Beyond Segregation: NYU Metro Center Announces a Resource Center for School Diversity and Integration

The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools was awarded inaugural funding from New York City’s City Council for FY2017 to establish a Resource Center for School Diversity and Integration. Led by Metro Center’s Executive Director, Dr. David E. Kirkland and recently appointed Deputy Director of Policy, Research & Evaluation Norm Fruchter, the Resource Center will support efforts to integrate public schools in New York City by convening educators and advocates, providing technical assistance and research, and assisting with the development plans to support citywide integration efforts. According to Deputy Director Fruchter, “Despite its extraordinary overall diversity, New York City has one of the most segregated school systems in the country, and segregation has actually worsened in recent years; the Resource Center aims to provide support for citywide integration efforts.”

In May 2015, the New York City Council passed the “School Diversity Accountability Act,” to require the New York City Department of Education to publish an annual report on school demographics that shows the segregation and diversity in New York City schools, as well as the steps DOE is taking to strengthen diversity. The first report was published in December 2015.

Over the past two years, advocates, educators, and legislators have begun taking renewed steps to address this crisis, including efforts to promote school integration at numerous levels:

- **Individual schools:** Schools across NYC have sought to improve diversity through creative enrollment and outreach strategies. One result was DOE’s decision in November 2015 to allow seven schools to pilot enrollment policies to encourage diversity, by giving priority to students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL), English Language Learners (ELLs), students in the child welfare system, and children of incarcerated parents (building on a model established at Brooklyn’s PS 133). Numerous other schools are currently seeking to move in this direction.

- **District-wide controlled choice:** In several community school districts, educators and advocates are pushing for “controlled choice” – a model implemented in Cambridge, MA and San Jose, CA – which balances student choice with diversity goals to result in more integrated schools. The Community Education Councils in District 1 and District 13 are working with DOE, utilizing a New York State grant, to explore this option. Educators and advocates in Districts 3, 15, and other districts are exploring this option as well. Some advocates have also encouraged models that would span across two adjacent, segregated districts (e.g. District 2 and 4 in Manhattan).
• *Specialized high schools*: NYC’s specialized high schools have come under scrutiny for the lack of black and Latino students. Advocates have been pushing for a range of changes to the admissions process to promote more diversity in those schools, and a lawsuit is currently working its way through the courts. The de Blasio Administration recently announced expansions of the “DREAM” and “Discovery” programs, and is considering other steps as well.

• *Screened high schools*: Educators, advocates, and students themselves are pushing for admissions policies that promote diversity in NYC’s screened high-schools, which are generally more diverse than the specialized schools, but still far too segregated. Options include individual school priorities, controlled-choice, or a system like that of “Educational Option” schools, which admit a balance of students based on academic achievement.

To date, however, these efforts are fairly disparate, lacking an overall strategy for advocacy, research, professional development, or evaluation. Representatives from these various efforts have met several times under the auspices of the New York City Council, but they do not share a coalition, resource center, home for training and professional development, or other coordination or support. The NYU Metro Resource Center for School Diversity and Integration aims to provide that support.