



COMMENTARY EARLY EDUCATION

NYC City Council Bill Is Good News for School Integration

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New York City just took an important step toward encouraging integration in the city's public schools.

Yesterday, the City Council's education committee unanimously passed a bill that would require the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to report annually on student diversity within each district and charter school in the city, by grade level. The information would include data on race/ethnicity and gender, as well as data on students who receive special education services, who are English language learners, who receive free or reduced-price lunch, who are in temporary housing or foster care, or who attend the school out-of-district.

Strong Features of the Bill

Decades of research show that integrated schools boost the performance of low-income students, on average, and provide all students with social and civic benefits by fostering tolerance and encouraging critical thinking. Having accurate and comprehensive data on school diversity is the first step towards building solutions to promote socioeconomic and racial integration.

This bill includes several important features that make for a strong data system:

1. The bill requires the DOE to report data by grade-level and for special programs. This is important for seeing patterns of segregation in schools where demographics skew based on grade—for example, when pre-K and kindergarten classes enroll more middle-class students than upper grades—or based on access to certain classes such as gifted and talented or dual language programs.
2. The bill requires the same reporting on district schools and charter schools. Separate enrollment systems for district and charter schools have caused fierce debate about whether charter schools in the city are exacerbating segregation. On one hand, NYC charter schools enroll fewer students with special needs and English language learners, on average, than district schools. On the other hand, two-thirds of charter schools are mixed-income, falling within 15 percent of the citywide average for low-income enrollment, compared to just one-third of district schools. Providing more nuanced data on charter and district schools will help inform how both sectors need to improve school diversity.
3. The bill includes a variety of socioeconomic measures, including not only free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, but also temporary housing status, foster care status, and primary home language. While free and reduced-price lunch eligibility is the main indicator of socioeconomic status used in K-12 education, it is a rough measure and one that is increasingly unreliable as more schools move to a system in which all students are eligible for free lunch. Having multiple measures allows for a richer understanding of the socioeconomic composition of a school.

Room for Improvement

When it comes to reporting on pre-K enrollment, however, the current bill has room to improve. Only about 40 percent of the city’s Universal Pre-K seats for four-year-olds are located in district or charter schools. The other 60 percent of the seats are located in centers operated by community-based organizations. The current bill does not include community-based pre-K centers in the reporting requirements, meaning that the DOE’s data will not give a complete picture of classroom diversity for the city’s youngest learners. As I explain in a [recent report](#), the city’s recent push to expand Universal Pre-K could be an opportunity for promoting integration, but only if the right policies—beginning with reporting data on diversity in all pre-K programs—are in place.

The bill will go before the full City Council for a vote later this year. If it passes, collecting better data on diversity in the city’s schools will be just the first step toward the bigger goal of finding ways for more school to give kids of different backgrounds the chance to learn together, side-by-side.

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