



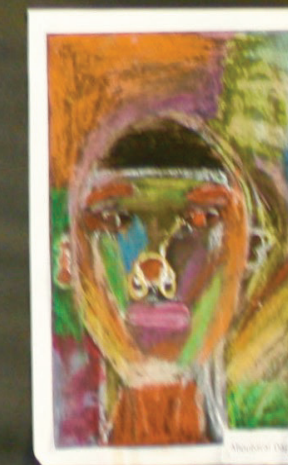
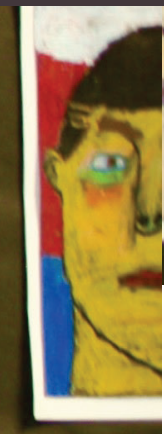
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INTEGRATED SCHOOLS IN A SEGREGATED CITY

TEN STRATEGIES THAT HAVE MADE NEW YORK CITY ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS MORE DIVERSE

BY CLARA HEMPHILL, NICOLE MADER AND THE INSIDESCHOOLS STAFF



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INTEGRATED SCHOOLS IN A SEGREGATED CITY:

TEN STRATEGIES THAT HAVE MADE NEW YORK CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS MORE DIVERSE

Research by the Integration Project at the Center for New York City Affairs, including intensive visits to 80 schools and interviews with parents and educators, identified these 10 intentional approaches to creating economic and ethnically diverse student populations. Many schools employ more than one of these strategies in conscious efforts to achieve such integration – efforts we believe are replicable in other schools throughout the city.

- 1. Hire a welcoming principal who values diversity**
The tone set at the top is crucial
- 2. Replace scripted lessons with a challenging curriculum**
Make the school a center of exciting learning
- 3. Recruit activist parents of different races to work together**
The power of grassroots diversity
- 4. Start fresh: Create a new school in an old building**
New beginnings in familiar settings
- 5. Start fresh, part II: Lease new space or build new buildings**
And now for something, and somewhere, completely different
- 6. Create a sense of community in a racially mixed neighborhood**
Diverse schools can anchor an area in transition
- 7. An imperfect strategy: Gifted and talented programs**
Turn them into bridges, not barriers
- 8. Bridge linguistic differences with dual-language programs**
Two tongues are better than one
- 9. Create alternative schools with diversity as a mission**
Integration as a defining quality
- 10. Set aside seats for low-income children in upper-income schools**
Inclusive admissions policies can make a difference

Introduction

School integration has become an increasingly pressing topic in New York City over the last two years. Important local and national research has put it back on the radar of policymakers, parents, and school leaders.¹ Much of this research, conducted from a bird's eye view, paints a stark picture of New York City as one of the most segregated school systems in the country. In fact, nearly half of the city's elementary schools are more than 90 percent black and Hispanic; white children and Asian children, who each make up 15 percent of the elementary school population overall, tend to be clustered in far fewer schools.²

Persistent housing segregation makes school integration difficult in large swaths of the city, particularly at the elementary level when most children attend school close to home. However, the diversity and density of many New York City neighborhoods means that there is great potential for many more schools to be integrated. Our last report found 28,175 children were in segregated schools in racially mixed neighborhoods while more than 62,607 children were enrolled in schools that were substantially poorer than their neighborhoods.³ These schools could better reflect the racial and socioeconomic diversity of their neighborhoods if they attracted a wider range of families and took steps to ensure that the families who are already there do not feel marginalized.

This report presents our findings from a year of visits to 80 elementary schools that are succeeding in attracting and retaining parents of different ethnicities and income levels. During these visits, we interviewed school leaders and parents about the steps they've taken to make their schools more diverse. We observed classroom instruction to get a feel for the curriculum and enrichment each school had to offer, and learned about how schools are reaching out to prospective parents and making them feel welcome. We also participated in conversations about diversity across the city, from Community Education Council meetings to local parent advocacy groups, to better understand the challenges these schools face as they work to diversify their student populations.

Through this research we identified 10 strategies that these schools have used to build student bodies from different ethnicities and income levels. Each of these strategies has benefits and drawbacks; some of the most successful schools combine several strategies simultaneously. At none of the schools we visited is

change happening on its own: this work is intentional and often difficult. All 10 strategies take a long-term commitment from school leaders, classroom teachers, or parent volunteers and a willingness to have difficult conversations about what it means to embrace diversity as a school and a community. We believe the city could make significant progress toward integrating more schools by replicating the most effective strategies.

In the last year, the city has been rocked by debates over plans to redraw attendance zones to ease overcrowding and to foster diversity at elementary schools on the Upper West Side and in downtown Brooklyn. In several districts, including the one serving the Lower East Side, advocates are proposing “controlled choice,” that is, admissions policies designed to ensure a mix of different income levels at each school in a district. This report does not address these district-wide strategies, nor does it examine whether student achievement in the schools we visited increased (or decreased) as they became more diverse. In a coming report we will assess the potential for systemic policy approaches to boost diversity and student achievement in New York City. However, there is a large body of national research that says integration improves student outcomes,⁴ so we publish our findings about school-level strategies that can be employed today believing that the urgency of the situation requires immediate action towards integrating schools.

Here are the 10 strategies that appear to be working in New York City.

STRATEGY 1:

HIRE A WELCOMING PRINCIPAL WHO VALUES DIVERSITY

It sounds obvious: A principal who hopes to enroll children of different backgrounds must ensure that parents of all races, ethnicities, and income levels are welcome and valued. Yet at a surprising number of schools we visited, the principal set a tone that made parents of certain groups feel excluded. In several schools that served mostly well-off families, we spoke to working-class parents who felt the administration favored families who could make large contributions to the PTA. In some high-poverty schools, principals were in a defensive crouch, refusing even to allow prospective parents (or us) to tour. On the other hand, we met principals whose commitment to integration made a huge difference.

As principal of **PS 261** in the Boerum Hill section of Brooklyn, Zipporah Mills learned to navigate different values, customs, and educational expectations among her pupils' parents, who live in public housing developments as well as in pricey single-family homes.

Take the annual school auction and wine tasting, which raises money for a full-time librarian, substitute teachers, and classroom air conditioning. This is an event loved and attended by many middle-class white families in a school that has a mix of Asians, blacks, Latinos, and whites, including Arabic-speaking families.



(Above) P.S. 261, Philip Livingston

Mills, who is black, was bothered by the lack of black families at this big money-earning event. "I would love to see more black families at the wine tasting," she told her parent-teacher association, adding, "We drink wine!" Her PTA laughed, but Mill's statement had a serious intent and did result in more black parents at the wine tasting. Even as she said it, however, she knew that her "Arabic-speaking mothers are never going to come to the wine tasting."

And, she asked herself, “What would our Latino families from Sunset Park like to do at the school auction?”

Mills, who led the school for a decade until her retirement in September 2016, tried to have “honest conversations with everyone.” On our visit, we were impressed with her winning way with kids and parents, and her frank discussions around income and race. Before the school year begins, staff “split children out like a deck of cards, by race, academics, and gender” to create heterogeneous classes.

“The culture of the school makes it unique. We’re committed to making diversity work.”

Mills was a bridge linking racial groups. She set a frank-talking tone and tried to be fair. Parents of color sometimes confided in her things they wouldn’t feel comfortable saying in larger parent groups and she was able to support their concerns in the broader community. When a black child came to her and said his white teacher was calling on mostly white kids to answer questions in class, Mills had to weigh whether there was bias in her classrooms and, if so, how to address it. She encouraged the child to take it up with the teacher himself. It was training, Mills said, for speaking up and defending oneself— an important skill in college and in life. The teacher wasn’t aware of what she was doing and made an effort to change; Mills created an environment where both students and adults are safe to learn.

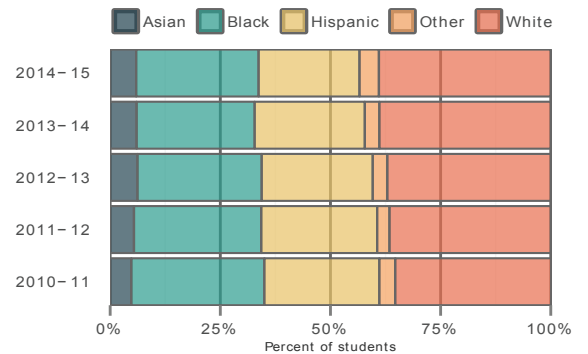
Things aren’t perfect at PS 261. Some teachers complain about discipline problems, and not every teacher thought Mills was an effective leader. Still, parents and staff work hard to bring the community together.

“The culture of the school makes it unique,” said parent Rachel Porter. “We’re committed to making diversity work.”

P.S. 261, Philip Livingston
Boerum Hill, District 15,
Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Zoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

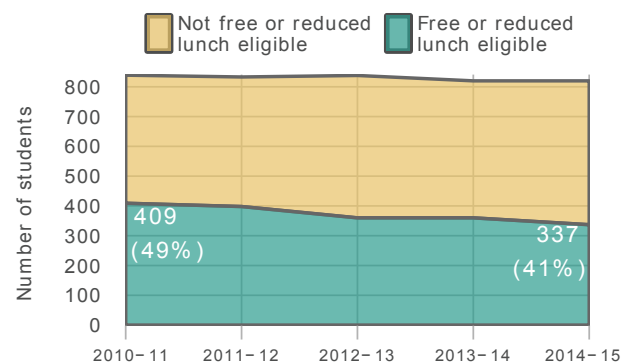


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$73,222 is the estimated median household income of children at the school (Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 15 Avg: \$63,939)

2% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years (Citywide Avg: 9% | District 15 Avg: 4%)

18% were chronically absent in 2015-16 (Citywide Avg: 23% | District 15 Avg: 13%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

73% of teachers agree the principal is effective (Citywide Avg: 79% | District 15 Avg: 82%)

94% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them (Citywide Avg: 92% | District 15 Avg: 93%)

See endnotes for data sources and methodology.

STRATEGY 2:

REPLACE SCRIPTED LESSONS WITH CHALLENGING CURRICULUM

High-poverty schools tend to have a curriculum that focuses on basic skills, with scripted lessons and lots of test prep.⁵ In many classrooms in such schools, the teacher does most of the talking and children sit quietly, filling out worksheets at their desks. Children read the same book at the same time, or work on the same page of their math textbook.

However, in many of the schools we visited, principals introduced teaching techniques designed to offer children the chance to take part in class discussions, to choose books based on their interests, and to write thoughtful essays (with multiple revisions) rather than fill-in-the-blank worksheets. In these schools, teachers design science experiments that foster curiosity and exploration; social studies lessons that frame history as a debate rather than a list of dates to be memorized; and art projects that encourage creativity.



(Above) P.S. 84, Jose de Diego

When Sereida Rodriguez-Guerra became principal of **PS 84** in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn in the middle of the 2009-10 school year, the school had low enrollment; a lackluster, scripted curriculum; and low levels of academic achievement. The school's population was overwhelmingly Latino, and nearly every child qualified for free lunch.

"When I arrived here there were classes still using basal readers (old fashioned reading textbooks)," said Rodriguez-Guerra, who worked with teachers to overhaul the curriculum. Instead of textbooks, children began to read from picture books, science discovery books, novels, and historical biographies. Instead of filling out worksheets, children kept diaries and wrote longer essays.

The school switched to the Teachers College Reading and Writing Program, which encourages students to read

books of their choosing and at their skill level as well as write and revise multiple drafts of work on a variety of topics. Teachers also weave in explicit instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary.

“In the beginning, I sat in on every school committee to make sure everyone felt welcomed...That’s changed. We have very active parents from all backgrounds and there are lots of ways to be involved.”

A rooftop science lab gave children the chance to conduct outdoor experiments. Instead of sitting quietly, children were encouraged to work in groups and move around their classrooms. The school had a Spanish-English dual-language program designed to make children fluent in both languages (See strategy number 8). Rodriguez-Guerra marketed the dual-language program effectively to newcomers in the gentrifying neighborhood. There are two dual-language classes per grade in the elementary school, which allows for the Department of Education’s preferred method of side-by-side classrooms with separate teachers for English and Spanish. Students spend a whole day immersed in one language in one room and then switch the next day.

As more whites enrolled in the school, some parents complained that children of color were marginalized. But Rodriguez-Guerra, who grew up in the area herself, has worked hard to build consensus among the longtime Latino residents and the more affluent newcomers. For instance, during Hispanic Heritage Month, students learn about important contributions from the Hispanic community, but also work on projects about their own cultural heritage that they share with their classmates.

“In the beginning, I sat in on every school committee to make sure everyone felt welcomed,” said Rodriguez Guerra. *“That’s changed. We have very active parents from all backgrounds and there are lots of ways to be involved.”*

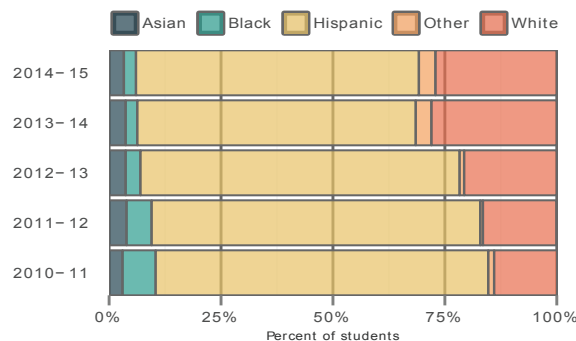
P.S. 84, Jose de Diego

Williamsburg, District 14

Grades Pre-K to 7

Admissions method: Zoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

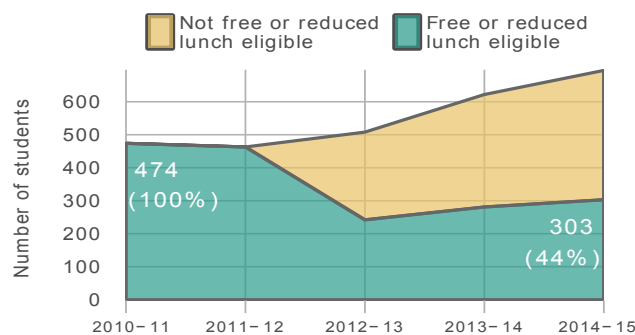


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$57,583 is the estimated median household income of the children at the school (Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 14 Avg: \$42,022)

7% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years (Citywide Avg: 9% | District 14 Avg: 7%)

24% were chronically absent in 2015-16 (Citywide Avg: 23% | District 14 Avg: 26%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

75% of teachers agree the principal is effective (Citywide Avg: 79% | District 14 Avg: 86%)

91% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them (Citywide Avg: 92% | District 14 Avg: 94%)

STRATEGY 3:

RECRUIT ACTIVE PARENTS OF DIFFERENT RACES TO WORK TOGETHER

Sometimes the catalyst for integration comes from parents. At **PS 11** in the Clinton Hill section of Brooklyn, for example, parents have been working for a decade to recruit a range of families to a school that once served mostly low-income black children. Today, the PTA gives 7 tours a year to parents of prospective students; since the PTA represents just about every race and ethnic group imaginable, visiting parents are likely to see someone who looks like them as a tour leader, and the tour leaders are great ambassadors for their school. The PTA also organizes family movie nights, dances, and workshops, and raises money for student enrichment activities such as violin lessons and for recess coaches on the playground.

“I love the diversity,” one mother said. “Not just the racial diversity, but every kind of diversity. We have homeless kids and kids who live in public housing and kids of doctors, lawyers, artists, and designers.”

Activism at PS 11 began in 2005, when parents of toddlers formed a group called “Friends of PS 11” to raise money for the school, even though their own children weren’t yet old enough to attend. They organized events such as jazz concerts, giving parents of different backgrounds a chance to socialize informally.

They lobbied to remove an unpopular principal, who retired in 2006 and was replaced by one who was more responsive. Enrollment at PS 11 increased from 501 in 2006 to 831 in 2016, while the proportion of students qualifying for free lunch declined from 70 percent to 44 percent. Black children, who once made up 90 percent of the enrollment, still make up the largest group at the school, or 68 percent; parents of other races we spoke to said they did not feel marginalized.

In Manhattan, a similar story is playing out at **PS 125** in Harlem. It has long had a popular Pre-K, but many parents then withdrew their children when it was time for kindergarten. That’s partly because the school’s upper grades had a traditional approach to education, not the play-based or child-centered approach that many parents said they wanted. “There were so many parents looking for a progressive choice, but one didn’t exist in the district,” said Daiyu Suzuki, father of two PS 125 pupils.



(Above) P.S. 11, Purvis J. Behan

"I remember parents would get together in the park and talk about 'Where do we go?'" said Tomoi Zeimer, whose child now attends PS 125. "Either it's a super-expensive private school or a really low-rated public school. We thought, 'Is there a way that we can go into a school and make it better?'"

Parents lobbied the principal, Reginald Higgins, and the district superintendent to adopt a less-scripted approach to teaching. Higgins, struggling with low enrollment and eager to try something new, agreed, and enlisted Julie Zuckerman, the principal of the progressive Castle Bridge School in Washington Heights, to serve as a mentor. Higgins worked with Borough of Manhattan Community College to help revise the curriculum and coach teachers.

"Either it's a super-expensive private school or a really low-rated public school. We thought, 'Is there a way that we can go into a school and make it better?'"

The school is a work in progress: Attendance is well below average and test scores have room for improvement. But enrollment is increasing after a long decline and our visits convinced us the school is moving in the right direction. "We haven't seen a final product yet," said Suzuki. "We're a community in the making."

In the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, an inter-racial group of parents decided they would rather support their zoned schools than enter a lottery to send their children halfway across the borough to a better-established alternative. This group, called the Bed-Stuy Parents Committee, has an active Facebook page and organizes regular get-togethers where parents can swap stories about what's going on and ideas about what to do about it. It's too soon to say whether they'll be successful, but they've managed to instill hope in a neighborhood with few good alternatives.

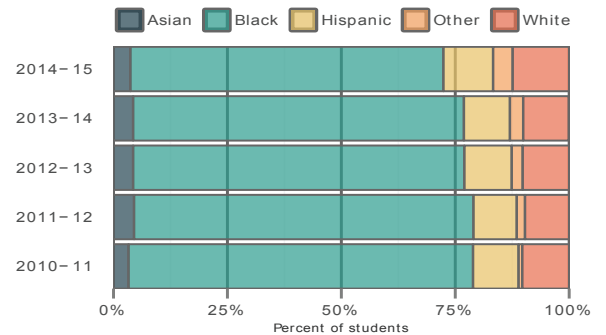
P.S. 11, Purvis J. Behan

Clinton Hill, District 13

Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Zoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

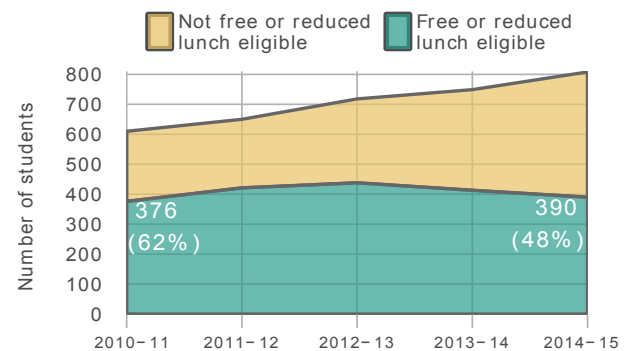


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$55,904 is the estimated median household income of the children at the school
(Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 13 Avg: \$51,518)

4% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years
(Citywide Avg: 9% | District 13 Avg: 9%)

14% were chronically absent in 2015-16
(Citywide Avg: 23% | District 13 Avg: 33%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

95% of teachers agree the principal is effective
(Citywide Avg: 79% | District 13 Avg: 79%)

94% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them
(Citywide Avg: 92% | District 13 Avg: 91%)

STRATEGY 4:

START FRESH: CREATE A NEW SCHOOL IN OLD BUILDING

Everyone we spoke to agrees: It's way easier to start a school from scratch with a new principal, new staff, and new kids than to turn around an existing school with a longstanding bad reputation. One strategy is to phase out an old school (by not accepting new students) and start a new school in the same building, beginning with the youngest grades and adding a grade each year. While closing schools is politically fraught (because teachers lose their jobs and a community loses a neighborhood institution), a fresh start is sometimes the best way to build a successful school culture with energized leadership and a cohesive staff. Parents are more willing to take a chance on a new school with no track record than with an old school with a long history of low performance and poor discipline.

It doesn't always work. Some schools, particularly in the Bronx, have been opened and closed multiple times in the same building; the schools' names may change but little else does. But when the new school brings in an experienced, effective principal with new ideas and new teaching techniques, the strategy can have good results. Take the **Waterside Children's Studio School, PS 317**. It opened with grades K-3 in 2009, replacing PS 225, a low-performing, sometimes disorderly school near the beach on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens. Seven years later, PS 317, now serving grades Pre-K to 5, is flourishing. Test scores are on a par with the citywide average, teacher satisfaction is high, and enrollment is booming—so much so that a school that once had hundreds of empty seats now has a wait-list for kindergarten.

Founding Principal Dana Gerandasi attributes the school's growth to the teachers' creative approach to academics and the arts. There are few textbooks; instead, children choose books based on their own interests. In math, teachers try to spark discussions about how to solve problems. The school aggressively pursues grants to support its ambitious arts program which includes dance, drama, music, and visual arts. Students perform



(Above) P.S. 317, Waterside Children's Studio School

in the New York City Student Shakespeare Festival. The Guggenheim Museum and the New York City Ballet support residencies at the school.

The school population is shifting. Some of that change is because the school's attendance zone was redrawn to include fewer children from Far Rockaway, the eastern part of the peninsula that includes public housing developments. The neighborhood has new immigrants that include children who speak Arabic, Polish, Spanish, and Hindi. At the same time, somewhat more affluent families have been lured to the neighborhood by the relatively low price of housing and the express buses to Manhattan.

"I would 100 percent agree that we are a diversity success story," says Gerandasi. "A lot of people are moving in and parents are pulling their children out of

Catholic schools and putting them here.”

Another new school in an old building is **PS 705** in Crown Heights, a rapidly gentrifying section of Brooklyn. Founding Principal Sandra Soto works hard to balance the concerns of a range of parents—families who want a progressive approach to education and those who prefer traditional methods; homeless families who live in nearby shelters and upper-middle-class families who live in brownstones. The PTA has a “diversity committee” to make sure that all parents feel included; the leadership of the PTA includes people of different races. Soto’s own family is multi-racial—she is of Haitian ancestry and her husband is Puerto Rican—and she seems to have a good rapport with parents of different ethnic groups.

“You have to be a pioneer, and you have to be willing to fight through the growing pains.”

The building that houses PS 705 has seen a remarkable transformation. It was formerly known as PS 22, a chaotic, low-performing school with a declining enrollment and a principal with poor ratings from her supervisor. Soto, formerly assistant principal at the well-regarded PS 189 nearby, opened her new school in 2012 with grades K–3 and added a grade each of the next two years. Explore Exceed Charter School, which shares the building with PS 705, also opened in 2012, while PS 22 took in no new students that year and closed permanently in 2014.

According to Soto, starting a new school was easier than turning around an old school would have been. “You get to set the tone. You get to choose your staff,” she said. The school is a work in progress: attendance and test scores are still below average. But parents who are willing to stay and work together to improve the school can count on the support of the administration and a cohesive staff.

“You have to be a pioneer, and you have to be willing to fight through the growing pains,” she said.

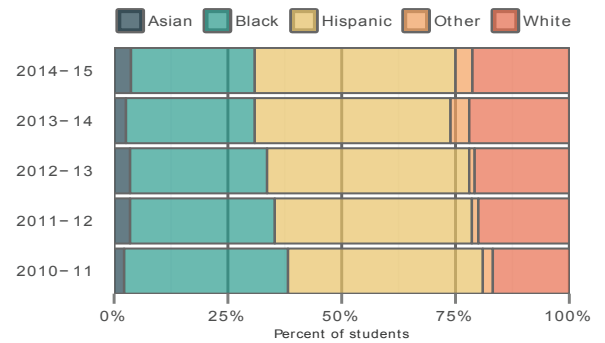
P.S. 317, Waterside Children’s Studio School

Rockaway Park, District 27

Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Zoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

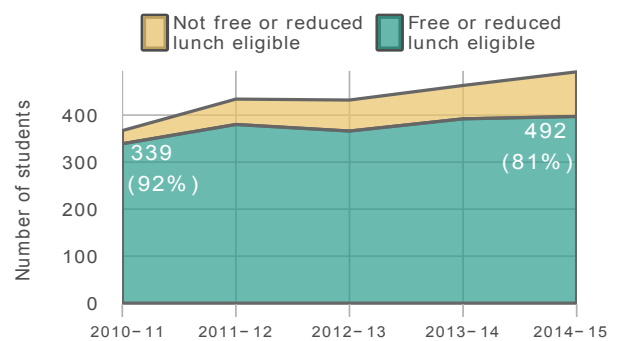


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$54,751 is the estimated median household income of the children at the school (Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 27 Avg: \$56,380)

8% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years (Citywide Avg: 9% | District 27 Avg: 4%)

19% were chronically absent in 2015-16 (Citywide Avg: 23% | District 27 Avg: 22%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

97% of teachers agree the principal is effective (Citywide Avg: 79% | District 27 Avg: 79%)

93% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them (Citywide Avg: 92% | District 27 Avg: 91%)

See endnotes for data sources and methodology.

STRATEGY 5:

START FRESH PART II: LEASE NEW SPACE OR BUILD NEW BUILDINGS

With good leadership and strong teaching, a new building (or even newly leased space in an old building) can jump-start an old school and make it attractive to a range of parents.



(Above) P.S. 151, Yorkville Community School

For example, there's PS 151, also known as the **Yorkville Community School** on the Upper East Side. The old PS 151 long suffered from low enrollment and poor academic performance. Although the school's attendance zone included middle-class and wealthy families, the school mostly served children from nearby public housing developments. The dilapidated school building was torn down in 2001 to make way for a high-rise residential building; elementary school children who lived in the zone were dispersed to other schools in the neighborhood for years.

Beginning in 2008, parents in the community campaigned hard to have the school reopened. Parents whose children attended a private nursery school formed an alliance with a child care center that served children in public housing to lobby elected officials. Lori Levin, who would become the PTA president of the new school, said the alliance between well-off and working-class parents helped persuade elected officials that this was not just "another school for the Upper East Side." The Department of Education agreed to open the Yorkville Community School in leased space in a former parochial school in 2009; parents and staff gave the school its new name to help give it a fresh start.

The new principal, Samantha Kaplan, who taught at PS 41 in Greenwich Village and was assistant principal of

PS 217 on Roosevelt Island, met with activist parents at an Upper East Side nursery school regularly for more than a year, sharing her vision for a new school and listening to their dreams for their children. Kaplan built relationships with the community organizations that would offer enrichment classes and built support among elected officials. Now the school serves both children who live in public housing and those who live in apartments that rent for \$10,000 a month.

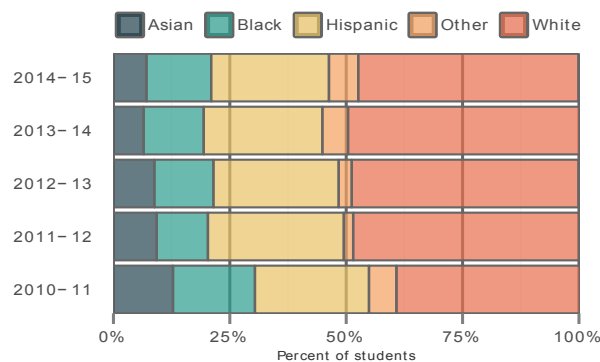
In Hell’s Kitchen on Manhattan’s West Side, **PS 51**, which served mostly low-income children, was torn down in 2011 as part of redevelopment of the whole block where it was located. Children were reassigned to classes in a rented space on the Upper East Side. In 2013, the school re-opened in an unusually bright and well-equipped seven-story building, with two science labs, two outdoor play yards, two gyms, an art studio, a library, a music room, and a health clinic. Since then, enrollment has steadily increased; about half the children qualify for free lunch.

PS 51 has long had an effective leader, Nancy Sing-Bock, and an experienced staff that works together as a team. The administration manages to make parents of different races, income levels, and nationalities feel welcome with events like family basketball games, movie nights, and international potluck suppers. They also offer English classes for parents. The student body includes children whose parents work at the nearby Chinese consulate, as well as children who speak Arabic, Korean, Spanish, or Bengali at home.

Sing-Bock and the staff ask parents who speak different languages to serve as “cultural ambassadors” at PTA meetings and include both newcomers and old-timers on the School Leadership Team. Parents are invited to share their skills and knowledge with their children’s classmates: a bus driver talks about his work when children study transportation; a busboy talks about his work when children study restaurants. Even without a new building, PS 51 was a good school, but the new building allowed it to become even better.

P.S. 151, Yorkville Community School
Upper East Side, District 2
Grades Pre-K to 5
 Admissions method: Zoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

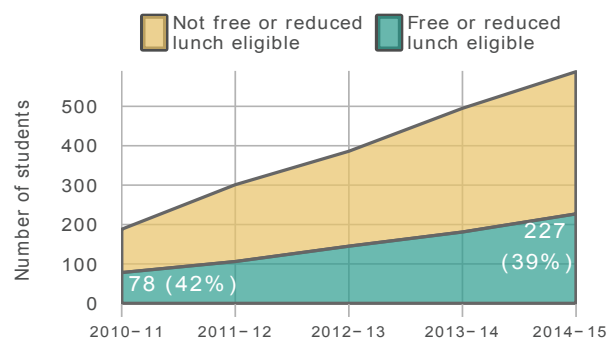


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$81,691 is the estimated median household income of children at the school
 (Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 2 Avg: \$95,473)

8% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years
 (Citywide Avg: 9% | District 2 Avg: 4%)

17% were chronically absent in 2015-16
 (Citywide Avg: 23% | District 2 Avg: 11%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

92% of teachers agree the principal is effective
 (Citywide Avg: 79% | District 2 Avg: 84%)

91% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them
 (Citywide Avg: 92% | District 2 Avg: 90%)

See endnotes for data sources and methodology.

STRATEGY 6:

CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A RACIALLY MIXED NEIGHBORHOOD

Some corners of New York City feel more like a small town than a big city. Children bike to school, housing costs are manageable, and everyone seems to know everyone. When these neighborhoods are racially mixed, the schools typically are as well. City Island in the Bronx, Roosevelt Island in Manhattan, Bergen Beach in southeast Brooklyn, and Travis in Staten Island, for example, all have racially mixed zoned neighborhood schools that serve as focal points for their communities. Each of these has a significant number of children who qualify for free lunch, but the communities don't have the extremes of wealth and poverty seen in some neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan, where public housing abuts luxury high-rises.



(Above) P.S. 26, The Carteret School

PS 312, a large school with a suburban feel in Bergen Beach, a remote corner of southeast Brooklyn, has seen an influx of students from Russia, Haiti, China, Pakistan, and Korea in recent years. While the proportion of whites decreased from 63 percent in 2004 to 44 percent in 2016 and the proportion of black students increased from 23 percent to 39 percent, the school hasn't seen the rapid white flight that schools in neighboring Canarsie witnessed some 30 years ago.

School officials attribute their success to their efforts to build a welcoming school culture with an engaging curriculum. Parents from different backgrounds are invited to the school to talk about their cultures or to share a home-cooked dish. The school has adopted a program called the Harmony Project designed to build empathy and cooperation among different groups. "Kids in the playground really, truly embrace one another," says Sungmin Yoo, who became principal in 2014.

"The principal, teachers, aides, office staff, cafeteria ladies, and security guard--every person in this school makes children (and parents) feel welcome."

The community of Travis on Staten Island, once mostly white, now includes a growing number of Latinos and a smattering of blacks and Asians, and tiny **PS 26** is changing with the neighborhood. Principal Laura Kump has energized her staff by encouraging them to adopt imaginative teaching techniques. Since she became principal in 2011, PS 26 has become one of the city's most improved schools in English language arts test scores. Kump has a knack for helping teachers aim higher. Teachers run parent workshops and post short videos online for parents who can't make it to meetings in person.

PS 26's enrollment is growing again after several years of declining numbers; even enrollment in upper grades is climbing as parents pull children out of other schools. Parents like new features, including teaching assistants for kids with special needs, a new after-school option, and an early morning drop-off (some staff work extra hours for free to make the early drop-off option happen).

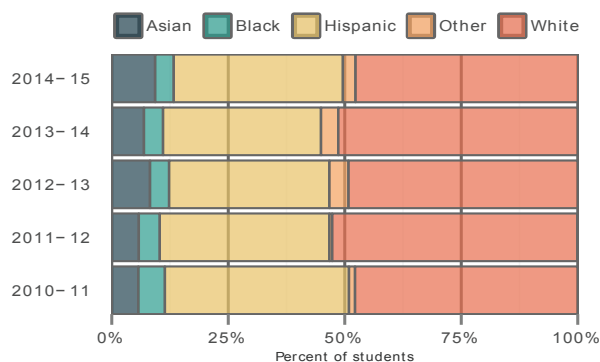
P.S. 26, The Carteret School

Staten Island, District 31

Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Zoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

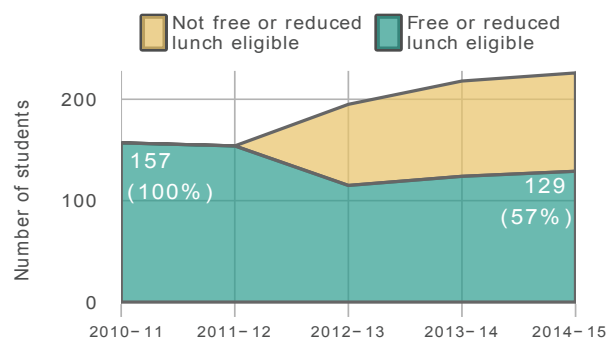


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$79,358 is the estimated median household income of children at the school
(Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 31 Avg: \$69,401)

Data on the percentage of students in temporary housing in the last 3 years is unavailable
(Citywide Avg: 9% | District 31 Avg: 3%)

17% were chronically absent in 2015-16
(Citywide Avg: 23% | District 31 Avg: 20%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

100% of teachers agree the principal is effective
(Citywide Avg: 79% | District 31 Avg: 83%)

98% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them
(Citywide Avg: 92% | District 31 Avg: 92%)

STRATEGY 7:

AN IMPERFECT STRATEGY: GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS

Creating a “gifted and talented” (“G&T”) program in an ordinary neighborhood school is one of the most common strategies used to encourage middle-class families to enroll their children in high-poverty schools. Gifted and talented programs are typically open to children in an entire district. Admission to such programs has long been based on a test given to children the winter before they start kindergarten.

(Below) P.S. 11, William T. Harris

These programs can be a good way to solve the challenge of teaching children who begin kindergarten with very different academic preparation—say, a child who has attended private nursery school for two years compared to one whose first school experience comes in kindergarten, or a newly arrived immigrant from China versus a child who has grown up speaking English. Particularly in high-poverty neighborhoods, gifted programs can provide a boost to talented children of color who might otherwise suffer from low expectations in a regular class. Occasionally, these programs serve to jump-start enrollment at a school in a mixed-income neighborhood that has been avoided by the middle class; over time, as the school becomes more popular, the gifted program may be eliminated, as has happened at PS 10 in Brooklyn and PS 9 in Manhattan.



There are significant drawbacks, however. While some schools manage to bridge gaps and make everyone feel like one big family, more typically the gifted program creates a feeling of haves and have-nots within the school. There are often significant racial disparities, with white and Asian children clustered in the “gifted” classes and black and Latino children predominating in the general education classes.

PS 11 in the Chelsea section of Manhattan is an example of a school that has bridged such gaps. Principal Robert Bender has managed to knit together a wide-ranging population that includes children who live in the Fulton Houses public housing development and those growing up in Chelsea’s lofts, condos, and brownstones. When Bender took the helm at PS 11 in 2005, there was little mixing between the mostly black and Latino kids in

general education classes and the mostly white and Asian students in G&T. The division was “so glaring,” he recalls. To narrow it, he said, “We started with the arts and food to get families to talk to each other more.”

Now, children with special needs, those in general education classes, and children in G&T together perform in school musicals, go camping, and travel to Washington D.C. They all take part in such popular activities as ballet, photography, tap dancing, or airplane-making. The ballroom dance team and the chess team mix children from different classes. The science teacher shares his passion for birdwatching in an after-school program open to all.

Parents turn out in large numbers to visit classrooms on “Family Fridays.” DJ-ed potluck dances, attended by 600–700 people, are held in September and June on the playground. The general education classes, which once were predominately black and Latino, now have increasing numbers of white and Asian children.

“In addition to black and white, PS 9 has a bunch of mixed-race kids and a number of South Asian kids. It’s a warm, tolerant, and diverse place.”

Not all the city’s gifted programs are segregated by race. At **PS 9** in the Prospect Heights section of Brooklyn, general education classes, dual-language Spanish-English classes, and gifted classes all have a mix of different races. “In the lunchroom, on the playground, in the halls, PS 9 has a Sesame Street level of mixture,” one parent said.

“In addition to black and white, PS 9 has a bunch of mixed-raced kids and a number of South Asian kids. It’s a warm, tolerant and diverse place.

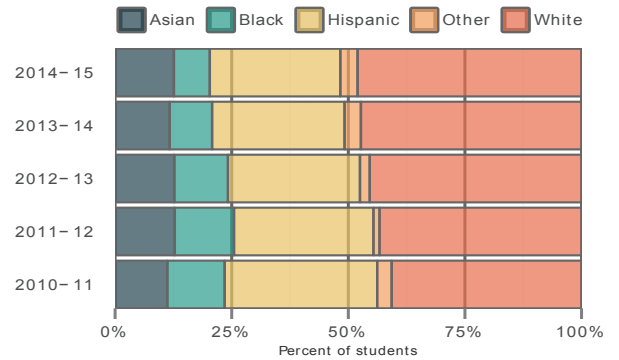
And one school, Talented and Gifted Young Scholars in the East Harlem section of Manhattan, attracts a mix of black, Latino, Asian, and white children from across the city.

P.S. 11, William T. Harris

Chelsea, District 2
Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Zoned
(with Gifted and Talented Program)

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

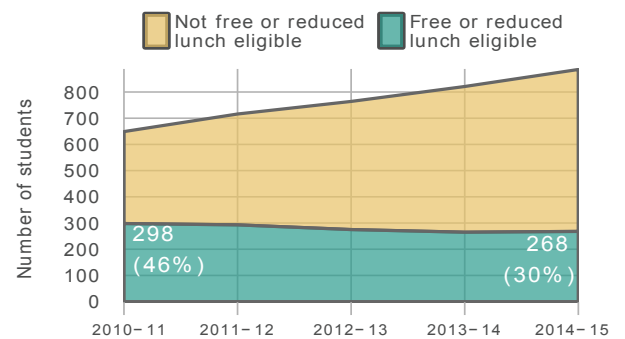


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$98,465 is the estimated median household income of children at the school
(Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 2 Avg: \$95,473)

2% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years
(Citywide Avg: 9% | District 2 Avg: 4%)

11% were chronically absent in 2015-16
(Citywide Avg: 23% | District 2 Avg: 11%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

96% of teachers agree the principal is effective
(Citywide Avg: 79% | District 2 Avg: 84%)

94% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them
(Citywide Avg: 92% | District 2 Avg: 90%)

See endnotes for data sources and methodology.

STRATEGY 8:

BRIDGE LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES WITH DUAL-LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña touts dual-language programs—designed to make children fluent in two languages—as a good way to foster diversity. Typically in these programs, half the children come from homes where English is the predominant language and half come from homes where another language is. Their teachers alternate the language of instruction, usually with classes in English one day and classes in the other language on the other. The most common dual-language programs in city schools are in Spanish, but there are also programs in Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Italian, Hebrew, German, and Polish.

Many of these programs offer a terrific way to mix children of different backgrounds.

There is a potential downside, however. Sometimes these programs lead to divisions within the school in which a dual-language class is seen as “special,” much as “gifted and talented” classes are seen as special. In some schools, the French-dual language program is mostly white, the Spanish program is mixed white and Latino, and the general education class is mostly black and Latino.

What works particularly well is when the whole school is dual language, like **Castle Bridge School** in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan.

(Below) P.S. 513, Castle Bridge School



Castle Bridge opened in 2012 as an alternative school of choice in a building shared with a traditional elementary school, PS 128. Castle Bridge is a nurturing place where kids make snacks, take care of class pets, ice skate, and swim. Principal Julie Zuckerman was former principal of Central Park East 1 in East Harlem (see strategy Number 9) and she has adopted many of her old school’s practices. Unlike Central Park East, however, Castle Bridge offers instruction in English and Spanish. Children are encouraged to read books they choose themselves and to speak as much as they listen.

In the lower grades, teachers spend half the day speaking English to their students and half speaking Spanish. In the upper grades, teachers alternate Spanish and English days. The goal is to teach children to read, write, and speak fluently in both languages. Children of Dominican ancestry share classes with African-American and white children.

Zuckerman said the school is very popular with middle-class families. Yet she is just as pleased when local, working-class parents find out about it, such as the bus driver who returned to inquire about it for his child after driving the schools' students on a field trip. Zuckerman tries to anticipate children's needs: she keeps five warm coats in her office in case anyone needs one for daily outdoor recess in the winter.

In 2016, the school was one of several across the city selected to pilot admissions policies aimed at maintaining economic diversity: a portion of seats are set aside for low-income children or children who have an incarcerated parent.

Classes combine two grades; kids stay with the same teacher, in the same classroom, for two years. Instead of report cards, teachers write multiple-page "narratives" for each child twice a year.

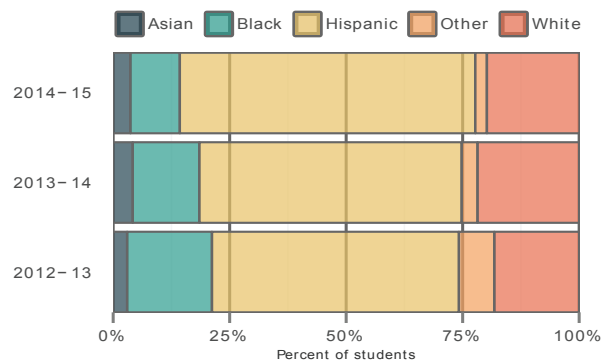
To an unusual degree, children make decisions about what they want to study. During a daily "project time" in the lower grades they choose from a menu that may include blocks or dress-up. With a grown-up's help, two children from each class take turns preparing snacks, such as pancakes or asparagus with garlic butter, in the kitchen during this time. Parent involvement is strong. Families join students in a weekly schoolwide sing-a-long, for which the principal plays guitar. They are invited to accompany kids on weekly wintertime ice-skating sessions in Central Park.

P.S. 513, Castle Bridge School

Washington Heights, District 6,
Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Unzoned
(with dual program in Spanish)

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

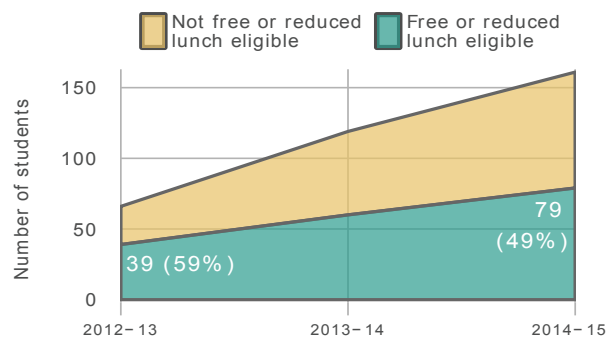


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$44,718 is the estimated median household income of children at the school
(Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 6 Avg: \$40,635)

9% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years
(Citywide Avg: 9% | District 6 Avg: 13%)

14% were chronically absent in 2015-16
(Citywide Avg: 23% | District 6 Avg: 21%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

100% of teachers agree the principal is effective
(Citywide Avg: 79% | District 6 Avg: 76%)

92% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them
(Citywide Avg: 92% | District 6 Avg: 94%)

STRATEGY 9:

CREATE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS WITH DIVERSITY AS A MISSION

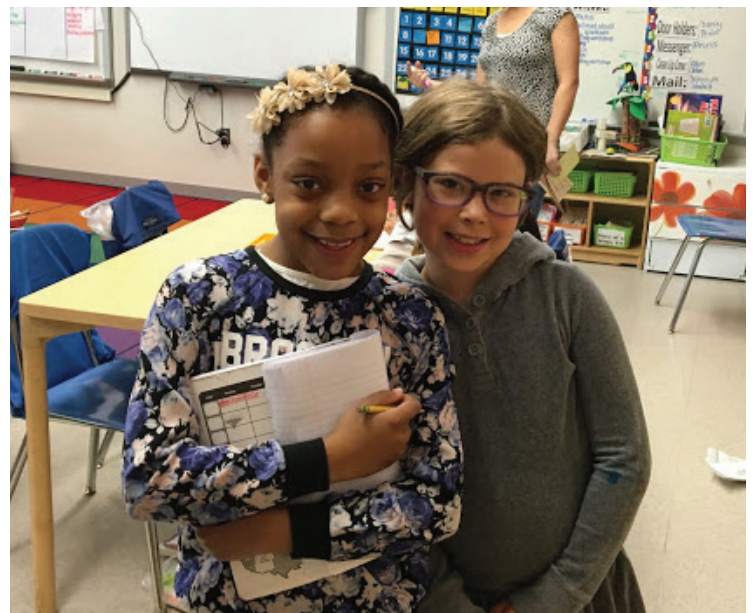
Since the 1970s, a small group of alternative schools in New York City have refused to accept racial segregation as a given and have instead sought, celebrated, and attracted an integrated student body. **Central Park East 1**, founded in 1974 by the visionary leader Deborah Meier, is the oldest of these, but their numbers have grown over the years and now represent a promising model for racial and economic integration in many neighborhoods.

At a time when other schools had desks in rows, Central Park East had tables and sofas. At a time when other schools tracked children into classes for “smart” and “dumb” kids, Central Park East put kids of different abilities and even different ages into the same class. Children put together vast cities from wooden blocks and build covered wagons or puppet theaters with hammers and saws. They would sing, dance reels, and make sculptures of the human body complete with internal organs. Central Park East 1 has undergone wrenching changes in recent years, as a new principal has clashed with parents and staff over the direction of the school. Still, its influence is felt in progressive schools of choice throughout the city.

These schools do not have attendance zones; rather they admit children by lottery (or other application) from an entire district or even an entire borough. As such, they are a good way to attract middle-class children to schools in low-income neighborhoods and, in the case of Ella Baker School on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, a way to attract working-class children to a school in a very expensive neighborhood.

For example, **AmPark Neighborhood School** in the Kingsbridge section of the Bronx, enrolls a mix of Hispanic, black, white, and Asian children from all over

(Below) P.S. 344, Ampark Neighborhood School



the borough; it includes children from middle-class families as well as those who qualify for free lunch. The school, known for its commitment to the environment, wears its “progressive” label proudly. Teachers believe children learn best by “doing” and engaging in issues that matter to them—like hatching and raising trout to release into the wild or even advocating for a classroom democracy.

Over time, some progressive schools, like Brooklyn New School, have “tipped,” and attracted mostly higher-income children. To maintain a balance of

children of different income levels, some of these schools have received permission from the Department of Education to give preference to low-income children (see strategy number 10).

Charter schools – tuition-free schools supported by tax levies but operated independently of the Department of Education – were designed to offer alternatives to the mostly low-performing traditional schools in low-income, predominately black and Latino neighborhoods. As a result, many of them are as segregated as the traditional public schools. However, a handful of charter schools have made racial diversity part of their mission; a few others have attracted a diverse population thanks to their special themes.

Founded in 2005, **Hellenic Classical Charter School** in the Sunset Park Section of Brooklyn grew out of the Soterios Ellenas School, a longstanding Greek-Orthodox parochial school that has educated Brooklynites of Greek heritage for decades. Demographic changes have reduced the number of local families wanting Greek parochial education, and the idea was born to create a not-for-profit, secular charter school, based on Hellenic culture and drawing in a broader range of students.

The school population is ethnically and economically diverse, with rising numbers of Hispanic students; not even one-quarter of students are of Greek heritage. Still, at least one hour of each 8 am to 4 pm school day is devoted to studying Greek with five native-speaking professional teachers. But other cultures are celebrated too. Each classroom studies a different country in preparation for the school’s multicultural fair; Cinco de Mayo and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day are important holidays.

Community Roots Charter School in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn makes a big effort to build a sense of community with families who come from diverse backgrounds and different neighborhoods. Parents who bring their children to school may stay in the classroom to read to them. A variety of workshops for parents are held in a spacious family room. Family cooking and sports programs are held frequently.

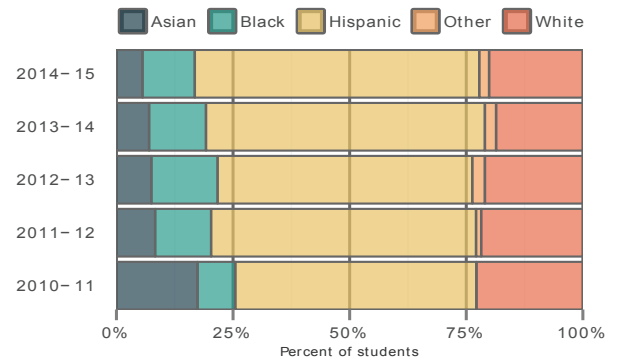
P.S. 344, AmPark Neighborhood School

Kingsbridge, District 10

Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Unzoned

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

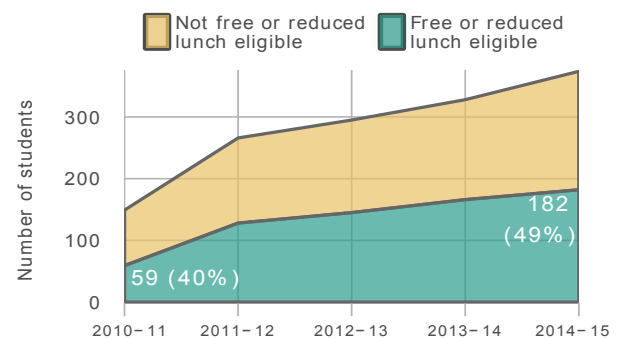


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$54,447 is the estimated 2014 median household income of the children at the school (Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 10 Avg: \$33,866)

6% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years (Citywide Avg: 9% | District 10 Avg: 17%)

12% were chronically absent in 2015-16 (Citywide Avg: 23% | District 10 Avg: 26%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE , 2015-16

95% of teachers agree the principal is effective (Citywide Avg: 79% | District 10 Avg: 77%)

91% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them (Citywide Avg: 92% | District 10 Avg: 92%)

See endnotes for data sources and methodology.

STRATEGY 10:

SET ASIDE SEATS FOR LOW-INCOME CHILDREN IN UPPER-INCOME SCHOOLS

The vast majority of segregated schools in New York City serve predominately black and Latino children. But segregation goes both ways; there are also some schools that serve mainly well-off, mostly white children. Some advocates of diversity say it's important to ensure schools do not "tip" and become too white or too well-off, because low-income children and children of color may feel marginalized. And a school that attracts many well-off children may mean nearby schools have higher concentrations of poverty than they otherwise would.

(Below) P.S. 133, William A. Butler

To deal with this reality, some schools have established set-asides for low-income children, for children who are still learning English (called English Language Learners or "ELLs") or for other groups, such as children with special needs or children whose parents are incarcerated.



When PS 133 moved into a new \$66 million building in Brooklyn's Park Slope, some parents were concerned that the historically black and Latino school would become dominated by white, upper-

income families, because new construction of expensive apartments was driving out long-time residents. To forestall that possibility, PS 133 adopted an updated admissions policy designed to foster socioeconomic and ethnic integration, including dual-language programs in French and Spanish.

Instead of drawing students only from its old District 13 zone, in 2013 the school also began accepting Pre-K and kindergarten students from across the district as well as the racially diverse District 15. Thirty-five percent of all kindergarten seats are reserved for English language learners and children who qualify for free lunch.

The PS 133 program has had mixed success. The school has had trouble recruiting Spanish-speaking children from outside the neighborhood; only four percent of children are classified as ELLs. Even when busing was provided, many parents from immigrant neighborhoods like Sunset Park, apparently satisfied with their local District 15 schools, were reluctant to send their children outside the neighborhood, school officials said. Some parents are discouraged by the fact that bus stops are as far as 10 blocks from children’s homes and the pick-up time is as early as 6:55 a.m. Nonetheless, PS 133 has succeeded in enrolling a mix of students of different races and ethnicities: about one-third are white, one-third are black, and one-third are Latino.

This “set aside” of seats for low-income children was adopted by seven other elementary schools in 2015, including six schools of choice (see strategy number 9) and one zoned Brooklyn school, PS 705 (see strategy no. 4). Although it’s too early to judge their success, several of these schools say the strategy has enabled them to enroll a more diverse student body.

This spring, Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña, invited all interested principals to apply to make changes to their admissions plans for the coming 2017 enrollment cycle. In October, 12 more schools announced their plans to set aside seats for low income children. In addition, over a dozen schools have received small grants to plan for changes to admissions and ramp up parent outreach. Some charter schools have also adopted set asides for low-income children. It’s a strategy that can work to preserve racial and economic balance at very popular, over-subscribed schools of choice. It could also be used to fill empty seats in zoned schools in high-income neighborhoods.

P.S. 133, William A. Butler

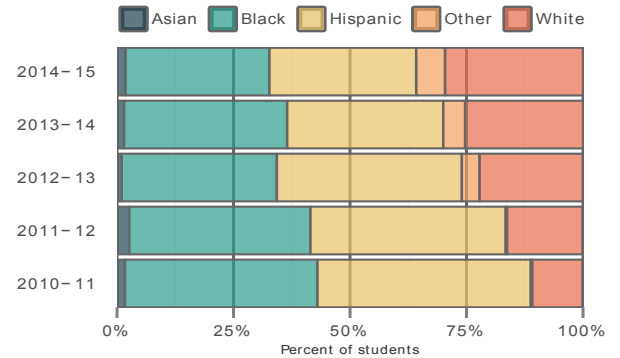
Park Slope, District 13

Grades Pre-K to 5

Admissions method: Zoned

(with dual language programs in Spanish and French)

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

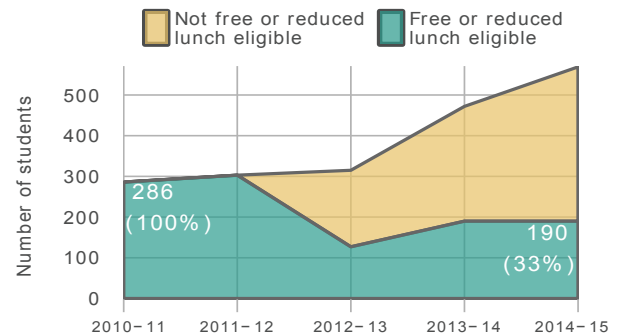


SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

\$67,862 is the estimated median household income of children at the school
(Citywide Avg: \$48,557 | District 13 Avg: \$51,518)

5% of these students have been in temporary housing in the last 3 years
(Citywide Avg: 9% | District 13 Avg: 9%)

17% were chronically absent in 2015-16
(Citywide Avg: 23% | District 13 Avg: 33%)



SCHOOL CLIMATE, 2015-16

89% of teachers agree the principal is effective
(Citywide Avg: 79% | District 13 Avg: 79%)

87% of parents say the principal works hard to build trusting relationships with parents like them
(Citywide Avg: 92% | District 13 Avg: 91%)

Conclusion

Integration by itself is not a panacea. Even in the racially and economically mixed schools we visited, there remain obstacles to be overcome and internal divisions to be bridged. Some have first-rate teaching, some are works in progress; some have high levels of academic achievement, some have a long way to go.

But decades of research shows that breaking up high concentrations of poverty in any one school is one of the most effective and inexpensive ways to improve academic achievement for poor children.⁶ High-poverty schools face daunting odds even when they have effective leadership, excellent teachers, and plenty of books and supplies. Social workers and counselors at high-poverty schools—not to mention the children themselves—are often overwhelmed by dealing with the effects of poverty. Even the best teachers have trouble gaining traction if a large proportion of their pupils miss school because they are homeless or have chronic illnesses that are correlated with poverty, such as asthma.

It's easier to attract and retain high-quality staff at schools that serve a mix of children of different incomes—and where teachers can devote time to children who need their help the most. Indeed, one of the reasons low-income white children tend to do better in school than low-income black children is that low-income white children usually attend school with middle-income white children, while low-income black and Hispanic children usually attend schools with other low-income black and Hispanic children.⁷

Meaningful economic integration is possible only in places in which there is a critical mass of middle class parents willing to send their children to public schools. And even in racially and economically diverse neighborhoods, as our previous report shows, many schools remain segregated because middle class parents of all races tend to avoid low-performing, high-poverty schools that serve mostly black and Hispanic children.

Anyone who has attended the last year's contentious public meetings over changing school attendance zones in Brooklyn and Manhattan has reason to be pessimistic about the prospect of school integration in New York City. At these meetings, white apartment owners shout that their property values will plummet if they are zoned to a high-poverty school; long-time black and Hispanic residents voice their fears that their neighborhood school will be taken over by wealthy newcomers.

Zoning changes are necessary, both to alleviate overcrowding and to end the gerrymandering that has too long segregated schools by race and income. However our findings from visits to schools suggest that zoning changes alone will not result in integrated schools. Rather, the city needs effective principals who are committed to diversity and capable of managing different parents' expectations; teachers who can offer a challenging curriculum to all children; and parents who are willing to work together to improve their schools. The good news—and the reason for optimism—is that there are many schools in the city that already have accomplished these tasks. They offer lessons to be shared and emulated.

ENDNOTES

¹ John Kucsera and Gary Orfield (2014), "New York State's Extreme School Segregation: Inequality, Inaction and a Damaged Future," UCLA Civil Rights Project; Robert W. Snyder (2015), *Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City*, Cornell University Press; Halley Potter, Kimberly Quick and Elizabeth Davies (2016), "A New Wave of School Integration: Districts and Charters Pursuing Socioeconomic Diversity," The Century Foundation.

² According to the Center's analysis of individual student biographic data from 923 elementary, K-8 and K-12 schools provided by the NYC Department of Education for the 2014-15 school year.

³ Clara Hemphill and Nicole Mader (2015), "Segregated Schools in Integrated Neighborhoods: The city's schools are even more divided than our housing," Center for New York City Affairs.

⁴ Richard Kahlenberg, editor (2012), *Future of School Integration*, The Century Foundation; Karl Alexandra and Stephen L. Morgan (2016), "The Coleman Report at Fifty: Its Legacy and Implications for Future 5 Research on Equality of Opportunity," *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(5), pp. 1-16; Sean R. Reardon (2016), "School Segregation and Racial Academic Achievement Gaps," *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2(5), pp. 34-57; Ross Weiner (2007), "Opportunity Gaps: The Injustice Underneath Achievement Gaps in Our Public Schools," *North Carolina Law Review*, 85(5), 1315-1418. Douglas Ready and Elizabeth M. Chu (2015), *Sociodemographic Inequality in Early Literacy Development: The Role of Teacher Perceptual Accuracy*. *Early Education and Development*, 26(7), pp 970-87.

⁵ Henry M. Levin (2007), "On the Relationship between Poverty and Curriculum," *North Carolina Law Review*, 85(5), 1318-43.

⁶ Kahlenberg (2012).

⁷ Reardon (2016).

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Student ethnicity and Free or Reduced Lunch eligibility: Retrieved from the NYC Department of Education (DOE) June Biographic Datasets for the school years 2010-11 to 2014-15. The data includes any student enrolled in the school at any point between October 31st and June 20th of that school year. Ethnicity categories include Asian, Black, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, Native American or Alaskan Indian, White and Parents Refused to Sign/No data. The latter were excluded from our calculations, and Multi-Racial and Native American or Alaskan Indian were combined to form the category "Other."

Estimated median household income: Retrieved from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Following a methodology established by the Independent Budget Office in 2015, we used each student's census tract of residence from the DOE June Biographic Dataset from 2014-15 to match students to the publicly available American Community Survey data. Therefore this estimate does not capture the exact income of any particular student's household, but does reflect the typical household in each student's community and the context in which each student lives. This improves upon traditional measures of student socioeconomic status, such as eligibility for free or reduced lunch, because it can be used to describe students at all points across the socioeconomic spectrum, not just students below a particular threshold. School, district and city estimates were derived by averaging the income estimates of each student in the 2014-15 school year.

Students in temporary housing: Retrieved from the DOE Report on Demographic Data in NYC Public Schools, December 31, 2015

Chronic absenteeism: Students who missed more than 10% of the school year. Retrieved from the DOE 2015-16 Preliminary Attendance file.

School climate indicators: Percent of teachers and parents who "agree" or "strongly agree" with these questions on the DOE 2015-16 Annual School Survey.

CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS

THE CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS AT THE NEW SCHOOL is an applied policy research institute that drives innovation in social policy. The Center provides analysis and solutions. We focus on how public policy impacts low-income communities, and we strive for a more just and equitable city. We conduct in-depth, original and timely research that illuminates injustice, quantifies social change, and informs public policy. We identify practical solutions and fresh ideas to address pressing social and economic issues. We engage communities and policymakers and are committed to the debate of vital political and social issues. Through public events and our written work we provide opportunities for dialog. These conversations put leaders on the record, forge connections among groups, and inform ongoing policy change.

INSIDESCHOOLS, a project of the Center for New York City Affairs, has been an authoritative and independent source of information on New York City public schools since its founding in 2002. We visit hundreds of schools each year, observing what's happening in the classrooms, cafeterias, hallways, and bathrooms, and we interview thousands of people – principals, teachers, students and parents—to gather information about school philosophy and academic rigor that is unavailable anywhere else. We pair this with quantitative information on school performance, climate, and community from seven City and State databases. We have become known as the “Consumer Reports” for the nation’s largest public school system, receiving nearly two million visitors to our web site each year.

THE INTEGRATION PROJECT at the Center for New York City Affairs, a multi-year research and reporting effort headed by InsideSchools founder Clara Hemphill, is examining ethnic and economic integration in the city’s public schools. Previous publications of this project include:

- Segregated Schools in Integrated Neighborhoods: The City’s Schools Are Even More Divided than Our Housing, by Clara Hemphill and Nicole Mader, Center for New York City Affairs, December 2015.
- Tough Test Ahead: Bringing Diversity to New York City’s Specialized High Schools, by Bruce Cory and Nicole Mader, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, June 2016.
- Diversity in New York’s Specialized Schools: A Deeper Data Dive, by Nicole Mader, Bruce Cory, and Celeste Royo, Center for New York City Affairs Urban Matters blog, June 2016.

The Integration Project expects to make recommendations based on its research findings to city policymakers in a report to be published in late 2016.

