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**Testimony of Sarita Subramanian  
To the New York State Standing Committee on Education  
Hearing on Specialized High School Admissions**

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Good morning Chair Benedetto and members of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Education. My name is Sarita Subramanian and I am the supervising analyst for the education team at the New York City Independent Budget Office. IBO is a city agency providing nonpartisan policy analysis and information for elected officials and the public. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing to examine the admission process and access to New York City's specialized high schools.

In February, IBO released a report in which we simulated what offers to students would look like under the Mayor's proposal from last June, which would move away from the Specialized High School Admissions Test and instead use a combination of grades and performance on New York State standardized exams. Based on this new combined score, the Mayor's proposal would distribute offers to the top 7 percent of students from each traditional public and charter school who also rank in the top quartile citywide.

IBO's report is divided into three sections. First, we looked at the demographic profile and prior academic performance of students who would have received offers if the new system had been in place for last school year—2017-2018. Second, we looked at which middle schools the students who would have received offers came from. Finally, we described the academic profile of the high schools that students who would have received offers actually attended last year. My testimony will focus on the first and third sections of the report. The full [report](#) is attached for your reference.

In looking at the demographic profile and prior academic performance of students who would have received an offer, we found that there would be substantially greater racial diversity compared with the actual incoming class for the specialized high schools last year. Five times as many black students and more than four times as many Hispanic students would have received offers compared with the number of blacks and Hispanics who actually attended specialized high schools in 2017-2018. While the share of offers to Asian students would have been half of the share that actually attended a specialized high school, they would still have comprised the largest share of offers. Roughly the same number of white students would have received offers under the Mayor's proposal. The share of offers to female students would have increased to about two-thirds of all offers and the share of offers to students in poverty would have grown to more than 63 percent.

Some opponents of the proposal have argued that it would increase the possibility of admitting students who might not be as prepared for the specialized high schools' demanding curriculum. Our data allowed

us to look at the prior student achievement of those who would have received offers under the proposed replacement system. We found that the average grades in seventh grade for students who would have received an offer would increase slightly—by less than 1.0 percentage point—compared with students who actually attended specialized high schools last year. The share of students who would have been proficient in English Language Arts would decline from 96 percent of those who actually attended a specialized high school to 92 percent of those who would have received offers under the Mayor’s proposal. Almost 90 percent of students would have been proficient in math, although virtually all ninth graders who attended a specialized high school in 2017-2018 were proficient in math.

It is important to note that when selecting the top 7 percent of students at each school who would receive an offer to specialized high schools based on the new combined performance score, the proposed policy stipulates that students must also score in the top quartile citywide for that metric. The implication is that it provides a citywide “floor” for student achievement in addition to meeting the requirement for their relative standing in their school. We found that the citywide floor actually filters out very few students.

Because our study used the cohort of students who entered ninth grade in 2017-2018, we were able to identify which high schools that students who would have received offers actually chose to attend last year, given the options available at that time, and to observe the academic profiles of those schools. IBO ranked all public high schools in the city in 2017-2018 by the share of students that graduated college-ready in both English and math and identified schools with a college-ready rate of 97 percent or higher—a rate equivalent to that in specialized high schools.

We found that the proposed changes would have the greatest impact for top-performing black and Hispanic students, who were less likely than white or Asian students to attend a top-ranked high school in the city in 2017-2018. Of the students who would have received an offer to a specialized high school, just 12 percent of black students and 16 percent of Hispanic students attended a top-ranked school in 2017-2018, compared with 46 percent of white students and 63 percent of Asian students.

The greatest unknown factor related to the Mayor’s proposed policy is how it will affect students’ choices for high school. While the proposed policy would affect which students would receive offers to a specialized high school, perhaps equally important is which schools students decide to rank among their choices. And even then, some students who receive an offer from a specialized high school choose not to attend. Among students coming from public middle schools, 18.0 percent who received an offer to a specialized high school as an incoming student for 2017-2018 chose not to attend. Actual changes to enrollment at the specialized high schools will depend on whether students who would receive offers would actually choose to accept them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.