



**For Immediate Release**  
**Sunday, June 3, 2018**  
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### **LDF Statement on New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Plan to Reform the Admissions Process of the City’s Specialized High Schools**

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced today plans to enact new measures to diversify the City’s most elite public high schools, known as Specialized High Schools, beginning in 2019. In 2012, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), [LatinoJustice PRLDEF](#) and [The Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College](#) filed a [federal civil rights complaint](#) on behalf of a broad coalition of New York education, civil rights and social justice organizations. The complaint challenged the current admissions process to the Specialized High Schools. [Rachel Kleinman](#), Senior Counsel at LDF, issued the following statement:

“For the past six years, LDF has been fighting the admissions process of New York City’s Specialized High Schools, which severely limits access for Black and Latino students to the city’s best public schools. That admissions process is based on a single test score, which is not a fair measure of academic preparedness and excludes many students who lack access to expensive test prep services. Even the country’s most prestigious colleges and universities do not use a singular test as the sole criterion for admissions.

“This process has resulted in extraordinary inequalities. This year, less than 10 percent of admission offers to the Specialized High Schools were made to Black and Latino students even though they represent 67 percent of the city’s public schoolchildren. At Stuyvesant High School—one of the city’s top high schools—only nine Black students were admitted out of 902 available seats. Not only is this outrageous and unfair to individual students, it perpetuates a false narrative about the intelligence and aptitude of Black and Latino students. Mayor de Blasio’s decision to revitalize the Discovery Program, which provides an alternate pathway for admission for low-income students, is a welcome first step in fixing these inequalities. However, it will have only a limited impact because the vast majority of students will continue to be admitted under the “test-only” admissions policy, which state law requires for three of the eight Specialized High Schools.

“Greater action is needed to expand this educational opportunity. The State must change this discriminatory law, and the City should put resources behind this effort. LDF has repeatedly proposed a multi-factored admissions process that offers a comprehensive portrait of a student’s knowledge and potential, and does not arbitrarily lock far too many qualified and talented New York City students out of an important pipeline to opportunity. The City also can, and should,

change the admissions process for the newest five of the eight Specialized High Schools immediately and without waiting for the state legislature to act.

“All students should be assessed on multiple measures—including high test scores, grades, class rank, attendance, essays, letters of recommendation, interviews, extracurricular activities and a multitude of other factors—which are, collectively, stronger indicators of academic success than a one-off multiple choice exam. An admissions process that measures academic excellence on multiple criteria such as these will create greater racial and geographic diversity while producing a highly qualified student body. We will be watching carefully to see how the mayor’s plans unfold.”

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*