
21 that and has there been discussion about that?

23 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Ah, so Medgar
24 Evers, um, Prep is not one of the CUNY early college
25 high schools, um, that's in my portfolio. Um, it's

probably similar to Hunter in that it's, um, sort of independently, ah, managed by, the, ah, administration at Medgar, um, it's a, a DOE high school. So DOE's Office of Enrollment, um, would be the appropriate group to talk to about any concerns with Medgar, changes to Medgar's, um, admission criteria. We do run several 6-12 schools in our portfolio of 20, um, early college high schools, and, um, in part, you know, because of the pandemic middle school screening, um, has been lifted or is very different for the coming year. None of our schools, um, in our portfolio have expressed concern about that. Um, we understand that this is a really challenge time and all of our schools are getting ready to embrace and support the students they receive next year, understanding that they will come in with, ah, a lot of different needs, um, and that we will be prepared, um, and we, we know that we can support all students at being successful.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: So the screen for the schools in your portfolio, did they have screens previously and are those screens being lifted at this time?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: I would have to get back to you, ah, with specifics across the 20 schools. Um, there's, there's some variations, um, so I can follow up with you for, for each one of them what, what specifically is different and for the coming year.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: And for the ones that you do know about, is this lifting of the screen a temporary, um, decision in regards to the pandemic, or is this now a permanent decision moving forward? And permanent, of course, permanency changes, but is it considered that this will be the new practice moving forward?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Ah, so DOE's Office of Enrollment, um, manages admissions policies. Um, they have framed changes for this year as a pause. Um, I don't believe that they've announced any sort of permanent, um, ongoing change to admissions, um, after, for, after this year. They have not yet done that.

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: OK. Thank you. Those were all the questions I had.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Majority Leader Cumbo. We'll now turn to Council Member Landers for his questions.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Ah, thank you very much, Chair Barron, again, for this hearing. Um, as I mentioned earlier after the students, about 10 years ago this spring with alumna Elena Kagan, nominated by President Obama to serve on the Supreme Court, and long before the current wave of activism for school integration and for black lives, Hunter College High School commencement speaker Justin Hudson gave a powerful address. I read his quote before. Ah, if you truly believe that the demographics of Hunter represent the distribution of intelligence in this city, then you must believe that the Upper West Side, Bayside, and Flushing are intrinsically more intelligent than the South Bronx, Bed-Sty, and Washington Heights. And I refuse to accept that. Unfortunately, at that time President Raab and then Hunter's, the then-Hunter Dean for Diversity said no to any changes. Parents, faculty members, and alumni feel very strongly the test is very valuable in terms of preserving the kind of

specialness and uniqueness the school had. Two years ago there was another movement for school integration. At that time as well Lisa Siegman and the admissions, ah, director, ah, said at this time I would say no. We know that our test is producing highly successful students in our highly successful school. So on the one hand I'm glad that the activism of the current students is changing things and that there's at least openness to change. But that task force and its timeline is two years too late, it's 10 years too late. Um, and it also doesn't sound like it is producing any proposals for this year's admissions process for next fall's incoming class at Hunter. So I guess my first question is, um, are you aware that selective high schools in so many other cities, Boston Latin, San Francisco's Lowell High School, Thomas Jefferson High School, and Maggie Walker Governor's High School in Virginia have all suspended their admissions test and adopted alternative pro-diversity admission systems for this pandemic year?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Is that question for me?

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Yes, yes. Are you aware of that?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Yes, I am aware of that.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: OK. Is that under consideration for this incoming fall's class at Hunter College High School?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: There are a lot of things under consideration for this fall's incoming class to Hunter College High School.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: What are they? Because you talked a lot about this task force and long-term change. I guess I would like to know what is under consideration for the pandemic year admission and when you'll, when you'll have something more concrete to tell us.

DIRECTOR PACHECO: We will have something more concrete to share with everyone, not only the people who are here, but with the public in general, and the city very shortly. But that's not something that I can share here right now.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So after 10 years of waiting and two years of waiting and setting up a task force that might have results in June, you also

1 don't have a date for when you will know what your
2 admissions process is for the fall?

3
4 DIRECTOR PACHECO: We do not yet. We
5 are not in a position yet to, ah, confirm what those
6 plans are for this fall's incoming class.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: You have one, but
8 you're not yet in position to confirm it, it sounds
9 like is what you're telling me.

10 DIRECTOR PACHECO: No, that's not what I
11 said. What I said we are, it's not in a position to
12 confirm. So we are still working on whatever needs
13 to be worked on and we are not in a position to share
14 that information right now. [inaudible]

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: You, you sound
16 like you're being very clear in what you're, so do
17 you know it? Because it sounds like you're telling
18 me you can't confirm it or you can't share it. Um,
19 has a preliminary internal decision been made on what
20 next year's admissions process will be?

21 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Ah, we, we are in, we
22 are still in, ah, the determination phase of what
23 will occur for next year. As you can imagine, this
24 is a very, very large process, um, so it's not
25 something that's being taken lightly, and we will

soon be able to share with everyone what the process will be for this coming year.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Um, so I'll say, you know, I, I, you know, we're gonna have our preliminary budget hearing more broadly in this Committee on Higher Education, you know, and the city provides a lot of the funding for Hunter College High School, ah, within one month. Do you think by then you will know, ah, whether you are suspending the admissions for next year?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: I'm, within one month? Yes, I am sure that we will be in a position to know what we are doing and we'll be able to share that with the public.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: OK. I mean, to be honest, and, I, look, I, I, you know, I, I appreciate that there's a lot going on. You pretty clearly communicated that an internal decision has already been made on what's gonna happen next year. But you're not, you know, gonna share with us now because they're still finalizing it, um, that, you know, I, I hope, look, I think what would be a great, I guess, let me ask it like this. Um, if you, if you, let me, I guess I'll ask the question this way.

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2 As you are proceeding with this longer-term task
3 force, doing really important work because what
4 school culture is, what the curriculum is matters
5 enormously into whether, ah, achieving more
6 integration will work. Um, what do you think the
7 impact would be, ah, of moving towards a more
8 integrated and diverse school community of choosing
9 for this year to follow the lead of Boston Latin and
10 those other schools in suspending, ah, the one single
11 high-stakes admissions test this year, ah, versus
12 continuing forward with it.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

14 DIRECTOR PACHECO: So, I, I can't speak
15 to what we can do in, in comparison to those other
16 schools. None of the schools that you mentioned are
17 in the City of New York. Ah, they are very different
18 schools in very different places. What I can say is
19 we are looking into and, and starting to finalize
20 what will occur with this year's process. And
21 assisting us in this effort is, ah, an educational
22 equity expert who came to us actually at the
23 recommendation of some of the people who offered
24 testimony earlier today. That person has been
25 enlisted, ah, to offer assistance and support to help

1 guide us in some of those decisions, ah, for this
2 year's process. And that person was an instrumental,
3 um, piece to change in some of those other, ah, in
4 some of those other schools that you just named.
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: OK. So that's
7 the first thing you've said that least gives me a
8 little reason for hope and optimism, so I'm gonna
9 take. I am glad that you have hired someone to think
10 about this year's admissions process and beyond who
11 did work with those other schools. I guess, though,
12 I will disagree that the fact that this is New York
13 should be used as a way of saying we can't be more
14 ambitious and move more quickly to achieve a Hunter
15 College incoming student body as diverse as New York
16 City. Honestly, you've got the extraordinary
17 diversity and resources of these brilliant young
18 people in all those communities, in Bedford
19 Stuyvesant and Washington Heights and the South Bronx
20 as well as Park Slope and the Upper West Side and
21 Bayside and Flushing. So, um, it's all the more
22 reason New York needs to lead here. So I'm glad
23 you're gonna have that report for us by the time we
24 reconvene, ah, for our preliminary budget hearing.
25 I'm gonna take as hopeful and optimistic that you

1
2 have hired that consultant, um, but, ah, I just want
3 to be really clear. Following the lead of those
4 schools and suspending the test this year and using a
5 one-year pro-diversity admissions systems would be a
6 great down payment on making long-delayed progress,
7 um, but if we come back with something that continues
8 the test for next fall and hopes to makes progress
9 beyond that I just think it will be hard for anyone,
10 ah, to take Hunter's integrity to that work, ah, very
11 seriously. Thank you, Madam Chair, for this hearing,
12 and thank you again to the students for their, ah,
13 for their courage and time and organizing.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank you
15 all. Um, seeing as we have no other council members
16 waiting to ask questions I will now turn it back to
17 the chair for additional questions. Chair Barron?

18 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Ah, thank you very
19 much. Ah, I do have lots of questions and I'm going
20 to just start by saying that do you, do you see that
21 there's a problem, that there are so few students of
22 color as well as low-income students at Hunter
23 College High School? Do you acknowledge that as a
24 problem?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Can you hear me, Madam Chair?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Now I can, yes.

DIRECTOR PACHECO: Thank you. Um, I acknowledge that we have a lot of work to do at the campus schools.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You don't think it's a problem? Besides the work, you don't think it's a problem?

DIRECTOR PACHECO: I think, no, I think, I think that we have some huge gaps, not only in our student body, but, ah, in, in a lot of areas of the school as a whole. Um, so, we have a lot of gaps. We are working on those. Ah, ah, specifically with respect to, you know, DEI initiatives, that includes not only admissions, ah, but it includes retention, it includes, you know, the curriculum, it includes the climate of the school, you know, it includes faculty hiring. There are a lot of issues, a lot of places where we have gaps. And we acknowledge that, and we know that it's going to take a lot of work. We've already started doing a lot of work that I know hasn't been mentioned here. There's, as you mentioned, ah, Madam Chair, revolutions do not occur

1 overnight. We have been doing a lot of work,
2 particularly since I, since my arrival at the campus
3 school [inaudible] four years. Um, so between, ah,
4 doubling and in some areas almost tripling, ah, some
5 of our, um, um, applications from underrepresented
6 boroughs, right, from, um, ah, so Bronx and Staten
7 Island, from charter school networks, ah, which used
8 to be very low and in the last two to three years
9 has, ah, ah, more than doubled. So we've been doing
10 a lot so far. So I don't want to discount any of the
11 work that we've already been doing and how it has led
12 to at least making more, Hunter more aware, um,
13 excuse me, making those who are not as familiar with
14 Hunter, um, making, making them more aware of who we
15 are and, and what we do. So we've been doing a lot.
16 But we know that we still have more, ah, more to do.
17 Um, and, and some of what we are still doing involves
18 the task force. It's not limited to the task force.
19 But it does involve the work of the task force.

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: What would you, ah,
22 rank the gap that exists in the, ah, racial
23 composition, the demographics of Hunter, where you
24 said you have lots, ah, and then there are many gaps.
25 How would you prioritize the gap that exists in the

1 student population at Hunter College High School?
2
3 Where does that fit in your list of, um, things that
4 have to be done?

5 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Ah, well, that's
6 number one. It always has been number one on my list of
7 things to be done as an initiatives director. Um,
8 if, if that's your question.

9 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's, that's my
10 question. Right, that's my question. Um, OK. In
11 terms of, ah, the models that we've talked about,
12 what's the enrollment, I don't know if you had, if
13 the data, if your report said that. What's the
14 enrollment in all of the early college programs?

15 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Ah, Hunter is not an
16 early college school, so I think Andrea has to...

17 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Yeah.

18 DIRECTOR PACHECO: I'm sorry.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

20 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Yeah, I, I
21 don't have the, um, current school year's enrollment.
22 I can follow up with you about that. Last year we
23 had a little over 9000 students across all the 20
24 schools.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. So if, I would like that if you would disaggregate that for me, ah, at the specialized high schools, the early college high schools, um, and how that trend has moved. Now, I heard you say that Medgar Evers College is not an early college high school?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: How does a college, how does a school become a early college high school? How do they get into that selection criteria?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: So the 20 schools in our portfolio were developed in cooperation with the DOE, um, and their college partners to have that structured pathway to, um, earn associate's degree or up to 60 credits. So there are many high schools across the city that offer the opportunity to take advanced courses and even college credit-bearing courses that aren't part of the Early College Initiative.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. And I also would like if you would be able to, um, give us the demographic makeup for the students who do earn college degrees. Ah, I think you gave us some of the

1 statistics about the students that earn it. But if
2 you could us the demographic breakdown of that as
3 well. And in terms of students attending the early
4 college high schools, if a student doesn't want to,
5 is it expected that all the students who enroll in
6 that program will all take, ah, classes that will
7 give them the ability to have the additional two
8 years beyond high school? Is that the expectation?
9 And so if that requires additional time beyond the
10 normal school day, ah, suppose students have other
11 obligations that don't permit them to do that? So
12 what I want to know is there a differentiation in
13 students' programs as they go to these early college
14 high schools.

16 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: There are
17 probably many differentiations in programming across
18 the 20 high schools. The, each of those 20 is
19 focused on a core mission of every single student
20 having the opportunity to begin college course taking
21 while in high school and accumulate the, that up to
22 60 credits, regardless of what they, what level of
23 education they enter with, right? So we have English
24 language learners, we have students with IEPs, we
25 have those students that I referred to are coming in

at the lower end of the eighth grade test scores, and so there's a lot of differentiation that happens in terms of the academic supports, um, and courses that students have access to make sure that everybody is ready, um, and has access to college courses, usually beginning in about tenth grade, um, for our 6-12 schools, some often happen beginning in ninth grade, um, because some of that early preparation has happened earlier.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: The Academy for Careers in Television and Film, which CUNY college is partnered with that program?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Ah, that's the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Do you know if they have any kind of, ah, affiliation with the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Um, I believe the school administration has worked with MOOME in various ways over the years. I'd have to follow up with you to see what they were doing this year, if anything.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. Um, according to, well, I did ask you for disaggregation of the

1 degree and the affiliation, um, the number of
2 students, rather, who are able to attain designs,
3 those who have, um, just additional credits with not
4 necessarily an associate's degree, and if you could
5 remember to get that for us. And then in terms of
6 the instructors, are there special qualifications
7 that are necessary for teachers who are in the early
8 college high schools?
9

10 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: The high
11 school teachers are licensed as high school teachers.
12 Um, they are DOE employees. Um, the college courses
13 are taught by, um, CUNY adjuncts. In some cases
14 those are high school faculty who also qualify for
15 and have applied to be adjunct, um, CUNY adjuncts,
16 um, and might teach those courses, um, in addition to
17 or, you know, outside of their, their school day as
18 high school teachers.

19 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So all of the
20 teachers in, in the DOE buildings themselves are of
21 course regular DOE certified.

22 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And the affiliation
24 with the college are college instructors or adjuncts
25

that are teaching them. Do students go to the college campus for those classes?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes. Um, it varies across the 20 schools and, and the course, right, but over the, their time at an individual high school a student will probably do both, um, have some time on the campus of their college partner as well as take courses in their high school that are taught by our college faculty.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And those, is there an arrangement between the, ah, unions regarding the affiliation or the relationship between the early college high school and the colleges themselves? Is there any kind of interaction between the unions? For example, is a affiliation or relationship between the UFT and the PSC?

UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: I'm not aware of any formal relationship between the two unions.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. And, again, for the ECI schools, I would love to have a breakdown of the demographics of the teachers at the ECI schools as well as at, um, Hunter College High School and the Medgar Evers School, which you say is not a part of the ECI, but we would like to get that information as

1 well. And then, um, I do have a question again
2 regarding Hunter, no, Hunter College High School.
3 And, and for the Hunter College High School in terms
4 of the teaching staff, are they DOE employees or are
5 they CUNY employees? Whose payroll are they own?
6 Which union, ah, are they affiliated with, for Hunter
7 College High School? Can we unmute?

9 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Ah, I believe
10 Sabra might be able to answer that.

11 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes. Can we unmute
12 her?

13 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Um, Madam Chair, can
14 you hear me?

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, I can now.

16 DIRECTOR PACHECO: Um, what I, I, Madam
17 Chair, as in my role as director of admissions I
18 would not have, ah, specifics about our, ah, faculty
19 at Hunter College High School.

20 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. Well, if
21 someone could, ah, get that information I would
22 appreciate that. I'd like to know that. The last
23 question I have is about the course work itself and
24 it's particularly for, um, the early college high
25 schools. Do we have any idea of how many laptops DOE

1
2 has lent to students, particularly in these early
3 college high schools? Do we have any assurance that
4 all of the students were able to receive those
5 laptops, and what provisions were made based on the
6 fact that they may have unreliable or unstable
7 broadband. Ah, that's particularly for the early
8 college high school programs.

9 UNIVERSITY DEAN SOONACHAN: Yes, ah, so
10 the, the laptop distribution is through the DOE. Ah,
11 so we could follow up with you to get the fact
12 statistics. Our, our principals across the 20
13 schools, though, have worked very closely with all of
14 their teachers to make sure students are, have what
15 they need to be successful this year. Um, they do a
16 lot of individual follow-up with students, um, and a
17 lot of support, um, and have worked to be very
18 understanding of students who, um, who need extra
19 technology or access to broadband. We can follow up
20 with you, um, when, regarding the numbers.

21 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very much.
22 Ah, I want to acknowledge we've also been joined by
23 Council Member Ulrich, who is a member of the
24 committee as well, and Madam Moderator, I'll turn it
25 back to you. I've concluded my questions and, ah,

1 turning it back to you. I do want to thank this
2 panel for coming and for presenting the information,
3 and you will receive written requests for the items
4 that we've talked about and we look forward to you
5 getting them back to us.
6

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank
8 you, Chair Barron. Um, we have concluded CUNY's
9 testimony and will now turn to the rest of the public
10 testimony. First, I'd like to remind everyone that I
11 will call up individuals in panels. Once your name
12 is called a member of our staff will unmute you and
13 you may begin your testimony once the Sergeant at
14 Arms sets the clock and gives you a cue. All
15 testimony will be limited to three minutes. Remember
16 that there is a few-second delay when you are unmuted
17 before we can hear you. And please wait for the
18 Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin
19 before your starting your testimony. So the first
20 panel of speakers will be Hridmita Hasan, Mia
21 Montrose, Brianna Gallimore, AnnaBelle Medina, and
22 Charlotte Ritz-Jack. Ah, I will now call on Hridmita
23 Hasan to testify.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.
25

HRIDMITA HASAN: My name is Hridmita Hasan and I am a current junior at Hunter College High School. In my five years at Hunter I have found that the 2.4% black, 6.2% Latinx, and 9% low-income student population maintained by the school often manifests and takes other forms in student life as unconscious biases and it put assumptions outside of just being a few disheartening and depressing statistics. Not only does Hunter perpetuate an environment that promotes segregation between students, but they continue to promote educational experiences that are disparate, unequal, and incredibly isolating. My identity as a South Asian practicing Muslim at Hunter presents me at both ends of the spectrum. I am an ethnic majority whilst remaining a religious minority. And while I have felt the [inaudible] political salients and accentuation of my religion through my friends, peers, teachers, and classes, it isn't anything compared to what I've seen some of the more prominent ethnically underrepresented minorities at school face. I have watched my own friends unconsciously create and take part in exerting a hostile environment for underrepresented peers through

[inaudible] statements, insensitive quips that were meant to be funny, and even casual actions that aren't meant to mean any harm. It is no lie that there is a general sense of ignorance and closed-mindedness among the Hunter student population and the Hunter community. And while no one is at direct fault, there is also no lie that the admissions process continue to encourage this. Hunter offers a variety of resources and opportunities for students, including a handful of cultural clubs, that allows students to find comfort, seeking solace in their peers who come from similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. But a 40-minute meeting with kids of the same background, whether that be race or ethnicity, isn't enough because the issues lie within the community as a whole. While students may meet in this manner and express their sentiments with their friends, who may have dealt with similar experiences in the Hunter community, this is a conversation that regards, that regards the entire Hunter population. It is not fair that these students are being forced to pick up the pieces and deal with the collateral damage of the pressing issues and experiences they are put through because of our community, whether

unconscious or not. We are asking that you hear us and see the reverse effects of your efforts in composing and polishing the Hunter population. While students may be surrounded by individuals who are bright, talented, and challenge them to do better, they are also being denied the use of cultural sensitivity, empathy, and self-awareness that will aid them through a exponentially diverse future to come. It is important that CUNY and Hunter recognize the necessity of increased diversity and publically commit to reforming the admissions process. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. I will now call on Mia Montrose.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MIA MONTROSE: I actually believe that Clementine Roach was supposed to be on that list and go before me.

CLEMENTINE ROACH: Hello, sorry, um...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CLEMENTINE ROACH: Hi, my name is Clementine and I'm a senior at Hunter College High School. I'm here to talk about the way Hunter's current admission system disproportionately benefits

students who have the ability to pay for test prep, disadvantaging low-income students. Our teachers who write the test have earlier clearly highlighted the fault with the current process of a single high-stakes test. However, many who recognize these flaws still point to the way test prep gives bright students the training they need to take the test and get in. They ask why instead of making all these changes to the process can't we just create opportunities for test prep for low-income students. Years of attempts by alums in our administration to increase free test prep for, for prospective seventh graders has shown that this is an ineffective solution for a number of reasons. First, whether or not it is free, many low-income students will not have the time to do test prep as they must work or help take care of families. Second, even if these programs are well run they will never have the resources or staff of businesses that charge thousands of dollars. Rather than giving disadvantaged students a leg up, it would just turn the test into a war over who has access to the best prep. People who can afford it will always be able to pay for more expensive prep and have the

connections to beat the system. In 2020 Hunter tried to increase free test prep and it did not bring in a single student. Furthermore, if we recognize that test prep is a large factor being able to get in, then we are also recognizing that many of the students Hunter admits are students with the most prep, rather than the most overall high-achieving and brightest student. And HCHS administrators even admitted to the assumption that every student who goes to Hunter takes prep. This is in evidence of a flaw with the system. Within Hunter, critical thinking, complex and thorough understanding of material is valued highly, as opposed to rote memorization and cramming without really understanding the mechanics of a subject. Shouldn't we want our admissions process to reflect these values? Not only does a reliance on test prep demonstrate the flaws of the test and its misalignment with Hunter's mission and values, it also divests from actual educational programs to help low-income students. By focusing resources on test prep for underprivileged students, we are ignoring the fact that they may not have the same grounding of certain fundamental skills because of disparities in

earlier education. Money could instead, for example, be used for a summer program that helps incoming students with less resources prepare for seventh grade, rather than preparing them for a test. Beyond any debate over the efficacy of test prep, the relationship between private test prep businesses and HCHS, a public high school is problematic. HCHS4Diversity recently held a press conference that's been talked about a lot in this hearing with Council Member Inez Barron after 37 elected officials signed a letter addressed to the Hunter administration, urging this year's test to develop, ah, equitable admissions alternatives, this test be suspended and develop admissions alternatives. In retaliation, Kwellier test prep, a service used by many who prepare for the Hunter test, wrote a reactionary email to everybody on their mailing list. We have submitted the full email, which can be found as the 25th document in our written testimony, pages 147 to [inaudible]...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CLEMENTINE ROACH: ...Ah, can I continue, please?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, you may.

CLEMENTINE ROACH: Ah, thank you. Ah, but in short it was a fear-mongering call to action which showed an image of HCHS4Diversity spaces, which included multiple minors, and then attacked our ideas, including personal attacks on Council Member Brad Lander and his daughter. It should be disturbing to see a private for-profit business attempting to influence the admissions process of a public high school. While the email attempts to push responsibility for change onto early education rather than HCHS, it is clear this is an email created by a business desperate not to lose money. Kwellier prep is charge \$3900 for Zoom courses and \$4500 for in-person classes this summer. In Kwellier's About Us page, Hunter is the first school they mention. If the test were to be changed or removed, Kwellier could lose a lot of money. We do not want, ah, private businesses should not have an influence over New York City students' education. We do not want to build up a flawed system. We want to reform the current one or create a new one that will bring in high-achieving students from all over the city, not just the ones who have \$4000 to spend on prep. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Clementine, for your testimony. We will now turn to Mia Montrose.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MIA MONTROSE: Thank you. So good afternoon. My name is Mia Montrose and I'm a junior at Hunter College High School. As a black student, every day is a reminder that our student body does not represent the entirety of New York City's academic talent. I'm constantly faced with the question of whether or not I belong here. I started in an elementary school surrounded by a people that looked like me, where my culture was celebrated and shared. My Caribbean roots grew to become a defining part of my identity, but that part of me is lost inside Hunter's walls. In fact, I still look to my old elementary school friends for a space where I can be myself, because I only need one hand to count the amount of people at Hunter with a similar cultural identity. Because the majority of my peers come from similar backgrounds, I often have difficulty partaking in class discussions because of the feeling that everything I say will be wrong simply because it's different. It was only until this year in

English class when we started one of Zora Neale Hurston's novels that I felt that I could add to the conversation, only because I saw myself in her work. Even then I felt like my experience was overlooked by other students. Plainly put, being a part of the minority at Hunter has been isolating and damaging. But this lack of diversity is hurting all of Hunter's students. Underrepresented populations are not reaching their full social, emotional, or academic potential and the rest of our peers aren't being exposed to the different perspectives, cultures, or realities of an extremely diverse city. This is a direct out come of Hunter's sole reliance on a single high-stakes admissions exam. The Hunter test has proved itself to fail students at underfunded and understaffed schools and to overlook the implications of New York City's segregated school system. This is important to recognize, especially as we consider what this means for the students across our city that have received disparate and unequal educational opportunities after school shut down last spring. As a city, we have seen how the pandemic has disproportionately affected low-income families and families of color. An admissions process that

1 considers a student's background or educational
2 hardships must replace Hunter's current process if we
3 truly want to recognize and support the academic
4 talent from our city's most vulnerable New Yorkers.
5 While the Hunter test has only been postponed, not
6 canceled, competitive exam schools across the country
7 have suspended their single high-stakes admissions
8 exams, as Council Member Lander stated, for 2021 and
9 have implemented systems that aim to consider the
10 effects of the pandemic while still admitting a
11 diverse high-achieving class. Excellence lies in
12 equity. Hunter College High School has the
13 opportunity to follow this lead given that the school
14 is not restricted by Hecht-Calandra. We have the
15 freedom to experiment with our admissions process and
16 implement an equitable process for the 2021 admission
17 cycle. We understand that any substantive way
18 requires time and money.

19
20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 MIA MONTROSE: May I continue? Thank
22 you. Um, we understand that any substantive way
23 forward requires time and money, but proactivity and
24 intention are even more conducive to progress.
25 Hunter College High School is a remarkable place.

But we will continue to hold our administration accountable in creating a school that admits students equitability and that is a place where students like me and all those who spoke before me can truly thrive. Referencing the second document of our submitted written testimony, found on pages 2-5, we have known that this test is not an accurate measure of academic talent or potential, but an indicator of socioeconomic and situational privilege for 20 years. The educational disparities across New York City have existed long before 2020, but the pandemic has served to bring them into our public consciousness. This is an opportunity to examine all the ways in which not only our city's elite high schools, but our entire education system fails underrepresented students. We need commitment and we need reform. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Mia. I will now call on Brianna Gallimore.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

BRIANNA GALLIMORE: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Chair Barron, for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you to the Hunter College High School students for their

continued leadership and advocacy. Please know that you have the support of the HCHS students on this call. My, my name is Brianna Gallimore and I'm a junior at the High School of American Studies and a member of the HCAS Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. On my first day of HCHS I was told that I got lucky. As one of four black students in my grade, I immediately felt out of place. I took the HCHS T with no prep and scored only one point above the cutoff. I can say no more than I got lucky. I got lucky, but the education of black and brown students should not be based on luck. We should not have to feel like outsiders in our own school. For many black students like myself, choosing a high school makes, means making a choice between an inclusive environment and a quality education, a choice that no student should have to make. Admissions to specialized high schools are held under lock and key, only accessible to those who can afford thousands of dollars in test prep. Factors such as access to resources and an alienating curriculum increase socioeconomic tensions and end up targeting low-income students, many of whom are black and Latinx, therefore limiting their access to these

1 specialized high schools. We have certainly felt the
2 effects of these inequities at HCHS. When the school
3 was founded in 2002 until around 2012, HCHS had a
4 diverse student body with about a fourth of each race
5 being represented. But since then its demographics
6 have shifted. According to the City Council's own
7 data, today the school is only 5% black and around
8 14% Latinx. This is completely different from the
9 demographics of Lehman College, our CUNY host, which
10 is around 53% Hispanic and 30% black. There is a
11 large discrepancy between CUNY schools like Lehman,
12 which tend to be very diverse and representative of
13 the communities that they serve, versus HCHS,
14 although being on the same campus, is not nearly as
15 representative of the diversity in the Bronx or the
16 diversity in New York City as a whole. In keeping
17 with our current admissions system, there is only one
18 other method that would immediately increase the
19 diversity in our school, the Discovery program, which
20 gives disadvantaged students who score just below the
21 SHSAT cutoff score an opportunity to attend HCHS.
22 Through the Discovery program we have seen an
23 increase in the diversity and we hope to expand the
24 program soon. Right now, I go to a high school that

1 is incredibly racially, ethnically, and
2 socioeconomically homogenous. And I have experienced
3 the detrimental effects of such lack, of such a lack
4 of diversity. While students have taken upon
5 themselves to try to rectify this problem, it is not
6 a fight that we can undertake on our own. We need,
7 we need help from legislators like yourselves. I
8 implore you to take note of the personal accounts
9 given today and commit to diversity, equity, and
10 inclusion in our school. A student should never be
11 forced to choose between a diverse environment...

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 BRIANNA GALLIMORE: ...[inaudible].

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You may continue.

15 BRIANNA GALLIMORE: Thank you. Quality
16 education does not exist without diversity.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
18 testimony, Brianna. I will now be calling on
19 AnnaBelle Medina.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 ANNABELLE MEDINA: My name is AnnaBelle
22 Medina and I go to the High School of American
23 Studies. I want to thank the council and Chair
24 Barron for the opportunity to testify. I started at
25

HCHS in the fall of 2017. Transitioning into high school is objectively challenging for any student. But the way in which my experience was difficult felt unique from that of my peers. The District 10 middle school I went to was a safe space for me. In the classroom I heard from different, I heard from students in a different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, I had the security of knowing my culture was represented as well. This combination ensured that I felt respected and appreciated. Because I was appreciated, I had no idea that what I truly feeling was the larger positive impact of attending a diverse institution. This experience was what I thought would stick with me throughout my high school years while going to school in the Bronx. However, at HCHS I felt incredibly isolated, despite attending a school in District 10 whose campus is surrounded by people of color. When I would walk into the Lehman College cafeteria to buy lunch I saw almost exclusively black and Hispanic college students, as one would imagine in Bedford Park. But when I would return from lunch, I struggled to even find another Hispanic student in the classroom and almost never had any classes with

black students, as there were only four in our entire grade. My high school experience was supposed to be defined by normal teenage activities, but the two things I will remember most are the isolation I felt and the work I did to combat that feeling.

Organizing with my peers, some of whom are testifying today, we created the Committee for Equity,

Diversity, and Inclusion to provide a safe spaces for students of color at HCHS. In addition, we launched

a campaign to advocate for expanding the Discovery program to 33%, which helps HCHS bring in more

students of color from the Bronx. During the

campaign we spent our entire summer meeting with

elected officials to pressure the Department of

Education to use the power that they have within the

state law to increase diversity at our school. Since

representatives from this year we have been reluctant

to embrace this necessary measure. I urge the

council to compose and sign on to a resolution

directed at Chancellor Carranza requesting he

increase the Discovery program to 33%, or to work

with us in order to take other appropriate action.

However, we are aware that Discovery is just a

temporary solution to the structural inequity within

1 that specialized high school admissions process.
2 This is why I also urge the council to adopt
3 Resolution 1401, calling for the state legislature
4 and governor to repeat Hecht-Calandra, giving New
5 York City the power to reform our own admissions
6 processes. Although all the work that we, as high
7 schoolers, have done to foster diversity has been
8 incredibly empowering, the truth is that it is unfair
9 we were forced to take on this task in the first
10 place. It is unjust that those who have been harmed
11 most by the lack of diversity are the ones who must
12 work to solve the issues that our current system
13 created. Due to the pandemic the HCHS Class of '25
14 is especially at risk to be one of the least diverse
15 classes yet. Because of school closures, District 10
16 middle school students may have had, may have been
17 less prepared to take...

18
19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20 ANNABELLE MEDINA: ...[inaudible]
21 admissions test. Ah, may I continue, please?

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, you may.

23 ANNABELLE MEDINA: Thank you. District
24 10 middle school students may have been less prepared
25 to take the specialized high school admissions test

and possibly not even aware that the test exists. This makes your support in urging the Department of Education to increase the Discovery program and the state to repeal Hecht-Calandra by adopting Resolution 1401 all the more necessary. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, AnnaBelle. Ah, I will now call on Charlotte Ritz-Jack.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

CHARLOTTE RITZ-JACK: Good morning and thank you to Chair Barron for her leadership on this incredibly important is. My name is Charlotte Ritz-Jack and I'm a senior at the High School of American Studies at Lehman College, or HSAS, and a leader of the HSAS Committee for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. For almost nine months our school has tirelessly fought to expand the percentage of students admitted through the Discovery program to one-third of each incoming class. While the HSAS community overwhelming supports this proposal, our advocacy work has been led by students. We are directly impacted by education public policy, and we know this change will create a better social and academic experiences for all members of our

community. In the status quo with Hecht-Calandra still in place the Discovery program is our only method of increasing diversity at our school. The percentage of Discovery program admits a lot [inaudible] specialists high schools decided by the chancellor. Our advocacy has all revolved around urging Chancellor Carranza to expand the Discovery program because the Discovery program works. Our proportion of white and wealthy students, which is uniquely very high at HSAS and among the greatest across city schools, has gone down at the same proportion for which Discovery program admits have increased. This year the freshman class is 50% white, the lowest it has been since 2012 when our demographics began to shift, and 20% of students were accepted through the Discovery program, the highest proportion in HSAS history. Our freshman class looks a lot different than our senior class, which was only 6% Discovery students. Action is even more desperately needed now as we could have our least diverse yet. This year the DOE administered the SHSAT on short notice as the pandemic continued to ravage our city. Many students unable to access tutoring and without adequate time to prepare

1 [inaudible] neighborhoods, like many in the Bronx
2 where schools are located, painfully impacted by
3 COVID to an inequitable proportion simply did not sit
4 for the exam this year. The COVID-19 crisis has put
5 many of New York City middle school students in
6 unimaginably hard situations. This testing cycle
7 favors privileged white students more than any other
8 group. An expansion of the Discovery program is
9 direly needed. And we have met with over 20 elected
10 officials requesting that they advocate on our behalf
11 with the chancellor. Additionally, nearly a hundred
12 members of our community, parents, alums, teachers,
13 and current students, have emailed Chancellor
14 Carranza requesting an expansion of the Discovery
15 program beginning in the 2021 to 2020 school, school
16 cycle and moving forward. Chancellor Carranza has
17 overwhelmingly withheld a response, declining
18 opportunities to work together and make this change a
19 reality. He has responded with just one state
20 senator's advocacy, despite the hundreds of letters,
21 and cited the Christa McAuliffe Intermediate School
22 PTO's lawsuit of expired relevance as the DOE's
23 reasoning for not acting on our proposal. The
24 Christa McAuliffe Intermediate School PTO versus Bill
25

de Blasio was filed in early 2019, when de Blasio and Carranza announced an increase of the Discovery program to 20%. The federal suit argues an expansion of the Discovery program constitutes as racial discrimination against Asian American and is thus a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. However, the suit has no impact on the expansion of the Discovery program at HSAS. As the PTO requested a preliminary injunction alongside their filing of the suit, asking any changes to the Discovery program be halted until the suit...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHARLOTTE RITZ-JACK: May I continue?

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes, you may.

CHARLOTTE RITZ-JACK: Thank you. Ah, this request was denied on February 25 of 2019 by Federal Judge Edgardo Ramos on the basis that the suit was "not likely to succeed on their equal protection claim." In other words, the decision was made because the court found the case unlikely to prevail. Christa McAuliffe then appealed the decision and on December 20 of 2019 the United States Court of Appeals withheld the decision, upheld the decision to reject the preliminary injunction.

1 Additionally, Bronx Science alum Clyde Millan
2 followed a lawsuit with the New York State Education
3 Department when the 20% expansion of the Discovery
4 program was mandated. The case was dismissed on
5 August 29 of 2019. The decision reads, "I cannot
6 conclude that respondent's expansion and modification
7 of the Discovery program was unlawful, arbitrary, or
8 capricious." These suits have been rejected by
9 judges and have no legal implications for the
10 expansion of the Discovery program. So today we are
11 here in front of the City Council asking for
12 movement. To the members of the Higher Education
13 Committee and other members of the council committed
14 to integration and persuaded of diversity's infinite
15 benefits, action come in a composition and a
16 signature on a resolution directed at Chancellor
17 Carranza requesting he implement our school's
18 proposal to expand the Discovery program as submitted
19 in June of 2020. But advocacy doesn't end there. We
20 urge the city's leaders to listen and truly commit to
21 holistically creating an equitable system of
22 education because that's where excellence lie,
23 excellence lies. Our school, its students, teachers,
24 and faculty will thank you, as will the legacy of the
25

city as elected representation taking a stand to move our currently segregated reality towards a future that prioritizes opportunity. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony, Charlotte. Um, before I turn to Chair Barron for questions, I'd like to remind council members to use the raise hand function in Zoom to indicate they have a question for the panel. And I'll turn it Chair Barron for her questions.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very much. I want to thank the panel for coming and, ah, I, I do want to acknowledge that our second panel, the CUNY panel, has remained and I'm grateful for that, so that they can hear directly from the students what it is that their concerns are. In terms of, I particularly want to give some time to the students from the High School for American Studies 'cause we haven't heard from them, ah, previously, ah, during this hearing. In terms of what you're experiencing at your school how, what has been the, um, position of the administration? What has been the opportunity to be able to say, ah, we're not bound by Hecht-Calandra, only those three schools are, so what has been the efforts, ah, of the administration to look

1 at, do they see this as a challenge or as a gap, and
2 what has been their response in trying to address
3 that issue? Have they met with you? Have they had
4 conversation? Are there any kinds of initiatives or,
5 ah, student meetings that are held that allow
6 students to dialogue and to talk about what might be
7 those unconscious biases? What's been your
8 experience with the administration at your school?

10 ANNABELLE MEDINA: Um, yeah, so our
11 administration is completely supportive of expanding
12 the Discovery program. They submitted the proposal
13 to the DOE in June of 2020. It's, um, submitted with
14 our written testimony to the council as well. Um,
15 and it was submitted not only with the principal and
16 vice principal's support, but with every faculty
17 member, um, at our high school. Ah, and
18 unfortunately we are bound by Hecht-Calandra. When
19 our school was mandated a specialized high school we
20 were immediately added to the law. Um, so we will
21 have to wait until it is either repealed or something
22 else happens, um, to have some wider systemic reform.

23 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So the Hecht-
24 Calandra you're saying extends beyond just Stuyvesant
25 Tech and the Brooklyn College, ah, Brooklyn Tech,

1 Stuyvesant, and Bronx. But in fact, OK, ah, so what
2 has been your experience as students, then, ah, to
3 mobilize, and we appreciate the fact that you're in
4 that leadership and taking on that struggle to be
5 able to, to make that difference. Well, what do you
6 see as, you talked about the Discovery program and
7 the benefits from that. Has that been something that
8 has been, ah, going on an incline? What's been the
9 trend in terms of the, ah, Discovery program?

11 ANNABELLE MEDINA: Um, yeah, so
12 basically, um, like you said, we all mobilized over
13 the summer, um, beginning with sort of like a letter,
14 um, that circulated around our school, um, that had
15 the support of different staff members, of students,
16 of parents and alum, um, where we essentially started
17 the initiative to expand diversity within HSAS. Um,
18 and like I want to say Brianna mentioned in her
19 testimony before, Discovery program, it is the only
20 way right now that we can expand diversity and it is
21 the one thing that we can advocate for within our
22 city because we are bound to Hecht. Um, so a lot of
23 our focus has gone to trying to expand this program
24 to 33%. Um, so over the summer, like we had
25 mentioned before, um, we went with different elected

1 officials in order to, um, sort of try and lobby the
2 chancellor to increase that. Um, as mentioned
3 before, he did increase it to 20% a few years ago,
4 but at our school we just have such a unique
5 proportion of white students that the 20% is not
6 enough for our school. We need more than that and
7 because our school is so small, I want to say about
8 100 kids per grade, each and every percentage
9 represents one student who could be coming in through
10 Discovery. So that like every single percentage
11 matters a lot for our school and it is like
12 imperative that we are able to expand this program
13 because that is right now the most we can do besides
14 campaigning to repeal Hecht-Calandra.

16 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Well, I want to
17 thank you for coming and sharing your testimony, and
18 I just want to make sure that you're aware that many
19 instances it was the student population that brought
20 about change. Ah, we can look back to the struggle
21 of the Civil Rights Movement. We can look across
22 other countries, other nations. It's that p
23 operation of students that are fighting for CUNY, and
24 CUNY itself was that population of students in the,
25 ah, Sixties that fought to have the black studies

1 program, that fought to have open admissions, and
2 it's, ah, I guess that, that urge and that vibrancy
3 and that youthfulness and that quest for doing what's
4 right, what's just, and what's equitable that in fact
5 serves as an impetus to get you to move. So I just
6 want to say that I support you, I commend you, and
7 look forward to your ongoing efforts and in any way
8 that I can continue to work with you and advance your
9 cause I'm glad to do that. So please just make sure
10 you reach out to me and we can stay in touch as we
11 move forward and share ideas to, to shake the system,
12 to break up this concrete that, ah, has so many
13 institutions embedded in it and doesn't want to let
14 it loose. But thank you so much for your testimony.
15 Madam Moderator?

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
18 Barron. Seeing as there don't appear to be any more
19 council members with questions, I can turn it back to
20 you if you have any additional questions, or we can
21 go on to the next panel.

22 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: We can move to the
23 next panel, thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right, thank you.
25 All right. In our next panel we will have, we have,

um, pardon, Aesam Sharafaldin. Aesam, if, if you're available?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: Hello. Ah, hello.

My name is Aesam Sharafaldin and I'm a first-generation immigrant. My parents were both raised in Yemen and I [inaudible] in my life. I'm a New York City native and I grew up in Flatbush, Brooklyn. As a student at the Macaulay Honors College at CUNY Hunter I've rarely felt at home. To say the least, Honors College is disproportionately white, has always made me feel alienated, especially during the required seminars that were made for the sole purpose of creating a sense a community. There is this pressure to assimilate and oftentimes requires me to compromise my own unique personality that got me here in the first place. Watching groups of white or white-passing people [inaudible] create a sense of exclusivity by only socializing amongst themselves, while I had to struggle to find familiar face for my own sense of community just never sat right with me. While this is just a personal anecdote, I've bonded with many people of color in the same Honors College in grades above, below, and in other CUNY campuses.

Part of the admissions process for the Macaulay Honors College for the class of 2022 is to respond to a prompt describing why you love NYC. And it is sad to say that the people who uphold this very culture that we praise and love are underrepresented and struggle to find those same principles within the Honors College. While CUNY is the college of proletariat its Honors College is definitely not.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Do you have more? Ah, you're muted.

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: [inaudible].

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. You're muted again.

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: Yeah, I'm saying, no, that is it, that is all.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK, oh, that's it, OK, great, thank you so much. Are there other members of this panel, Madam Moderator?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: There aren't any logged in currently. I think there are a few that were hoping to get in around 12:30, but I don't know if we'll be, might be concluded by that time. But if you have any questions.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much for, for participating in our hearing, and, ah, you talk about a program that we had not previously discussed at length. They were in my opening remarks, but we had not discussed them at length, the Macaulay program. How does someone get into the Macaulay Honors program? Sharafaldin, can [inaudible]?

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: [inaudible] So the admissions process just requires you to have a specific GPA and, ah, you would have to write, you have to respond to essay prompts and you'd have to go through a series of, like I think one interview. I think it might differ depending on the CUNY campus you're applying to. But for Hunter College specifically I went through one interview and had to send in two essays.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And in terms, in terms of your participation at Hunter, do you select the school that you want to attend? Do you select the program through the school or do you have the program, ah, how does that work?

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: You select the CUNY campus you'd want to attend to and then you apply from Macaulay to that campus. But the application process is, is the same, but the interview itself might be dependent on the CUNY you're applying to, 'cause I know, ah, other friends in other campuses that didn't have to go through an interview.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Oh, so each campus may have its own, ah, requirements for admission?

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: Yeah, but, but the, the, ah, the essays, the prompts, are common throughout.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: It's interesting. I thought I heard you say that the prompt was why I love New York City, is that what you said?

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: Yeah. That was from the Class of 2022. We'd have to, one of the prompt is to respond to.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's a very...

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: ...[inaudible] around New York City that you love, the culture, whatever it is.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's a very presumptuous topic heading, ah, very perhaps limiting

rather than being more open and inviting another kind of perspective and, ah, I don't know who proposes those questions but rather than saying how, what do you feel about New York City, you know, to say why you love New York City, it assumes that you're here and that you have had all kinds of positive experiences. So that's an interesting topic. In terms of the Macaulay Honors program, you're, you're in Hunter.

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: What are the, who are the other students that are in Hunter in that Macaulay Honors program? And how do you interact with them? Do you have classes together? Do you travel together?

AESAM SHARAFALDIN: [inaudible] so a lot, a huge chunk of people would then migrate specifically, come from Staten Island, Staten Island Tech, to, to be exact, and the majority of them are, are either white or white-passing. And there's like this like, almost like a cult, and I don't mean to point fingers or anything, but it's like the same people like have the, like striking sense of exclusivity and it's just like, and it makes you,

1 it's like I have to put in the work in order to
2 actually assimilate and compromise my personality in
3 the process and, ah, we also find people from Long
4 Island, like not, not like, the majority of the
5 people that I've interacted with are not even from
6 NYC itself. They're like Long Island or, ah, I mean,
7 Staten Island is part of the five boroughs, but it's
8 a, it's some anomaly.

10 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: So do you feel that
11 there are any kind of opportunities for you to share
12 your cultural experiences and have them acknowledged
13 or have them, ah, a part of the conversation? Are
14 there groups, sessions where particularly the
15 Macaulay Honors students come together to, ah,
16 interact as a group?

17 AESAM SHARAFALDIN: Yes, ah, so the
18 college itself has these required seminars and
19 there's four of them, and, uh, they were made for the
20 sole purpose of like creating a sense of community
21 for these students and the only problem is that
22 there's, there's no one, I mean, it's hard to find
23 people to share, that share your same experience,
24 like with, within the college. So while there are
25 these seminars, like it's not enough.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Um, I think that it's interesting, because for me I don't see education as, as the, um, platform to require someone to be so-called assimilated in terms of blending in. Ah, I much more think that it's a matter of acknowledging and sharing, and I, I think back to, ah, I would, I've been reading recently about, it was a woman highlighted in Google who was a Native American and she talked about her experience. I think her last name was Sa, S-A, and she talked about her experiences and how when she went to the educational system, ah, on, on the reservation she was assimilated and lost her identity and lost a part of her culture, and so I'm always wondering when people say assimilated do they mean that they're giving up or they need to, ah, she talked about the fact that they cut her long hair, which was a sign of her culture, and she dressed differently. So are we talking about that kind of requirement, that people deny or not acknowledge or not, ah, be proud of their own cultural differences as assimilation, or are we talking about the opportunity to share your culture, your hairstyle, your clothing, ah, your manner of dress, in a way that people can become educated as to

1 what your own groups have contributed or how they
2 just have their cultural expressions? So I'm, I'm
3 concerned that we not see assimilation as, as being
4 giving up so that you can be part of the group, but
5 being able to share your own specific cultural
6 differences and have them not diminished or neglected
7 or pushed aside, but acknowledged, so, I don't know
8 how you feel about that assimilation.

10 AESAM SHARAFALDIN: I mean, ideally we'd
11 like to share our culture and not, not just
12 compromise in the process. But I think CUNY should
13 do more, or Macaulay Honors should do more in that,
14 in that context in order to help the students that
15 are not necessarily white, the people of color within
16 the college.

17 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: And, and the other
18 thing that I just want to say is that for me it's not
19 about having, ah, not about having to move from our
20 own environments and our own cultures into the
21 dominant in terms of the number of students in, in
22 the program, white population, but simply the fact
23 that the racism and the systemic differences and
24 disparity have poured the resources into these kinds
25 of programs that give them, ah, more of an

1 opportunity, that have other kinds of educational
2 supports that are available that make them more
3 attractive than perhaps other schools that don't have
4 those tangible material resources. But for me it's
5 not about integrating to be in that so-called white
6 group or that white environment, that privileged
7 group, but simply not being denied the opportunity to
8 take advantage of that. So I'm very leery also when
9 people say integrate, as if to say that's the body
10 that in fact has the more advantageous kinds of
11 circumstance. No told me I'd been muted. I don't
12 know for how long [laughs].

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Just a few seconds.

15 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK. So I, I just
16 want to share that, um, and thank you for coming and
17 sharing your testimony. OK, thank you. Madam
18 Moderator?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.
20 We've actually been joined by another panelist. So
21 I'll now take the time to call Diana Kennedy to
22 testify.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 DIANA KENNEDY: Hi, um, thank you all for
25 allowing me to come into the space, ah, to, ah, give

1 my testimony. Um, so as a Macaulay Honors student
2 I'm actually one of, I think approximately 10 black
3 students in my graduating class at Hunter College.
4 Um, we have well over 100 students in the program,
5 the majority of which at Hunter are white and, um,
6 Asian, and when I first arrived to the college I,
7 because it was a CUNY institution I assumed that it
8 would be diverse and that I would be interacting with
9 students who look like me on a daily basis. But I
10 was found that Macaulay Honors program within Hunter
11 was not representative of all, at all of the overall,
12 um, student population at Hunter College. Um, and as
13 a new student who was really new to being in such an
14 academically rigorous program I felt that being the
15 few, one of the few students of color, um, I was more
16 prone to falling into the imposter syndrome, um, and
17 stuff like that. So I felt it was very difficult for
18 me at first to felt as if I belonged within this
19 program. Um, additionally, like Aesam mentioned
20 before, we do have these Macaulay seminars in which
21 we are meant to forge a sort of community with our
22 fellow students, um, and some of these seminars are
23 actually focused on the history of New York City and
24 the people within, ah, the city. Um, however, these
25

1 seminars don't really emphasize the black experience
2 I felt in the way that they should and all the
3 seminars professors that I've had, um, since freshman
4 year were either Asian or white, um, and so it made
5 sort of conversations about, for example, police
6 brutality, um, and issues within the black community
7 sort of uncomfortable to have in that setting. I
8 remember in one of the seminars that I had we were
9 discussing, um, broken windows policing, um, and also
10 racial profiling, and because I was one of the few,
11 or actually the only black student in the class, ah,
12 the professor would often, I guess inadvertently use
13 me as an example for certain things, so for example
14 he would say, ah, in an instance of racial profiling
15 someone who looks like Diana, for example, would be
16 stopped, um, and not someone who looks like me,
17 referring to himself, who was a white male teacher.
18 Um, and so at the time I tend to let things roll off
19 my back and not really take them too personally. But
20 I spoke to professor and I told him, you know, am I
21 the only, your only example that you're using in
22 class because I'm the only student of color here,
23 the only black student. Um, and so obviously he was
24 a little bit embarrassed and became very flustered.
25

1 But then I realized that it's because Macaulay is
2 structured in a way in which students like me are not
3 really present in a classroom. So when we're having
4 discussions about the black community or about
5 policing or police violence, um, it's, it's sort of
6 difficult to have really an open dialogue with people
7 that don't necessarily understand the issue that
8 they're talking about.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

11 DIANA KENNEDY: Ah, and...

12 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: You may continue.

13 DIANA KENNEDY: Yes, OK. Um, and I'm
14 also part of Macaulay Diversity Initiative, which is
15 a student group which advocates for, um, students of
16 color within, um, Macaulay Honors College [inaudible]
17 recently we had a Zoom attack for one of our Black
18 History Month events and it took Dean Pearl
19 approximately, a little more than a week to respond
20 to the attack that had happened. In the meantime, a
21 bunch of other student groups, um, showed out in
22 solidarity for us and I feel that Macaulay doesn't
23 support students like myself in the way that they
24 should, um, and the environment that's created,
25 though not intentionally hostile, can definitely come

off as so, um, because there's so little students of color present. Um, thank you, that is all I have to say.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Oh, sorry, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: That's OK. Thank you so much for, for your testimony. It's always most important to hear directly from those who are impacted by the issues that we're discussing, and it highlights for me that, ah, there are still those who are charged with perhaps being sensitive and leading sessions that are supposed to bring some type of sensitivity who themselves have not been adequately prepared to do an analysis of their, ah, perhaps unconscious bias or insensitivity, ah, to highlight or someone who looks like a person in the class rather than talking generically and not being aware that there might be that level of sensitivity or uncomfortableness. Ah, I hope that he did apologize publicly since he made the statement publicly. Did he, Diana?

DIANA KENNEDY: Yes, yes, he did apologize at the end of the class.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: OK, well, that's good. That's, that's, ah, some acknowledge that came there. But it also says to me then that as Macaulay is in fact structuring these seminars with the intent of creating a sense of equity and understanding that they need to be very, very focused and very, ah, demonstrative in their, ah, in their presentation of being inclusive, because it appears to me that they're not being inclusive. And that's traditional. That's historic. You know, the people are still talking about Christopher Columbus discovered America when that's not factually true. And people are still talking about the fact that African Americans, ah, were enslaved and were very docile and that's not true. There's a whole period of resistance. So we've got to, there's a lot that we have to do to try to correct the historical errors and lies that are incorporated, and to look how we can bring that forward and make ourselves better people as we look at all of the members of our society. Ah, but I thank you for coming, and I thank you for your testimony.

DIANA KENNEDY: Yes, thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you. Madam Moderator?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Barron. I believe we've been joined by our final panelist. Um, I believe this is Matthew Barron, but please note that your name is listed as Aesam Sharafaldin, so if you could just provide us your name for the record, and then please testify.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

MATTHEW BARRON: Hi, hi everyone. My name is, ah, Matthew Barron, as stated. I don't know why it's showing up as Aesam Sharafaldin. But, um, yeah, I'm a junior in Macaulay and sort of like I haven't faced a specific micro aggression similar to Diana. However, I was really disappointed coming into the CUNY system. As a student at one of New York City's prestigious high schools, the Specialized High School Program, it, it was like the same thing. All the students there were also white and there was like lack of representation there, and students would just say like, like remarks that were not very, that, that, that, that would not really like, I don't know, just like, um, showed their representation and they, they, they would, ah, ah, say things about like, like

me being the only black person in school. And I thought that going to the CUNY system, known for its diversity, and its prestigious I would be able to escape from that. But, ah, as was, as was like their high school, the Prestigious High School Program in New York City, the Prestigious College Program in New York City is also very white as well. And I noticed a lot of the same patterns like, ah, black students being excluded from social gatherings, like parties, where most of the majority of the white students would be, but then the black students, ah, wouldn't be invited. And it's, I don't think, I don't think it's, it's, it's, it was meant to be malicious, but it definitely did come off in that way, considering that not only were there like parties and other social gatherings but even like around the campus like white students generally feel like less comfortable to talk to me than other white students I've noticed. Which like it lowers, as like a black student it lowers your confidence and you can sort of feel like a pariah in the school, even, even though it's not your fault. People just don't really understand your culture and, and, and they don't take the time to learn. There's, there's like other black

1 students I've seen in our grade who've been like
2 completely like excluded from like the grade as
3 whole, like they, they were never included in any
4 like social events at all. And it's, it's typical to
5 see that, like in the Macaulay like community within
6 the cohort. And just like the, that, it makes sense
7 that that would happen in any group of like, like,
8 ah, or any group or any community that, that isn't
9 diverse and only has a large majority of one group of
10 people. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your
13 testimony. Chair, do you have any questions?

14 CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Yes. Thank you.
15 Ah, glad again for your coming and sharing your
16 testimony. And I think that we're gonna have to have
17 a look at the Macaulay Honors program and perhaps not
18 in the format of a hearing per se, but looking at
19 that program and having some dialogue with CUNY to
20 have some improvements there and some, ah,
21 examination of what is actually happening so that we
22 can see what can be done to reduce this sense of
23 isolation or the projection of feeling less than and,
24 and be very targeted in giving the support and
25 encouragement to those students, black students in

particular who are not represented, ah, in sufficient numbers to let them know that they are valued, that they are important, and that they matter. Thank you so much for your testimony, and Madam Moderator, I'll turn it back to you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: All right. Thank you, Chair Barron. We have now heard from everyone that has signed up to testify. Ah, we appreciate your time and presence. If we inadvertently missed anyone that would like to testify, please use the Zoom raise hand function and I will call on you in the order of hands raised. I'll give everybody a minute to raise hands. Seeing no one else, I would like to note that written testimony, and which will be reviewed in full by committee staff may be submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing to, it to testimony@council.nyc.gov. That's testimony@council.nyc.gov. Um, Chair Barron, we have concluded public testimony for this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON BARRON: Thank you so much, and I just have to say to our new counsel, Emi Briggs, you did a fantastic job. You did it with ease. You didn't [inaudible] so I want to commend

1 you for how well you did on your maiden, ah, voyage
2 here. Thank you so much. And with that I want to
3 thank all of the panelists, thank all of you for your
4 testimony, and we've got to make CUNY better. You
5 know, it's where it is, but we've got to make CUNY
6 better in so many aspects of what it, ah, has to
7 offer in making sure that we get that equity. Um,
8 and CUNY alum, Hunter Class January 1967, and if it
9 were not for CUNY, were it not for CUNY I know that
10 my life would have taken a very different kind of
11 turn. So I want to make sure that we can make CUNY
12 better and work in that regard. Thank you to all the
13 students. We're living in very difficult times, a
14 time that none of us have ever lived through before
15 in terms of this pandemic, but I want to encourage
16 you and say be encouraged, don't give up, find some
17 kind of inner strength, find someone else you can
18 relate to that can help give you that boost, and my
19 office is always available. Please make sure you
20 reach out should we be able to help you in any
21 regard. And with that this hearing is adjourned.
22 I'm going to use my [inaudible] as a gavel and I
23 declare that this hearing is adjourned. Thank you.
24 [gavel]
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1 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 18, 2021