

To: The Hunter College & Hunter College Campus Schools Administration

From: List of Endorsers (in formation)

HCHS Organizations: MOSAIC

Initial HCHS Parent Endorsers (organizational affiliations for identification only):

**Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith, 6th Grade
Roseanne C. Almanzar, 1st & 5th grades
Judy Diers & David Parsons, 8th grade
Kavita & Sam Gilchrist, 7th grade, MOSAIC
Clayton Harding, 8th grade
Liz Hines, 5th grade
Olatunde Johnson, 7th grade, Columbia Law School
Lara Lai, 8th grade
Ritty Lukose, 10th grade
Marcus Mabry & Christopher Hubis, 5th grade**

**Andy McCord, former HCHS parent, Exam Schools
Partnership Initiative
Denise Milstein, 9th grade, Columbia University
Mary Ellen Moule, 12th & 10th grades
Naisha Quiles & Kareem Marcus, 3rd grade
Thara Russell, 4th grade, MOSAIC
Andrew So, 3rd grade, MOSAIC, South Bronx United
Paul Sonn & Martha Lees, 8th grade
Andrew Strom, 9th grade
Liz Van Hoose & Ron Briggs, 3rd grade, MOSAIC**

Additional HCHS Stakeholder Endorsers:

**HCHS Parents: 70
HCHS Alums: 105**

**Re: Hunter College High School Will Be Forced by the Pandemic to Modify Its Admissions System for 2021;
It Should Seize That Opportunity to Promote Greater Racial and Economic Diversity at the School**

Date: June 4, 2020; as revised June 12, 2020

Introduction

A generation ago Hunter College High School educated a racially and economically diverse group of high-achieving students. But today, less than 9% of the high school student body is Black or Latinx, and just 9% is low-income. This is despite the fact that 27% of the pool of New York City 5th graders scoring high enough to qualify to take the Hunter admissions test are Black or Latinx and 47% are low-income. Addressing Hunter's segregation is critical for the immediate and long-term wellbeing of our community. The protests that have erupted across our city and the country over the past week against institutionalized racism in response to police violence against Black men, women, and children have only heightened the urgency of this issue.

For 2021, the COVID-19 crisis will require Hunter and all of New York City's screened middle schools and high schools to modify their admissions systems since the state tests on which they have traditionally relied as a screen were canceled this year. Moreover, at this point it is highly uncertain whether or how post-quarantine conditions will allow Hunter to administer its traditional admissions test in January 2021. We urge that in planning contingencies for next year's admissions process, Hunter work intentionally to (1) ensure that the process does not further exacerbate segregation in the school, and (2) seize the opportunity presented by these necessary adjustments to explore ways to promote greater racial and economic diversity at Hunter.

Preliminary work by the NYC DOE to analyze the implications of necessary adjustments to the admissions processes at its own screened middle schools and high schools has shown that simply using test scores or grades from earlier years (in Hunter's case, 4th grade state test scores) would produce significantly different pools of top students -- and in particular would disadvantage Black, Latinx and low-income students as well as students with special needs and English language learners. Hunter must engage in similar analysis and incorporate into its plan safeguards to ensure that the revised qualification criteria it uses for the 2021 admissions test do not worsen the school's already very poor track record on diversity.

But it should go much farther than that. Hunter should seize this opportunity to adjust its admissions system for 2021 to experiment with permanent changes that will promote greater racial and economic diversity, while still admitting a highly qualified student body. As discussed below, it is clear that there is an untapped pool of highly qualified students who can excel at Hunter, and that this pool is much larger and more racially and economically diverse than the group of 175 students who are admitted to Hunter each year under its current system.

Other gifted and talented middle schools like the Anderson School, and selective high schools in New York and other cities have revised their admissions systems in recent years to promote greater diversity. Hunter should follow their lead and experiment for 2021 with a more nuanced system that does a better job of identifying and admitting a high-achieving, but more racially and economically diverse student body. Restoring such diversity to Hunter's student body is both a moral imperative and essential to achieving Hunter's mission. Hunter cannot succeed in educating young people to build a more equitable world when many of its students learn in classrooms where there are no Black or Latinx

students at all, and where conversations do not include the perspectives and experiences that a diverse student body brings.

Extensive research indicates that greater diversity improves educational experiences and outcomes for *all* students, just as corporate outcomes improve when a firm diversifies its management and employees. It is with an eye towards excellence that we seek to expand the pool of Hunter applicants and students to include high-achieving young people from every neighborhood of New York City, and of every background. The best and brightest from New York City's under-explored communities are every bit as qualified as those living in the few, predominantly white and affluent neighborhoods from which Hunter currently draws the bulk of its students. We seek to raise the bar, not lower it, by using new approaches for identifying and admitting those diverse students who traditionally do not even apply to Hunter.

As the COVID-19 pandemic shines a bright light on New York City's extreme racial and economic divide, it is simply not acceptable for Hunter to remain a segregated ivory tower. Hunter must seize the opportunity presented by the need to modify its admissions system for 2021 and make a serious effort to return to its roots of educating a high-achieving student body that is reflective of New York City's diversity. As we see tens of thousands in our city and millions across the country mobilize against institutionalized racism, we are especially mindful of the responsibility of our school to do its part to address the inequalities that produce racial injustice at all levels.

We call on the school and college administration to develop a plan for the 2021 admissions cycle to address the socio-economic and racial imbalance in the HCHS student body. The demographic make-up of our school should represent the city in which it is embedded and from which it draws its resources. We expect this plan to be developed in collaboration and consultation with faculty, parents, students, and alumni, and with the advice of school integration experts who can advise on best practices. The plan should include modifications to the HCHS admissions policies, a plan for the diversification of faculty, and the expansion of support for students of color within the school.

This memo presents a set of research findings and policy recommendations. We outline how and why the HCHS population is not representative of New York City; describe the mechanism whereby low-income and Black and Latinx students are excluded; demonstrate that a large pool of high-achieving and high-potential students exist within this demographic; show the uneven spatial distribution of HCHS students in relation to socio-economic and racial distribution of New Yorkers by census tracts; and present a set of evidence-based recommendations for modifying admissions practices drawing on the experiences of similarly successful high schools.

1. HCHS has become extremely unrepresentative of NYC's school population, with only a tiny share of Black, Latinx and low-income students.

- Hunter College High School currently admits students into its 7-12th grade program using a two-step process: (1) NYC students scoring in the top approximately 10% on their 5th grade NYS ELA and math tests (roughly 3,500 students from among the city's 70,000 5th graders who take the state tests) are invited to apply by taking Hunter's admissions test each January; and (2) typically about 2,200 of those invited take the Hunter test and the 170 top-scorers are offered admission based solely on their scores on that high-stakes test. An additional 50 seats in the 7-12 High School are filled by students from the Hunter College elementary school, which is limited to residents of Manhattan.¹
- Over the past decades, the demographic make-up of the HCHS student body selected using this restrictive system has become less and less diverse and representative of NYC's school population. See Table 1 below.
- Today just 2.4% of the HCHS student body is Black, and 6.2% is Latinx – while the NYC student population is 25.5% Black and 40.6% Latinx. See Table 1
- In terms of economic diversity, the school is similarly dramatically unrepresentative of NYC's school population: while the school had more economic diversity a generation ago, today it chiefly serves an affluent population. Only 9% of the current HCHS 7-12 students come from families below the Free/Reduced Lunch income threshold, which is \$47,638 for a family of four.² By contrast, 72.8% of the NYC school population is Free/Reduced Lunch eligible, or otherwise economically disadvantaged.
- In fact, the current HCHS population is far more skewed towards the affluent than NYC's original Specialized High Schools. While just 9% of HCHS's 7-12 graders are below the Free/Reduced Lunch threshold, the figure is 42% at Stuyvesant High School,³ 59% at Brooklyn Tech,⁴ and 42% at Bronx Science.⁵

¹ Wikipedia, "Hunter College High School," Admissions, available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter_College_High_School; Hunter College Campus Schools, Admissions, Test Day, Scoring, and Admission Information, available at <https://admissions.hunterschools.org/test-day-scoring-and-admission-information>.

² NYS Dept of Educ, 2019-2020 "Income Eligibility Guidelines for Free and Reduced Price Meals or Free Milk," available at <http://www.cn.nysed.gov/common/cn/files/attiincomeeligibilitygdlns.pdf>

³ Inside Schools, Stuyvesant High School, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/02M475>

⁴ Inside Schools, Brooklyn Technical High School, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/13K430>

⁵ Inside Schools, Bronx High School of Science, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/10X445>

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of NYC Student Population to Hunter Test Qualifying Population to HCHS Students

	NYC School Population (by percent) ⁶	NYC 5th Graders Qualifying to take Hunter Test, 2018 & 2019 (by percent) (top 10% on State ELA & Math Tests) ⁷	HCHS, 7-12 graders, 2019-2020 school year (by percent) ⁸
Black	25.5	11.3 / 11.3	2.4
Latinx	40.6	15.4 / 15.4	6.2
White	15.1	28.6 / 27.7	34.4
Asian	16.2	40.9 / 41.7	35.4
Multi-racial		3.2 / 3.2	21.4
Econ Disadv / Free-Reduced Lunch	72.8	47 / 48	9

Sources: NYC DOE & HCHS NYS DOE BEDS data

2. A large pool of high-achieving Black, Latinx and low-income students are being shut out of Hunter by its admissions system.

- The dramatic under-representation of Black, Latinx and low-income students at HCHS cannot be explained by an under-representation of such students among high-achieving NYC school students.
- NYC DOE data shows that among NYC 5th graders eligible to take the Hunter test – which Hunter defines as those scoring in the top 10% on both the math and ELA 5th grade state tests – 27% are Black or Latinx (11.3% Black, and 15.4% Latinx), and 47% are low-income. See Table 1.
- Yet HCHS enrolls tiny numbers of Black, Latinx or low-income students each year: less than 9% are Black or Latinx (2.4% Black & 6.2% Latinx). And just 9% are low-income. See Table 1.

⁶ NYC DOE, DOE Data at a Glance, available at <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>

⁷ NYC DOE, 2018 & 2019 Math and ELA 5th Grade Distributions (obtained by Hunter parents through data request to NYC DOE)

⁸ HCHS, BEDS data, Oct. 2019, available at https://hunterschools.myschoolapp.com/ftpimages/602/download/download_3120551.pdf

- Clearly, Hunter’s admissions system – which limits admissions to the top scorers on a single high-stakes test that has never been validated by educational experts and that few NYC students take – is a major force driving this exclusion. Our nation’s top universities, including those in the Ivy league, use admissions systems that combine a wider range of more reliable metrics. As a result, they are succeeding in admitting and educating a far more diverse group of high-achieving Black and Latinx students – many of them from New York City. Recent data show that six of the eight Ivy league colleges, plus Stanford, Duke, Vanderbilt, and Northwestern, all now have freshman classes that are more than 10% Black. By contrast, HCHS – which is located in New York City, where the school-age population is 25% Black – has a student body that is less than 3% Black.⁹ To put it another way, in many ways it is easier for a Black New York City school student to get into Harvard than into HCHS.
- Further evidence that New York City has a large pool of high-achieving Black, Latinx and low-income students that Hunter’s current admission system is failing to reach can also be seen in other high schools in the city that are succeeding in identifying such students. These include Success Academy High School, which is predominantly Black, Latinx and low-income and is admitted by lottery, and had an average SAT score of 1268 last fall.¹⁰
- Unlike NYC’s Specialized High Schools – where the state legislature has mandated use of the current SHSAT admissions test for Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Tech and Bronx Science, and where state legislative action is needed to change the admissions system – CUNY and Hunter enjoy complete discretion to modify the HCHS admissions system. Thus, there are no legal obstacles to CUNY and Hunter exploring options for modifying the HCHS admissions system in order to address the under-representation of Black, Latinx and low-income students at HCHS.
- Further data on students qualified to attend Hunter can be found in the pool of 5th graders scoring 4s or higher on the NYS 5th Grade ELA Test (minimum is 622)¹¹ and Math Test (minimum is 616) – a level that is just slightly lower than the Hunter test “top 10%” cut-off.¹² Citywide data shows that more than 40% of NYC 5th graders scoring 4s on either their NYS State Math and ELA tests are Black or Latinx.

⁹ Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, Black First-Year Students at the Nation’s Leading Research Universities (Jan. 2018), available at <https://www.jbhe.com/2018/01/black-first-year-students-at-nations-leading-research-universities/>

¹⁰ Success Academy Press Release (Nov. 8, 2019), available at <https://www.successacademies.org/press-releases/success-academys-largest-senior-class-achieves-an-average-combined-math-and-verbal-sat-score-of-1268/>

¹¹ NYS Educ. Dept, Definitions of Performance Levels for the 2019 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts Tests, available at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pressRelease/20190822/documents/ela-2019-scale-score-performance-level-conversion-charts.pdf>

¹² NYS Educ. Dept, Definitions of Performance Levels for the 2019 Grades 3-8 Math Tests, available at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pressRelease/20190822/documents/math-2019-scale-score-performance-level-conversion-charts.pdf>

And more than 50% of NYC 5th graders scoring 4s on their NYS State Math and ELA tests are economically disadvantaged. See Table 2.

- The Bronx provides a good case study of Hunter’s serious diversity problem. Much of the Bronx is within easy commuting distance to HCHS’s East 94th Street campus. There are many high achieving students in the borough: more than 1,800 Bronx 5th graders scored 4s on their State ELA Test and more than 2,800 did the same on the State Math Test. Most of them are Black, Latinx and/or economically disadvantaged. Yet currently very few Bronx students take the Hunter test and just 34 students from the Bronx are enrolled at HCHS in all of grades 7 through 12 —a miniscule 2.7% of the school. See Table 2.

Table 2: High-Achieving NYC 5th Graders by Borough, Race and Economic Disadvantage

High achieving = 5th graders scoring 4s on NYS state test (5th grade NYS State Test scores are used to determine eligibility to take Hunter College High School admission test)

B&L = Black and/or Latinx

Economically disadvantaged = eligible for free/reduced lunch, or other means-tested benefits programs¹³

Data source: NYC DOE

	ELA 4s	Math 4s	% 4s: ELA / Math	Black ELA 4s	Black Math 4s	Latinx ELA 4s	Latinx Math 4s	Econ Disad ELA 4s	Econ Disad Math 4s	Econ Disad B&L ELA 4s	Econ Disad B&L Math 4s
Bronx	1,836	2,824	13% / 13%	541	795	973	1,524	1,445	2,295	1,246	1,954
Brooklyn	4,192	7,057	30% / 32%	1,041	1,755	724	1,358	1,445	4,674	1,279	2,367
Manhattan	2,514	3,695	18% / 18%	289	612	543	917	893	1,612	537	1,084
Queens	4,326	6,852	31% / 32%	407	556	1,037	1511	2,565	4,274	1,002	1,472
Staten Island	904	1,205	7% / 6%	52	54	183	221	375	505	146	167
NYC	13,772	21,633	100% / 100%	2,330	3,772	3,460	5,531	6,723	13,360	4,210	7,044

¹³ NYS Educ. Dep’t, Glossary of Terms, available at

[https://data.nysed.gov/glossary.php?report=reportcards#:~:text=Economically%20disadvantaged%20students%20are%20those,for%20Needy%20Families%20\(TANF\).](https://data.nysed.gov/glossary.php?report=reportcards#:~:text=Economically%20disadvantaged%20students%20are%20those,for%20Needy%20Families%20(TANF).)

% B&L of all high achievers	44%	43%
% B&L of high achievers in DOE District Schools	37%	33%
% Econ Disad of all high achievers	54%	62%
% B&L of Econ Disad high achievers	63%	53%

3. The bulk of current HCHS students are drawn from a relatively few mostly affluent and white neighborhoods, with little representation of students from lower income, non-white parts of the city.

The spatial distribution of HCHS students throughout New York City presents a similarly stark picture of the underrepresentation of neighborhoods with lower income, non-white residents. In this memo, we present geographic data on where current HCHS students live and compare it at the census tract level with racial and economic geographic data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2017 (5-year estimates) acquired via NHGIS.org.

As presented in the tables below, the spatial distribution data show:

- The bulk of Hunter students are drawn from just 129 of New York City’s 2,164 census tracts -- a tiny fraction of the city. See Table 3.
- The census tracts where Hunter students live are on average 57.4% white, and just 6.8% Black, 15.5% Latinx, and only 11.1% in poverty --

in a city that is just 32.1% white, and more than half Black and Latinx, and that has a 19% poverty rate. See Table 4.

- By contrast, the census tracts from which there are no current HCHS students are 25.5% white, 27.4% Black and 33.1% Latinx, and average a 22.1% poverty rate. See Table 4.
- More than half of Hunter students are drawn from Manhattan -- New York City's wealthiest borough, and the city's whitest after Staten Island (from which few students attend Hunter because of the distance). See Table 5.
- This stark racial and economic divide between neighborhoods in NYC from which HCHS draws its students and those that have little to no representation at the school also mirrors, in many ways, the divide between communities hardest hit by the coronavirus and those less affected. NYC DOE data indicates that 292 of the students who qualified as potential applicants to Hunter's current class of seventh graders live in the 10 zip codes where the coronavirus has spread most. Yet, a look through the HCHS student directory shows there are only three Hunter seventh graders from any of those zip codes.

Table 3 shows some clear patterns in the demographic make-up of the tracts where HCHS students reside, with 255 tracts that drew only one student and 1 tract that drew 16 students. The bulk of Hunter students are drawn from just 129 of New York City’s 2164 census tracts -- a tiny fraction of the city. The demographics columns show typical socio-economic status variables for vulnerability and racial make-up. The table shows a trend of increasing privilege for census tracts from which HCHS draws more students.

Table 3. NYC Census Tract Distribution of HCHS Students

# of students per tract	# of tracts	# of students	% Non-Hispanic White	% Non-Hispanic Black	% Latinx	% without High School Diploma	% in Poverty
0	1662	0	25.5	27.4	33.1	21.9	22.1
1	255	255	39.3	11.2	24.5	16.8	15.7
2	118	236	47.3	9.4	18.7	12.7	13.0
3	39	117	51.7	7.1	13.3	10.1	12.5
4	28	112	58.9	7.3	13.0	6.8	11.2
5	17	85	53.9	4.4	19.4	9.4	12.2
6	9	54	60.3	5.0	14.4	5.7	9.7
7	11	77	67.9	4.3	10.7	4.7	7.5
8	7	56	74.7	1.9	9.0	2.7	6.4
9	4	36	61.9	5.1	17.4	4.7	7.9
10	3	30	60.2	6.4	17.7	4.7	8.5
11	3	33	65.0	9.3	8.8	5.4	15.3
12	5	60	78.1	3.5	7.9	2.2	6.7
13	1	13	80.2	3.1	5.1	3.7	8.2
15	1	15	61.0	6.6	14.9	4.5	18.2
16	1	16	66.4	4.8	13.2	2.9	5.2
NYC	2164	1195	32.1	22.0	29.1	18.9	19.6

* one student location in the database did not join with the census tract data.

Table 4 compares areas of the city where students live versus areas of the city where no students live, using the weighted average socio-economic status variables. This means that tracts with more students are more heavily weighted than those with very few students. Our findings indicate that HCHS students tend to come from areas that are much whiter and less disadvantaged than the city as a whole. For instance, on average students come from tracts that are nearly 60% Non-Hispanic White. This is close to double the city-wide average for

non-Hispanic whites and more than double the average for tracts that did not produce students. Even more stark comparisons can be made considering the proportion of non-Hispanic Black residents, where student home tracts have 6.8% non-Hispanic Black residents versus 22% city-wide. The Latinx population constitutes 15.5% for student tracts in comparison to 29.1% city-wide. Finally, with respect to educational attainment, student tract weighted average shows 8.3% of the population without high school degrees compared to 18.9% city-wide. While 11.1% of the population in student tracts lives in poverty, the city-wide population living in poverty is 19.6%.

Table 4. HCHS Students by Race and Economic Disadvantage

	% Non-Hispanic White	% Non-Hispanic Black	% Latinx	% without High School Diploma	% in Poverty
Non-student Locations	25.5	27.4	33.1	21.9	22.1
Student Locations*	57.4	6.8	15.5	8.3	11.1
NYC	32.1	22.0	29.1	18.9	19.6

* student location summary statistics are weighted by the # of students per census tract, so if 10 students were from tract "A", it will weigh 10 times more than a tract where only 1 student lives.

Finally, Table 5 shows the disproportionate representation of students by borough. More than half of Hunter students are drawn from Manhattan -- New York City's wealthiest borough, and the city's whitest after Staten Island (from which few students attend Hunter because of the distance).

Table 5. HCHS Students by Borough

Borough	# of students	% of students	% population
Bronx	32	2.7	17.1
Brooklyn	173	14.5	30.7
Manhattan	645	54.0	19.5
Queens	333	27.9	27
Staten Island	12	1.0	5.7
NYC	1195	100	100

4. Other high-performing high schools and middle schools in New York and nationally have developed admissions systems that select high-achieving yet much more diverse student bodies than Hunter.

- In contrast to Hunter, other high-performing schools in NYC and nationally use different admissions systems, resulting in highly qualified and much more racially and economically diverse student bodies – providing a road map for how Hunter could do the same.
- Three leading NYC gifted and talented middle schools – including the Anderson School, a major feeder of HCHS – have in recent years revised their admissions systems to promote greater racial and economic diversity:
 - The Anderson School recently announced that, starting next year, they will give priority to students residing in selected low-income neighborhoods in northern Manhattan and the South Bronx for 30% of their seats.¹⁴
 - The Brooklyn School of Inquiry, another highly-regarded G&T K-8 school, gives priority to students residing in selected school districts for 40% of their seats. Half will go to students from families with low-income and half to students living in districts 18 or 20.
 - The Tag Young Scholars School gives priority to students from families with low-income for 40% of their seats.
- At the high school level:
 - Beacon High School – one of the city’s most highly-regarded and sought-after schools – uses a multi-factor admissions selection system that combines consideration of grades, state test scores and student portfolios. While its diversity has dropped in recent years, it still enrolls a student body that is 34% Black and Latinx (14% Black and 20% Latinx) – far more diverse than Hunter.¹⁵
 - Millennium Brooklyn High School – a high-performing high school that is rapidly becoming as sought after and selective as Beacon, selects students based on a combination of high grades and state test scores, but also reserves 50% of its class for Free/Reduced Lunch eligible students, resulting in a student body that is 17% Black, 20% Latinx and 35% Free/Reduced Lunch eligible.¹⁶
 - In Chicago, the city’s high-performing, specialized high schools, such as Whitney Young Magnet High School¹⁷ – Michelle

¹⁴ Chalkbeat, Aiming for greater student diversity in NYC gifted programs, the Anderson School tweaks admissions (Apr. 20, 2020), available at <https://ny.chalkbeat.org/2020/4/23/21233687/aiming-for-greater-student-diversity-in-nyc-gifted-programs-the-anderson-school-tweaks-admissions>

¹⁵ Inside Schools, Beacon High School, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/03M479>

¹⁶ Inside Schools, Millennium Brooklyn High School, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/15K684>

¹⁷ Chicago Public Schools, Whitney M Young Magnet High School, available at <https://schoolinfo.cps.edu/schoolprofile/schooldetails.aspx?SchoolId=609755>

Obama's alma mater – use a combined system that takes into account grades, test scores and socio-economic factors to admit a high-performing and racially diverse student body – a system that is viewed by education experts as the most effective model for doing so.¹⁸

5. Like many NYC middle and high schools, Hunter will be forced to modify its high school admissions system for 2021. In doing so it must ensure that those changes do not worsen the school's already abysmal record on diversity. More importantly, it should take advantage of the need to modify the admissions system to adopt changes that will promote greater racial and economic diversity, while still admitting a high-achieving student body.

- Hunter will be forced to modify its high school admissions process for 2021 because the 5th grade state test scores it has traditionally used as a screen for eligibility to take the Hunter test were not administered this year. What's more, at this point it is highly uncertain whether Hunter will be able to administer its traditional in-person admissions test to thousands of applicants in January 2021.
- Hunter is not alone in having to change its admissions system in response to the pandemic. All of NYC's screened middle schools and high schools are now being forced to make similar changes since the grades and state test scores on which they have traditionally relied will not exist for 2020.
- Preliminary work by the NYC DOE to analyze the implications of necessary adjustments to the admissions processes at its own screened middle schools and high schools has shown that creating "substitute data" for admissions by using test scores or grades from earlier years (when it was possible to administer these tests) would produce significantly different pools of top students. In the DOE simulations, these disparities are greater in younger years and most strongly disadvantage Black, Latinx and low-income students as well as students with special needs and English language learners. The city is currently meeting with a wide range of stakeholders in this process and will shortly publish its analysis. Hunter would do well to engage similarly to develop strategies to ensure that the revised admissions system it uses for 2021 does not worsen its already very poor track record on diversity.

¹⁸ Brookings, *Elite or Elitist: Lessons for Colleges from Selective High Schools* (July 31, 2019), available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/elite-or-elitist-lessons-for-colleges-from-selective-high-schools/>

- As HCHS revises its admissions system for 2021, we urge that it be guided by these two important principles:
 - Do No Harm – Hunter must ensure that any alternative admissions systems it adopts for 2021 do not worsen Hunter’s already abysmal track record on diversity – by incorporating measures to mitigate the potential adverse racial and economic effects of any new screens or systems that it adopts.
 - Seize the Moment – Hunter should and must go farther and take advantage of this necessitated change to revise its current highly exclusionary admissions system. Specifically, Hunter should change how it uses the Hunter admissions test (if Hunter is able to administer the test for 2021) in order to expand access to Hunter to the pool of highly qualified Black, Latinx and low-income students who are being shut out by Hunter’s current admissions system.

6. Options for changing Hunter’s admissions system for 2021 and beyond to restore racial and economic diversity to HCHS

- There exist a range of options for changing Hunter’s admissions process for 2021 to improve racial and economic diversity at HCHS. As explained below, we call on Hunter to adopt an inclusive process for determining the revised admissions system for 2021, which includes all Hunter stakeholders as well as experts on best practices for school integration.
- To aid that process, we outline here some possible alternative approaches that would: (1) improve the racial and economic diversity of the pool of students eligible to apply to Hunter; and (2) improve the racial and economic diversity of the students admitted from that pool.
- We are not wedded to any one approach. But what is absolutely essential is that the revised admissions system that Hunter adopts for 2021 must expand access to Hunter for Black, Latinx and low-income students.
- Options for Improving Racial and Economic Diversity in the Pool of Students Eligible to Apply to HCHS – As explained above, the straight-forward alternatives to Hunter’s traditional use of 5th grader state tests scores as an eligibility screen – such as using 4th grade state test scores and/or grades – will have disparate racial impacts on Black, Latinx and low-income students. It is therefore imperative that if Hunter uses one of those alternatives, that it incorporate additional components to mitigate the adverse racial and economic impacts. Possible alternatives to mitigate the impacts include:
 - Rather than simply using 4th grade state tests scores or grades as an eligibility screen, Hunter could instead use a composite qualifying score that combines 4th grade test scores and/or grades with indexes of economic vulnerability, such as an adjustment for low-income students, or for students from high-poverty neighborhoods.
 - Alternatively, if 4th grade state test scores or grades were used as an eligibility screen, Hunter could mitigate their adverse racial

and economic impact by creating alternative avenues for eligibility to take the Hunter test – for example, by allowing community organizations that provide services to low-income students in NYC to nominate high-achieving students to take the Hunter test. Examples of such organizations that have strong track records of identifying and mentoring high-achieving, low-income students include organizations or programs such as Harlem Educational Activities Fund (HEAF), Armory College Prep Middle School Program, the city’s many Y tutoring programs, the Exam Schools Partnership Initiative (ESPI), the East Harlem Tutorial Program, New York Math Circle, Writopia Lab and many others.

- Options for Improving the Racial and Economic Diversity of Students Admitted to HCHS – While Hunter must ensure that changes in how it determines the pool of students eligible to apply to Hunter for 2021 do not decrease diversity, it should go much farther. Hunter should take advantage of having to change its admissions process next year to experiment with alternative admissions systems that will promote greater economic and racial diversity at Hunter, while still admitting a high-achieving student body – as other selective middle schools, high schools and colleges in New York and nationally already do. There exist a wide range of alternative admissions systems that Hunter could use that would select a highly qualified yet more diverse student body. Some options include:
 - Get Rid of the Test – Over the medium term, we believe Hunter should assess the reliability and impact of its test on admissions – and based on that assessment, very likely should eliminate it. To our knowledge the Hunter test has never been validated by any educational expert. Moreover, the fact that it tests students on content (such as math) that is not typically taught by the first semester of 6th grade in New York City schools makes the test unfair and exclusionary on its face, since students who do not have access to test prep or to schools with accelerated curricula are automatically at a disadvantage in taking it. Moreover, even if its content were fair, the very fact that it is a special test that families must learn about, and then must have the employment flexibility to escort their children to Manhattan on a work day to spend several hours taking the test, necessarily excludes a large portion of qualified NYC students whose families do not have the information or free time to enable their children to take the test -- to say nothing of test prep tutoring that most affluent applicants have access to, giving them an unfair leg up over low-income candidates who do not. Indeed, recognition of these significant obstacles has led Boston to now administer its exam school test to all students in the city in their public schools during the school day, and there is a push to do the same with the SHSAT in NYC. Equally unfairly, Hunter currently charges a \$70 fee to take its admissions test and low-income students’ families are forced to produce burdensome paperwork (in the form of income tax returns) to get the fee partially reduced to \$20. If Hunter preserves its test, at a bare minimum it should allow moderate and lower income students to take the test for free, and should not require burdensome paperwork for them to do so – for example by allowing them to self-certify that paying the fee would be a hardship, or by simply accepting their Free/Reduced Lunch status as sufficient evidence.

- Change How the Test Is Used by Combining It with Consideration of Economic Disadvantage – But if Hunter retains and is able to administer the Hunter test for 2021 (either in-person or online), the school should at a minimum modify how the test is weighted and used. Hunter and the NYC specialized high schools are virtually alone in the U.S. in basing admissions solely on students’ rank-order scores on a single high-stakes test -- a practice which is disfavored by leading education experts. There is no evidence that the top 175 scorers on the Hunter test are the only or best-qualified students to enroll and succeed at Hunter. In reality, many or most of the high-achieving pool of students who qualify to take the Hunter test could succeed at HCHS. Instead, most selective educational institutions in NYC and the United States – from Beacon to Dalton to Harvard – all use standardized tests as just one factor among others for selecting a high achieving student body. Hunter should do the same.

A simple reform for ensuring greater diversity at Hunter would be to adjust the selection system to combine an applicant’s Hunter test score with consideration of their economic disadvantage. Such consideration of disadvantage could be done in a wide range of ways. We believe that the most effective approach would combine consideration of both the applicant’s economic disadvantage (measured by their free/reduced lunch eligibility) with a measure of the economic disadvantage of the applicant’s neighborhood or alternatively of their elementary school. Integration experts believe that this combination most effectively identifies and controls for the combined effects of individual disadvantage together with the community effects of concentrated poverty.

This is the approach that is used by Chicago’s national model admissions system for their specialized high schools, which combines measures of individual and neighborhood disadvantage with measures of academic achievement.¹⁹ It is also the approach that is used under the NYC specialized high schools’ Discovery Program to identify and admit high-achieving disadvantaged students who otherwise would be shut out by an admissions system based solely on rank order scores on a single, high-stakes test. And it is similar to the approach recently adopted by the Anderson School, which now reserves a portion of its seats for applicants from targeted low-income neighborhoods.

Under such a system, Hunter could give priority for up to a given portion of seats -- say 30% -- to economically disadvantaged students from high-poverty neighborhoods or elementary schools. The top-scoring students on the Hunter test from these demographics would be admitted, and then the balance of the class could be filled in the traditional way with top-scoring non-disadvantaged students.

30% would be a very modest and reasonable portion of class places to reserve for economically disadvantaged students in light

¹⁹ Brookings, *Elite or Elitist: Lessons for Colleges from Selective High Schools* (July 31, 2019), available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/elite-or-elitist-lessons-for-colleges-from-selective-high-schools/>

of the fact that, according to NYC DOE data, fully 47% of the pool of students eligible to take the Hunter test (top 10% scorers on the 5th grade state tests) are low-income. See Table 1. Indeed, the fact that Stuyvesant High School and Bronx Science both have 42% low-income student bodies, and that Brooklyn Tech's enrollment is 59% low-income -- while Hunter's is a shocking 9% -- show that 30% would be a very moderate goal for which to aim.

We offer this proposal as just one example of the wide range of ways that Hunter's admissions system could be adjusted to take into account disadvantage and admit a high-achieving, more economically and racially diverse student body. The key point is that Hunter commit itself to promoting increased racial and economic diversity as it revises its admissions system for 2021. With the engagement of all stakeholders, and the assistance of school integration experts who are available to advise and assist, there is no question that Hunter can and should make significant progress.

7. We call on Hunter to adopt a transparent process that includes all stakeholders and school diversity experts as it develops its revised admissions system for 2021.

We call on the Hunter College High School and Hunter College administration to develop a plan for the 2021 admissions cycle to address the economic and racial imbalance in the HCHS student body. The demographic make-up of our school should represent the city in which it is embedded and from which it draws its resources. We expect this plan to be developed in collaboration and consultation with faculty, parents, students, and alumni, and with the advice of school integration experts who can advise on best practices. The plan should include modifications to the HCHS admissions policies, a plan for the diversification of faculty, and the expansion of support for students of color within the school.

As the pandemic shines a bright light on New York City's extreme racial and economic divide, Hunter has a moral imperative to make a serious effort at returning to its roots of educating a high-achieving student body that is more reflective of New York City's diversity. The above options all provide means by which Hunter can do a better job of doing so.