

Executive Summary

Among the 32 Community School Districts that comprise New York City's public school system, CSD3 is one of the most racially and socio-economically diverse; it is also among the most segregated and unequal. A 2009 federal magnet grant recognized the racial and socioeconomic disparities among schools in CSD3 and awarded the district an \$11 million grant to address the high rates of racial isolation.¹ Despite best efforts and good intentions, the magnet grant had limited impact.

CSD3 stretches from 59th Street to 122nd Streets, mostly along the West Side of Manhattan, and includes the neighborhoods of the Upper West Side, Manhattan Valley, and the southern portion of Central Harlem.

CSD3 includes 21 public (non-charter) elementary schools (4 of which serve grades K-8) and 11 public (non-charter) middle schools, as well as 9 charter schools.² Admissions criteria for most of District 3 public elementary (non-charter) schools are based on catchment/zone lines. In addition to catchment/zone lines, certain schools also admit students to choice programs (such as District Gifted & Talented as well as Dual Language programs) with policies that differ from school to school.

The combined average Economic Need Index for CSD3 public elementary schools is 61%, but few student populations are near the average. Rather, the average Economic Need Index ranges in CSD3 schools from fewer than 15% to as high as 97-100%. Likewise, while the CSD3's documented average of English Language Learners (ELLs) is 8.8%, the population of some schools is comprised of 18.9% or more ELLs while other schools serve as few as 3% of these students. Similarly, in a district where 66.5% of students are Black or Latino, the racial concentration of students is striking and parallels the patterns outlined above. Some CSD3 schools, including charter schools, are comprised of 95-99% Black and Latino students while at other schools less than 30% of the student body is comprised of Black and Latino students.

As such, CSD3 schools continue to be severely segregated. Just as it was sixty years ago when the Supreme Court announced that separate could never be

¹ District 3 Federal Magnet Grant Application (2009).

² Included in these numbers are two specialized schools with citywide enrollment: PS 859, The Special Music School of America, and PS 334, The Anderson School (a citywide school for students identified by testing as "gifted & talented").

equal, the separation of students by race and income continues to be inextricably connected to unequal learning environments, resources, curricula, school facilities, personnel, and more.³

The federal guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (March 2014) reiterate the argument that disparities in access to educational resources have negative effects on student learning, and call on states and school districts to comply with the legal obligation to provide students with equal access to these resources.⁴ Further, the Economic Need Index strongly correlates with the fourth grade English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics assessments (2013). Schools with fewer Title I students have higher scores, and schools with more Title I students have lower scores on average, regardless of the test in question. The segregation of students who rank higher on the Economic Need Index has a profound and negative effect on their ELA and Math scores.

The District 3 Equity in Education Task Force is advocating for an equitable admissions policy. A Controlled Choice student assignment plan will ensure that all of our public schools reflect, respect, and serve the entire district's families. Controlled Choice is a widely acclaimed student assignment methodology developed in the early 1980s by Michael Alves and others in Cambridge MA, as a way to voluntarily desegregate schools and avoid the imposition of court-ordered student assignment policies. It is an educationally sound, transparent, and equity-driven method of assigning students to public schools. It promotes diversity and allows parents to choose schools they want their children to attend in a manner that is fair to all students and families. It is also a practical method that has been implemented in over 30 school districts across the United States to respond to systemic segregation.

Key features of Controlled Choice include transparency and equity with the goal of creating a student assignment plan that is accessible and implemented consistently for all families. The plan also ensures that all schools reflect the diversity of the student population in a district and that no school becomes overcrowded or underutilized.

³ This was, for example, documented in 1966 by what is referenced as the Coleman Report and similar studies conducted since have documented the same findings: Coleman, James S., Ernest Q. Campbell, Carol J. Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander M. Mood, Frederic D. Weinfeld, and Robert L. York. 1966. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office; Orfield, Gary & Lee, C. 2005. *Why segregation matters: Poverty and educational inequality*. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.

⁴ <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-resourcecomp-201410.pdf>

Controlled Choice makes all schools in the district available to students living anywhere in the district, and no students are assigned solely based on their home address. Controlled Choice uses a student assignment algorithm built in to address the needs and preferences raised by the specific community where it is implemented. The specific components of the algorithm, such as the weight to be given to factors such as economic diversity, proximity to a given school, and selection of particular types of programs, are arrived at through a process that is equitable for all.

An integral element of every Controlled Choice program is a Family Resource Center that offers a space for equal access to the process. It has been widely documented that Controlled Choice student assignment plans are only successful if resources are allocated to build a sustainable infrastructure. This center provides relevant information and support for families as they learn about the schools and programs in the district and apply for admission.

The District 3 Equity in Education Task Force believes that CSD3 must embrace the opportunity and rise to the responsibility presented to us. To enliven the words of John Dewey from over a century ago: “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy.”⁵ The Task Force is confident that a Controlled Choice student assignment plan will promote District 3 schools as a model of diverse, well-resourced, and equitable educational opportunities for *all* students and families.

Signed,

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⁵ Dewey, J. *The School and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1907).