

JUNE 17, 2014

The Brooklyn Technical High School PTA implores our state legislators not to bring Senate Bill S7738-2013, also known as A9979-2013 in the State Assembly (the "Bill") to a vote until parents, teachers, students, school principals, alumni, and the public have an opportunity to be heard on whether and how any changes should be made to the mandated admissions process governing admission to the New York City Specialized High Schools.

Brooklyn Tech has for over 90 years provided an outstanding education to a diverse population of students, the majority of whom live in lower income and/or immigrant families. Admission to Brooklyn Tech is completely meritocratic, based solely on a superior score achieved on the Specialized High School Admissions Test ("SHSAT"), administered in the fall of 8th grade.

The Bill proposes to change the criteria for admission to what is termed "multiple objective measures of student merit weighted by the City Board or Chancellor including the grade point average of applicants, school attendance records, school admission test scores, and state test scores." There is no evidence that such criteria will more accurately predict success in the programs offered by the Specialized High Schools than the SHSAT. Moreover, grade point averages of students from hundreds of middle schools across the city are not comparable. According to the Department of Education's own grading system, not all middle schools are equal. Some test independently for admission; some offer different courses and varying curricula; others have special and academic progress programs; and still others have greater or lesser resources. Simply stating that grade point averages based on teachers' perceptions of students' relative strengths within the four walls of an individual school are "objective" doesn't make it so.

Worse, the Bill was written in the absence of any consultation with the affected constituencies. The rush to bring the Bill to a vote now is not only misguided, but threatens the very existence of Brooklyn Tech and the other Specialized High Schools. Given the lack of consultation and transparency in bringing the Bill to the Senate floor, it is unclear whether the likely demise of the Specialized High Schools as we know them will be an intended or unintended consequence should the Bill become law.

To the extent that advocates of this Bill are concerned that Specialized High Schools do not currently serve the underserved populations of New York City, the population of Brooklyn Tech is remarkably diverse, with over 60 nationalities represented in the hallways, from Arabic to Hungarian, Bengali to Portuguese, Cantonese to Russian. English is not the first language for more than two thirds of these students' families. Moreover, close to 60% of Brooklyn Tech students presently qualify under federal guidelines for free or reduced-price lunch.

The specialized public high schools are the solution, not the problem. Brooklyn Tech, along with New York City's other Specialized High Schools, has helped generations of aspiring students to realize the American dream.

We, the Brooklyn Tech PTA, therefore urge that the Bill, S7738-2013/A9979-2013, be withdrawn from consideration. If there is to be a reassessment of the admissions process for the Specialized High Schools, any proposed changes should be thoroughly considered in a deliberative and open process inclusive of all stakeholders.