



THE COUNCIL OF THE
CITY OF NEW YORK

August 7, 2020

Mayor Bill de Blasio Chancellor Richard Carranza
City Hall Department of Education
New York, NY 10007 52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Demand to Desegregate All Remote Learning Now

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza,

With as many as [one quarter](#) of public school families opting for [full remote learning](#) in the fall, we have a historic opportunity and, we believe, a mandate to desegregate classes and achieve educational equality online. With the school year fast approaching, only incomplete plans for what digital classrooms will look like have been shared. We demand that you desegregate all remote learning for this school year.

[New York City public schools are more segregated today than they were during *Brown v. Board of Education*](#), largely because our city's neighborhoods are: the result of a long history of [government-enforced racism and *de jure* segregation](#) right here in New York City. Many students live in school zones dictated by geography that stems directly from [racist redlining that continued rampantly and legally through the 1970s](#), and which continues to impact neighborhoods to this day, with [investigations](#) and even [settlements here in New York State as recently as 2015](#). While desegregationist housing policy is an imperative, we cannot wait for or rely on it. We must find ways to bring communities together in our classrooms. Enrichment programs have been [credited with providing access for black and brown students to our best schools](#), but early in this administration, [racial segregation was found to persist](#) in these programs, with [gifted and talented programs missing](#) from [black and brown low-income communities](#).

The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed systemic racial disparities in healthcare, as the virus has [disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color](#). As we transitioned to remote learning for 1.1 million students during the height of the pandemic, the Department of Education kept students segregated by geography and school district. However, with the benefit of a summer to plan for next school year, it would be irresponsible to preserve those same systems, particularly for full remote learning.

We have all been students at one point or another, and many of us are now parents who want the best for our children. Though we all hold varying opinions based on lived experiences,

anecdotes, and media exposure, it is essential that we concede to evidence-based, peer-reviewed and scientific articles to help guide our stances and make informed decisions. [Fifty years of academic, peer-reviewed research in the social sciences](#) has found that we can improve learning outcomes for students when teachers are able to thoroughly and actively engage with their students' individual differences and learning styles.

We propose the creation of a new desegregated citywide school district to serve every student enrolled in all remote learning. The virtual schools within this new district would be organized around learning style, enrichment, and even common interest. Initial online diagnostics or results from remote learning earlier this year would help identify how students learned, so we can best match them with teachers and virtual classrooms filled with diverse groups of students who learned the same way.

Enrichment programs like gifted and talented programs or those tailored to specific interests and remote learning styles could finally be offered to every student who qualified, with additional classrooms opened for students who may not have qualified or even known to take the test but who deserve the access and opportunity none the less. Enrichment programs such as dual language programs in English and Spanish, French, Creole, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, Urdu, Bengali, and more could proliferate and attract students of every color and creed. The roster of schools organized around standard common subjects such as STEM, Arts, English, or History could be expanded to include more areas such as sports and modern media. With the availability of real-time diagnostics and analytics for students as they complete assignments online, teachers and administrators would be able to provide support and guidance for any student who might have fallen behind in the traditional education system, which has over relied on high stakes testing and grades.

In order to meet new demand, the Department of Education, free of the constraints of physical school buildings and a limited number of classrooms, could offer teachers who have requested to teach fully remote, as well as any staff with a teaching certificate, the opportunity to lead these classrooms. We can reorganize virtual schools, classrooms, and teachers in an agile, data-driven approach to meet parent and student demand every step of the way.

Desegregation has always faced resistance, whether in Little Rock, Arkansas, or right here in New York City. Some might object that there is a short lifespan to any solution that relies heavily on remote learning to overcome the obstacles of geography and limited resources. However, what we offer is a path forward, leveraging this unique moment and the power of technology to take on systemic racism and desegregate now, not in some never occurring future. As we approach the end of the pandemic and a return to in-person learning, the all-remote program we've proposed might still be appropriate for some students or some programs. In the alternative, it can serve as a model for the city to learn from as we reorganize physical school buildings and classrooms to finally desegregate our school system.

Others might argue that they already have many of these programs in their district. Allowing for enrollment in programs from across the city will only open more options to parents, many of whom will find that in the status quo, even in school districts that do [offer gifted and talented or other enrichment programs](#), roughly [two thirds of the children](#) who qualify are routinely turned away.

Families of students of color or other traditionally marginalized communities may also prefer their children to be in a classroom with other kids of similar backgrounds. We must avoid a tokenistic approach to integration and proactively find ways to foster communities and learning environments where students who come from shared backgrounds can support and learn from each other. Remote learning provides more flexibility to create various learning environments to achieve these goals.

Though we are a little more than a month away from the start of school without a final plan for re-opening, we must acknowledge how ambitious our plan might be given the short time before us. The Department of Education must prioritize a safe re-opening and if desegregating all remote learning proves to be too resource intensive, then we ask that a citywide pilot be launched. As a pilot, parents and students could be asked this week if they wish to participate, setting up a limited number of virtual classrooms to address specific need. Once established enrollment could be expanded for the Spring Semester and depending on the pandemic and success of the program rolled out citywide for the next school year.

Imagine the public education system we can create together, with the ambitious goal of taking on systemic racism and segregation, all while providing a historic opportunity for students of every race and ethnicity. There would be no more lotteries. No more geographic preference based on racist red lining. No more false constraints created by generations of disinvestment in communities of color. Parents and students could simply apply and be guaranteed a seat in the virtual classroom of their choice. Equal educational opportunities for all.

Sincerely,



Ben Kallos
Council Member
5th District



Robert Cornegy
Council Member
36th District