



Legislation Text

---

**File #:** Res 0868-2019, **Version:** \*

---

Res. No. 868

Resolution calling on the New York City Department of Education to ensure the methodology for developing and scoring the Specialized High School Admissions Test, and the methodology for any future process implemented for Specialized High School admissions, be transparent and accessible to the general public.

By Council Members Powers and Lander

Whereas, The New York City (NYC) Department of Education (DOE) manages NYC's public school system, which includes more than 1,800 schools, with over 400 high schools; and

Whereas, Included within the DOE's 400 high schools, are nine Specialized High Schools (SHS), which serve students who excel academically and/or artistically; and

Whereas, In NYC, SHS are regarded as the most prestigious public schools, with students scoring at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile of the state SAT distribution and accounting for the majority of NYC students who attend Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, according to a 2018 Brookings' report; and

Whereas, For eight of the nine SHS, admission is based solely on the score attained on a single test, the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), while for one of these schools, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts (LaGuardia), acceptance is based on an audition and a review of a student's academic records; and

Whereas, Notably, the enactment of a State law in 1971, known as the Hecht-Calandra Act, codified into law the SHS' use of a single test for admission, with the exception of LaGuardia, requiring that admission into a SHS "be solely and exclusively" gained by taking a specialized, voluntary admissions test, the SHSAT; and

Whereas, Due to the high educational standards of these schools, they are highly sought after and competitive; and

Whereas, For example, the DOE reports that approximately 27,500 NYC 8<sup>th</sup> graders took the SHSAT for admittance into one of the eight test-based SHS for the 2019-20 school year; however, only 4,798 of these students received an offer to one of the SHS as a result of their SHSAT score; and

Whereas, Despite the high demand for students to be admitted into SHS, there has been widespread discussion of the eight test-based SHS' use of a single test for admission, as many contend that considering other factors, such as student grades, will help create a fairer admissions system; and

Whereas, To support this assertion, a 2008 Arizona State University and University at Colorado at Boulder study by Dr. Joshua Feinman revealed striking flaws in the SHSAT's methodology, finding that: the SHSAT has an unusual, not widely known scoring feature that can favor those who have access to extensive test-prep tutors; thousands of students who are not accepted have scores that are statistically indistinguishable from thousands who are granted admission due to the use of less precise methods; certain versions of the SHSAT may increase the chances students have to gain admission; and no studies have ever been done to see if the SHSAT is subject to prediction bias across gender and ethnic groups; and

Whereas, Notably, the student population at these test-based SHS does not adequately represent the broader NYC high school population, which is apparent in these SHS' lack of black or Latino students (less than 10% in 2018) despite the DOE system being approximately two-thirds black or Latino over all, according to The New Yorker; and

Whereas, Thus, it is vital to ensure that the methods behind developing and scoring the SHSAT, or any future SHS admissions' methodology, be transparent and accessible, and subject to critical analysis and improvement, to help ensure that NYC's SHS are diverse and representative of the whole City; now, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the New York City Department of Education to ensure the methodology for developing and scoring the Specialized High School Admissions Test,

and the methodology for any future process implemented for Specialized High School admissions, be transparent and accessible to the general public.

KK  
LS 7339  
4/29/19