



# 21st-Century School Integration in New York City: New Paradigms, Promising Practices, and Familiar Obstacles in the Nation's Largest District

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21st-Century School Integration in New York City:  
New Paradigms, Promising Practices, and Familiar Obstacles in the Nation's Largest District

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)  
Capstone

Submitted by

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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education Leadership

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## Dedication

Dedicated to Grandpa and Zoë Isabelle.

Grandpa, you are the inspiration for so much of the work I have done in my life. You were a true pioneer and a tireless champion for the civil rights of Black people.

Zoë, you are the inspiration for so much of the work I still plan to do in my life. I can't wait to see the amazing woman you grow up to be and the impact you will have on the world.

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## Abstract

In 2019, the New York City mayor–appointed School Diversity Advisory Group released two separate sets of recommendations to the Department of Education (DOE) on how to integrate its schools. The first set addressed the conditions necessary for integration to take root and was adopted by the DOE in June 2019. The second set addressed enrollment policies and special programs. It was released in August 2019 for consideration by the DOE.

This residency, based in the Chancellor’s Office of the New York City DOE, involved two primary tasks: coordinating cross-agency implementation of the recommendations that were adopted, and creating a process and a strategy to advance policy objectives from the recommendations under consideration. This capstone is a critical analysis of these efforts with implications for large-scale racial and socioeconomic school integration efforts in urban school districts.

The findings paint a nuanced picture of progress during the 2019–2020 school year. First, recommendations that were narrowly focused in one to two offices, had clear mandates, or overlapped with existing priorities, generally were successfully implemented. In contrast, recommendations that were broadly cross-divisional or open to interpretation generally made limited early progress. The analysis suggests that hierarchy, siloed divisions, and competing priorities impeded the implementation of complex recommendations, although enlisting senior leadership eventually accelerated the implementation of some of these recommendations. Second, the analysis shows that the public reception of the second report, especially its portrayal in the media, and the political reaction to the public reception created significant obstacles for advancing policy changes that would lead to more diverse schools. This led the DOE to reconsider strategy, timing, and community input, delaying substantive reform of enrollment policy beyond 2019–2020.

The implication for school districts attempting to integrate is that successful school integration requires both internal and external strategies, undergirded by an expansive vision of school integration. The external strategy should involve (a) having a clear, strategic, and persuasive public narrative that frames the value proposition of integrated schools as a boon to student achievement; and (b) cultivating support and legitimacy by the media, the public, and politicians. The internal strategy should involve (a) having innovative solutions to ingrained organizational practices, such as student placement; (b) deliberately creating novel structures for work; and (c) deploying targeted resources for transformative change.



## Preface

My grandfather was born in 1901, at a time when the United States was leaving the stain of its “original sin” of African slavery in the previous century and moving into a new one, full of possibility for the growing and increasingly diverse nation and its people. As time would show, the legacy of that stain proved too indelible to wash away, and the problem of the century ahead, the one Louis Redding was born into was, as W. E. B. DuBois classically predicted it would be, the “problem of the color line” (1903, p. 359).

Grandpa’s life was deeply connected to both the 19th and 20th centuries and their defining institutions. His grandmother, Margaret Ann Redding (“Grandma Redding”), had herself been a slave, having escaped once and been so brutally beaten upon her capture that she harbored a lifelong hatred of White people (Redding, 1991). His other grandmother, Cora Holmes, (“Grandma Conway”), was connected to White people in a different way; her extremely fair skin was a reminder that there were White forebears in Grandpa’s lineage and was emblematic of the country’s complicated history with race. Grandpa made the most of the opportunities his hard-working parents provided for him, graduating from Brown University at the top of his class. He went on to teach at and administer an all-Black school in Florida before attending Harvard Law School. He was one of the first African American graduates of that institution.

After law school, Grandpa moved back to his home state of Delaware to begin his legal career. The members of the Delaware Bar Association initially refused to let him sit for the bar, and then acquiesced, but only after arranging for a different, more difficult examination. He passed it. Grandpa was admitted to the Delaware Bar in 1929. For “Lawyer Redding,” this kicked off a decades-long career—half of it as the only Black lawyer in Delaware—leveraging his private practice to integrate public education and public accommodations and to level the playing field for Black Delawareans.

In 1952, he brought suits against two Delaware municipalities, Claymont and Hockessin, for denying African American families access to their local White schools (Kluger, 2004). The judge in

these cases, *Collins Seitz*, decided in favor of plaintiffs Ethel Belton, Shirley Bulah, and nine other Claymont residents. Seitz wrote in his decision that the state of Delaware's demonstrated inability to provide equal facilities for Black students left him with no choice but to immediately require the state to admit those students to the White schools to which they had appealed to enter. He argued that had he decided any differently it would be tantamount to saying, "Yes, your Constitutional rights are being invaded, but be patient, we will see whether in time they are still being violated" (Kluger, 2004, p. 450). Lawyer Redding's two legal victories, *Belton v. Gebhart* and *Bulah v. Gebhart*, were subsequently appealed by the state and then combined with three other cases from around the country to comprise *Brown v. Board of Education*. Grandpa, who had long been involved with the local and national NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), joined the esteemed legal team that took the issue of school integration to the nation's highest court. And in 1954, they won the most famous and universally recognized Supreme Court case in history.

As a young child, I was immersed in the rich history of my grandfather's fight for justice for African Americans. Perhaps because, at the time, it was so immediately relatable to me as a student, I was particularly fascinated by the school integration cases. As an elementary student, I did research, wrote reports, and gave presentations about my hero.

Alongside my scholarly fascination with Grandpa Redding's legacy and the topic of integration, I was experiencing life in the United States as a biracial child born into privilege in the American South. I attended public schools through high school, and with each passing phase I gained my own understanding of race, schooling, and society. Although my elementary school was somewhat integrated, my initial understanding of the accomplishments of *Brown v. Board*—of integration as a done deal, a fait accompli of history—was first shaken by my middle school experience. Not only were our classes tracked, but I placed into an honors track where I was one of a small handful of students of color. The school's tracking policy coincided with (or perhaps caused) a clear pattern of social self-segregation that I noticed *most* between my Black friends and my White friends but extended to students of all races and backgrounds. Things only got worse in high school,

as the only people I knew who dropped out early were Black, and the only other National Merit Finalists I knew were White and Asian.

My disappointment in the realities of the extant segregation in American schools fueled a desire to more deeply understand educational inequities and how they play out in practice. After running a mentoring program in inner-city Providence, Rhode Island, I moved to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to teach. I worked at the same school for nearly a decade and spent the last four as its proud principal. Throughout my tenure, I attempted to explore ways to integrate our 98% Black school—honors programs, individualized outreach, personalized tours—to no avail. I was disheartened that even in a racially diverse city (60% African American, 30% White, 6% Latinx, 3% Asian) with a school district that remade itself after Hurricane Katrina as a choice system, where ostensibly the neighborhoods in which children grew up did not constrain their choice of schools, segregation persisted. Desiring a deeper and more systemic lens for the root causes of segregation and in search of clues to how I might undo it, I applied to Harvard’s doctoral program in education leadership. My admissions essay centered on integration. In it, I wrote, “I plan to use the experiences and skills gained in the EdLD program to . . . pick up where my grandfather’s legal career left off, and lead a major integration effort in a large public school district” (Lallinger, 2016, p. 5).

While at Harvard, I made the most of my time, seeking to learn as much as possible about the history of integration, contemporary integration efforts, and how large-scale change happens in bureaucracies. I got involved with the Reimaging Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools Project, which gave me new language and experiences to think about what happens in schools that have a diverse mix of students but still fall short of being equitable and inclusive places for all to learn. Through the Public Education Leadership Project, I was exposed to the thorny issues that school superintendents face when trying to bring about transformative change. In 2018, feeling greatly fulfilled by my first two years, it became time for me to seek a placement for my residency.

In the spring of 2018, Bill de Blasio announced Richard Carranza as the next chancellor of the New York City Department of Education. Carranza wasted no time, declaring that one of his top

priorities would be to address the rampant segregation in the city's schools. His bold language about segregation combined with his doggedness to do something about it represented a marked departure from previous administrations and was virtually unheard of in a major urban district, let alone the largest in the country: "I've looked at issues of segregation. I've looked at issues of integration. I'm just not changing my language because I'm in New York City" (Gay, 2018). I watched from Cambridge with intrigue, and when residency applications were due, I submitted one to the New York City Department of Education. In it, I made a pitch for a role on the chancellor's team that would focus on integration, coordinating implementation of integration policies and advocating for bold policy changes to the enrollment system. To my complete surprise, when I arrived for my day-long interview in January 2019 and found myself face-to-face with the chancellor, the first thing he said was, "So I read your proposal. I love it!"

I often think to myself about all the contingencies that occurred in order for me to have the privilege of working on integration at this particular juncture under this particular leader. If I had applied for EdLD a year earlier or later, or Richard Carranza had not come to the New York City school system, none of this would have been possible. The fact that I have had the opportunity to spend the past year working on the issue my grandfather dedicated his career to, in the largest school system in America at a time when its leader has declared it a top priority, feels nothing short of divinely ordained. The pages that follow tell the story of my year in New York City.

## Introduction

*We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place.  
Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.*

Justice Earl Warren in the unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, 1954

Although the holding from *Brown v. Board of Education* is by far the most famous and widely cited legal doctrine that underpins the principle of racial integration in schools, the social goal of integration in the nation’s public schools far predates 1954. When public schooling originated in the United States in the 19th century, many notions of what it should be were rooted in Horace Mann’s concept of the common school, a place where children of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds would come together to learn. So why would the Supreme Court need to settle the legal issue of whether segregated schools should be allowed to exist more than 100 years after the first common schools proliferated? Principally, because racism has undergirded the American experiment since its origins. Many of the rights and freedoms accorded to White people were not accorded to people of non-European origins. The concept of the common school did not extend to non-White children.

Truly integrated schooling has been a rare phenomenon in the United States, both before and after 1954. Small exceptions have existed at various moments in time and specific geographic locations, created as deliberate projects that have existed in spite of an entire system designed to prevent integration.<sup>1</sup> As scholars Amanda Lewis and John Diamond describe in their book *Despite the Best Intentions*, “there was no time—in the history of American public schools—when they were segregated or since they have been ‘desegregated,’ when they served all students equally and well” (2015, p. 8). And so, when the leader of the nation’s largest school system declares integrating the school system to be one of his top priorities, it catches people’s attention. That is exactly what

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<sup>1</sup> In this capstone, I differentiate between desegregation, the simple reassignment of children to undo segregated conditions, and integration, the deliberate creation of optimal conditions for students of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds to learn together. A more comprehensive definition of integrated schools and school districts follows in the next section.

happened in the summer of 2018 when Richard Carranza, newly minted chancellor of the New York City Department of Education (DOE) stated publicly, “No, we will not wait to integrate our schools, we will not wait to dismantle the segregated systems we have!” (Shapiro, 2019c, p. 1).

The extent of the segregation in New York City schools is evident in the data. In 2014, the UCLA Project for Civil Rights declared the state of New York to have the most segregated schools of any in the nation, much of it fueled by New York City’s segregation (Kuscera and Orfield, 2014). Among the staggering statistics in the system that serves approximately 1.1 million students, Kuscera and Orfield found that 85% of Black students and 74% of Latinx students attended a school that was considered “intensely segregated,” which they define as having a student body that is less than 10% White (2014, pp. 60–61).

The UCLA study led integration advocates to wonder, if the DOE were to devise a plan to integrate New York City’s public schools in 2019, what would it look like? How would the DOE execute such a plan? These questions moved from the realm of the theoretical to the practical in 2017, when the mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio, established the School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG), a 45-member advisory panel, and charged it with issuing to the DOE a set of recommendations on how it might integrate its schools. These questions became even more pertinent 1 year later with the arrival of Carranza, a bold and forward-looking leader ready to challenge the status quo. By 2019, the SDAG had completed its work and released its recommendations to the DOE. This year-long strategic project overlapped with the implementation of one set of SDAG recommendations (“part one,” adopted in June 2019) and the public release of another subset of the recommendations (“part two,” released in August 2019).

## Capstone Overview

During my 10-month residency in the DOE Chancellor’s Office, I worked on two primary areas: (1) coordinating the implementation of initiatives designed to create the conditions for integration and (2) facilitating a process to change enrollment policies to make DOE schools more

diverse and integrated over a period of years. The capstone, therefore, represents a snapshot of a crucial moment in the immense effort to integrate public schools in New York City. The story that follows details successes and failures, presents the underlying causes of the results of the effort, and analyzes the degree to which the actions taken have moved the DOE closer to the goal of an integrated future.

I have organized this capstone into three main sections. I begin the first section by exploring the relevant knowledge and context for undertaking this strategic project. First, I look at segregation from a historical lens and past efforts to integrate the New York City public schools. Although the system has been segregated since its inception, there have been many attempts at integration over the years. These integration efforts teach critically important lessons about historical obstacles and tactics used to address them. Next, I examine the role that the media and public perception play in stymying integration efforts, focusing on how language can spur public outcry and disapproval, with specific relevance to the New York City context. Then, I investigate the data on segregation in New York City and make the case for integration. Subsequently, I explore the key features of the system, including its structure, power centers, and authorizing environment. Finally, I review the relevant literature on making change in bureaucratic, hierarchical systems such as the DOE.

In the second section, I focus on the work of the capstone itself. I begin by describing the project, which included aspects of coordinating the implementation of initiatives and creating a strategy to lead to substantive change on student enrollment policies. I then delve into the specific objectives and overarching goals set at the beginning of the project and describe how the events of the next 10 months unfolded. Next, I examine the evidence that substantiates the successes and shortcomings of the project, and the overall goal of furthering integration in New York City. Finally, I analyze the underlying factors that contributed to the results and make sense of the nuanced picture that emerges.

In the final section, I explore the implications of the findings of the residency project and the broader integration effort, specifically for the DOE and for the broader field. The topic of school

integration is increasingly relevant in the United States, as demographics shift and equity issues become more relevant in the national consciousness. The lessons learned from New York are highly applicable to ongoing and future efforts across the country. I conclude the implications section with a multi-part prescription for enacting 21st-century integration in large school districts, based on the learning from New York City.

## Takeaways: Five Themes behind Integration Efforts

Five complex, multidimensional themes appear throughout the capstone. They are the fodder for the debates about school integration in New York City and central to the story that is told in its pages.

The first theme is the relationship between merit and school placement. Admissions policies are at the heart of integration. The matter of how we decide who in the system gets to lay claim to attending which school, and for what reasons, is the most sensitive and most discussed theme in relation to integration. In a labyrinthine system with an assortment of admissions rules, the debate becomes muddled. Some argue that proximity to a school should guarantee admission. But in a population-dense city with historically gerrymandered boundaries, what does proximity even mean? In many parts of the city, rich and poor, White and non-White, live close together yet still attend separate schools. Moreover, the proliferation of school choice within the New York City public school system, which leads to students regularly attending schools far from where they live, undercuts this view. Others believe that other forms of “merit” should be considered, and that some combination of quantifiable metrics for student test-taking ability and behavioral history should determine admissions. Yet because these indicators are often correlated with socioeconomic status, many people believe such an approach is discriminatory. Finally, because the system creates countless opportunities to skirt admissions rules or otherwise game the system, certain aspects of the current situation reveal the implicit argument that wealth and influence should determine access to schools.



The second theme is the relationship between school quality and school integration. Members of affluent communities that argue against school integration frequently suggest that integration leads to a watered-down school experience, one that jeopardizes quality and sometimes even safety. Most research refutes this assertion. That said, many communities of color argue that students of color have a poorer quality of experience in integrated settings—a view borne out by historical accounts of the “era of desegregation” in the United States, in which Black teachers, curriculum, and unquantifiable wisdom were lost to desegregation.

The third theme is the role of the school system in addressing integration. Some debates focus on the degree to which the current state of school segregation is a natural phenomenon, and therefore what role, if any, a school system has in making integration part of its core business. Proponents of this view see segregation as a byproduct of centuries of individual choices that have led to the status quo. Those who make this argument typically (but not exclusively) come from wealthy and well-resourced communities, and feel that as unfortunate as segregation is, it is not up to them or their tax dollars to fix it. Moreover, if tax dollars must be spent on the issue, they should be spent bringing the “other” schools “up to par.” Nevertheless, the equal resources argument—one of the principal arguments employed in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896—is not the exclusive domain of affluent communities. Many communities of color have made this argument for decades, often assuming that true integration was not a possibility or even a desirable outcome based on historical precedent.

The fourth and fifth themes relate to the tension between grassroots vs. top-down change and slow vs. radical change. Insofar as integration is agreed to be a worthy social goal (which in itself is not a given), the question remains as to whether the project of integrating schools should be local and community-driven or centrally mandated, and whether it should be gradual or immediate. This debate is intertwined with historical traditions of local control of schools in the United States as well as a legacy of historically underrepresented groups, especially African Americans, only being able to rely on a central authority such as the federal government to guarantee minimal civil rights in the face of local discrimination. Proponents of a gradual approach argue that many components need to be

set right in a contemporary integration plan, particularly if it is to be more successful than historical attempts, and that doing so takes time. Integration advocates who have grown weary of slow progress tend to agitate for immediate solutions. A common response to indications that such change might be afoot is fearmongering that wealthy or White families will quit a school system that undergoes rapid integration. There is, in fact, historical precedent for “White (or middle class) flight” from integrating systems. Nonetheless, pro- and anti-integration forces alike argue that efforts should be local or central, fast or slow, based on what is most advantageous to their position in the current political context.

These themes are the subtext to the story of the capstone. They are the real issues on people’s minds as they discuss and experience integration in their communities. Above all, some combination of arguments about them forms the basis for the broader narrative about integration in any given community, which in turn shapes the attitudes, policies, and behaviors seen in the lived experience of children in schools.

## Review of Knowledge for Action

This section details the knowledge, history and research most relevant for pushing the strategic project forward, and whose resulting principles were most likely to lead to success in the project if implemented. It begins with the historical context of past integration attempts and the impact of the media and public perception on integration efforts. It then examines the current state of segregation more deeply and makes the case for integration. The end of the section deals with the structure of the New York City DOE and the contributions from research on best practices for making change in organizations. Finally, the section closes by offering a theory of action for the strategic project.

### History: The Legacy of Segregation and Integration Efforts in New York City

Black people have been a part of New York City since its incorporation into the British colonies in the 17th century from the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam. At the turn of the 18th century, the colony of New York had the second-highest proportion of slave-holding families of any British colony (School Colors, 2019). By 1800, of the state’s approximately 60,000 inhabitants, 4,000 were Black, and 2,000 of those Black inhabitants were slaves (Ravitch, 2000, pp. 3–4).<sup>2</sup> There was no public education system to speak of at the time, but its precursors were established in the form of private education and state funding for localities desiring to establish public schools.

Schools in New York City were segregated from the beginning. While most schools established near the turn of the 19th century were religious, the Manumission Society established a nonreligious free school for Blacks in Manhattan in 1787 (Ravitch, 2000, p. 6). That school became the “African Free School” in 1794, and the Manumission Society later established five more schools

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<sup>2</sup> For many years, the predominant racial groups in New York City were Black people and White people. The first part of this section on history gives disproportionate weight to these groups, but I will broaden the lens here and in other sections of the capstone to avoid the trap of the Black-White binary and to incorporate other narratives.

for Blacks. By contrast, in Brooklyn, which had not yet been incorporated into New York City, Blacks started “colored schools” to serve Black children “as an expression of community uplift” (School Colors, 2019, Episode 1, 15:20). Mark Winston Griffith notes that “these schools served their children well” (School Colors, 2019, Episode 1, 15:50). By the early 1830s, the city of New York, via the Public Schools Society, set out to establish “common schools” that enrolled White students from all social classes together, but excluded Blacks. In 1832, the systems merged under one umbrella; nonetheless, the Black schools remained separate and were designated “colored schools” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 24).

In 1873, the state of New York outlawed segregation and the “colored schools” that existed were phased out, or at least no longer referred to as such.<sup>3</sup> In 1884, the New York City Board of Education declared that segregation was now a relic of the past, stating: “The causes which led to the establishment of colored schools having ceased to exist, except as a matter of history . . . and the color line has finally and happily disappeared from our schools” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 25). Despite the board’s optimism, segregation would continue to be a hallmark of the New York City public schools through the next century and up until the present day.

The numbers of Blacks in New York City increased dramatically at the beginning of the 20th century. Whereas Blacks made up only 2% of the city’s population in 1900, by 1950 there were 750,000 Blacks and 250,000 Puerto Ricans living in New York City, combining to make up 13% of total population (Shapiro, 2019a). Discrimination in the areas of housing and employment resulted in intense segregation throughout the city, which was mirrored in the city’s public schools. In the 1940s, parents and activists began organizing and protesting in support of integration.<sup>4</sup> However, it was in

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<sup>3</sup> Some “colored schools” were closed, while others were made open to all students and no longer called “colored schools.” According to Ravitch, in 1883, one of the three remaining colored schools was “disestablished,” while parents of the other two petitioned to keep them open, with the understanding that they would be “nominally open to all” and would attempt to “assimilate” as soon as possible (Ravitch, 2000, p. 25).

<sup>4</sup> In 1943, a group with interracial leadership called the Bedford-Stuyvesant-Williamsburg Schools Council was established, which mobilized for better resources and fully certified teachers for local schools. It also “demanded that the board desegregate the school system by building schools in fringe areas where black and white neighborhoods were in close proximity” (Taylor, 1997, p. 62).

the 1950s that movement leaders began to intensely push for integration, buoyed by the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 decision, *Brown v. the Board of Education*.<sup>5</sup> Historian Diane Ravitch gives the primary reasons for Black demands for integration in her comprehensive history of the New York City Public Education System:

Some sought integration on pragmatic grounds, arguing that predominantly black schools did not get a fair share of the best personnel and resources. Others perceived school integration as a fulfillment of the American Dream, a society in which diversity is melded into a new and universal brotherhood. This perspective was rooted in Horace Mann's vision of the common school as a place where all segments of the community meet as equals. . . . (Ravitch, 2000, p. 245)

Sixty-six years later, these two arguments remain the principal rallying cry for pro-integration advocates.

In 1954, on the heels of *Brown v. Board*, Arthur Levitt, then the president of the New York City Board of Education, requested that the Public Education Association (PEA) investigate the state of Black and Puerto Rican schools and issue a report. The investigation found that 42 New York City elementary schools were 90% or more students of color and nine junior high schools were 85% or more students of color (Ravitch, 2000). Additionally, the commission found that the average eighth-grade reading score for Black and Puerto Rican students was 2.3 years behind that of their White peers (Simpson et al., 1961).

In addition to commissioning the PEA report, the Board of Education also appointed a Commission on Integration in 1954 to develop recommendations for the board to integrate its schools. The 2017-appointed School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) would have a mission and structure that was uncannily similar to the 1954 commission, which included 23 civic leaders and other members of the board and supervisors. The commission held hearings for two years and drafted recommendations that contained such matters as rezoning, teacher assignments, resources,

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<sup>5</sup>Annie Stein, Milton Galamison and NAACP leaders organized the NAACP Schools Workshop in the 1950s, which gave parents a forum to organize, express complaints about the system, and negotiate directly with the school board. In addition to agitating for integration, they argued for better conditions for segregated schools. For example, in 1956 they demanded the establishment of "intellectually gifted classes" in segregated schools, since principals discovered there were many students who scored well on the test (Taylor, 1997).

and school renovations.<sup>6</sup> In 1957, the board unanimously approved the commission's reports, but issued an addendum:

The Board of Education reserves to itself the privilege of interpreting the meaning to be attached to certain terms and phrases, of further studying and exploring the merits of specific recommendations and of resolving the administrative problems which necessarily arise in carrying out any policy for a school system as complex as that of New York City (Ravitch, 2000, p. 255).

In the end, despite the board's adoption of the reports and recommendations, they were never implemented. A report from the Harlem Parents Committee described the lack of progress, "The Final Report of the Commission...noted that public and professional misunderstanding of the recommendations, and inadequate funding on the part of the New York City Board of Estimate had resulted in slow and limited implementation of the proposed changes" (Harlem Parents Committee, 1965, p. 4). Time would show that the failure to integrate resulted from a number of additional factors, including the superintendent's commitment to neighborhood schools, tepid steps toward integration that soon fizzled out, the waning political legitimacy of the board, and uneasiness on the part of both White and Black political coalitions.

Subsequent years featured an increase in segregation in the system and ever greater dissatisfaction of Black New Yorkers with the lack of progress. In 1964, an adviser to the state education commissioner stated, "Nothing undertaken by the New York City Board of Education since 1954, and nothing proposed since 1963, has contributed or will contribute in any meaningful degree to desegregating the public schools of the city" (Oelsner, 1977, p. 76). Various Black advocacy

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<sup>6</sup> A report put out by the Harlem Parents Committee describes the principal recommendations of the Committee on Integration: "Among the Commission's recommendations: changes in both zoning and school construction policies; reduction of the number of de facto segregated schools; an intensive education program aimed at raising academic achievement in the "X" schools; re-examination of the procedures in the placement of children in special classes, strengthening and stiffening the syllabus and curriculum requirements; appointment of a more equitable proportion of regular and experienced teachers to "X" schools; an intensive remedial program in the "difficult" (i.e., segregated) schools; improved guidance services; intensive recruitment of non-white and Spanish-speaking personnel; a Board of Education "policy statement pointing out that a positive attitude toward all groups...is a prerequisite for appointment or promotion;" establishment of required in-service courses in human relations and intercultural understanding for all school personnel; establishment of a Community Relations unit to maintain constant liaison with the Board of Education's divisions and bureaus, with the State Commission against Discrimination, the New York City Commission on Intergroup Relations, the City Housing Authority and the City Planning Commission" (Harlem Parents Committee, 1965, pp. 3-4).

groups continued to put pressure on the board for real action on integration. One key leader, Reverend Milton Galamison, formed a Committee for Integrated Schools, which was an umbrella organization for pro-integration groups across the city. Galamison was a fierce and outspoken critic of the school system, saying “Nobody can do these children more harm than these children are being done every day in this public school system, and in my opinion, the refusal of the board to have already taken immediate steps to correct these evils is a disgrace and a crime” (Kahn, 2016, p. 1). Scholar Clarence Taylor characterizes Galamison as part of the “militant wing of the school integration movement,” an agitator who, in 1964, wanted the city’s school board to comply with demands for full integration immediately (Taylor, 1997, p. 5). In 1964, Galamison joined forces with Bayard Rustin and threatened a massive boycott if immediate action was not taken to integrate the schools. In an effort to avoid the boycott, the school board released a 3-year plan to rezone some schools, improve the quality in other schools, and relieve overcrowding. Groups of White parents dedicated to resisting forced transfers and defending neighborhood schools, known as “Parents and Taxpayers,” began to pop up across the city to demonstrate and invoke their opposition to busing. On the other side, dissatisfied with a plan that failed to work toward full integration, Galamison and Rustin began their boycott on February 3, 1964, and kept an astonishing 460,000 students out of school, with demonstrations at 300 city schools (Ravitch, 2000). It was officially the largest civil rights protest in American history, almost twice as large as the March on Washington (Kahn, 2016). Despite the massive showing, the boycott did not lead to a comprehensive integration plan.

The frustration with the lack of progress on integration led to a movement for local control of schools. Simultaneously, students of color continued to take up a larger share of the student population. In 1968, only 10% of teachers were Black or Puerto Rican, while 50% of students were (Stivers, 2018). Communities of color, by and large, began to see self-determination as the solution to these issues, rather than integration. In response, the New York City Board of Education created three experimental community control districts, which were designed to give local communities more

autonomy over their schools.<sup>7</sup> An ensuing struggle between one of the local control districts, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and the powerful United Federation of Teachers union, ultimately led to the decentralization of New York City schools into 30 locally controlled boards.<sup>8</sup> The shift to local control represented the end of a consolidated push for school integration in the Civil Rights Movement era.

## Environment: Roles of Media and Public Perception in Stifling Integration

Media coverage and public perception historically have played critical roles in stifling school integration efforts in Northern cities, principally by enabling White city dwellers to ignore segregation or explain it away as a phenomenon for which they are not culpable. This effect is amplified in New York City because of the dynamic interplay between the municipal political leadership, wealthy and politically well-connected citizens, and the outsized media market. (New York City has more dedicated education beat writers than many US states.) Matthew Delmont has demonstrated how the media historically downplayed segregation in Northern cities by focusing almost exclusively on Southern segregation, which was more visible and brasher in its own defense, but just as rampant (2016). This focus effectively let Northerners off the hook by allowing them to ignore the conditions of Blacks in their own segregated neighborhoods and schools. And if Northern Whites were in fact exposed to the truth about segregation in their midst, they could shrug it off as “de facto” segregation—segregation by happenstance—rather than the “de jure” segregation enshrined in law, as it was in the South. The fallacy of “de facto” segregation as a concept has been well researched and documented by scholars, among them Delmont and Richard Rothstein, who wrote a book called *The Color of Law* which uncovered the myriad ways that the government, at all levels, deliberately

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<sup>7</sup> One was in East Harlem, another in Two Bridges, and the third was in Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

<sup>8</sup> The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict with the United Federation of Teachers was a seminal moment in the history of education in New York City. The conflict stemmed from the experimental district’s termination of employees they deemed to be unfit to teach in their schools. The union responded with a massive strike of its members. Ultimately, while the conflict resulted in “local control” of schools, the union prevailed by retaining the ability to bargain as a unit.



created the segregated conditions that exist in America via housing policies, zoning laws, subsidies, tax exemptions, and many other tactics (2017). “Today’s residential segregation in the North, South, Midwest, and West is not the unintended consequence of individual choices and or otherwise well-meaning law or regulation but of unhidden public policy that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States” (Rothstein, 2019, p. viii). The widespread acceptance of the fallacious notion of “de facto” segregation today has yielded one of the principal lines of argumentation against pro-integration policies, which sounds something like, “we didn’t cause this problem so we shouldn’t have to fix it. Not only that, we shouldn’t feel guilty about not fixing it.”

This strategic use of language by the media, which is then parroted by influencers and decisionmakers, has also played a crucial role in stymying efforts to remedy what the government has wrought. One of the principal arguments in Delmont’s book *Why Busing Failed* is that anti-integration forces co-opted the word “busing” and turned it into a word that conjured powerful imagery of it as a tool of social engineering that sought to destroy the American value of “neighborhood schools” (2016). In reality, Delmont shows that busing had been a tool that enabled segregation for decades across the United States. In many cases, White students had to travel past Black schools to get to their all-White schools; moreover, Blacks often were denied the funding that would have enabled transit by bus at all (Delmont, 2016). But when proposals were made to remedy segregated schools by transporting students (even if it was not further than they previously traveled), the media was quick to run stories on “busing” and the accompanying public and sometimes violent backlash by Whites, which in reality was a reaction to integration rather than to busing itself. Because of how the media has covered “busing” for decades, many politicians in particular still regard the term as being too toxic to utter. In a 2018 *New York Times* interview in which he largely agreed that the New York State DOE had a role to play in integrating schools in New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio came out vehemently against busing:

Busing, he said, “absolutely poisoned the well” in Boston in the 1970s, near where he grew up. “I’m telling you, and I think history is on my side here, you do not want to create a series of conflicts here,” he said. (Gay, 2018)

It is not just the use of words like “busing” and “neighborhood schools” that beget opposition to correctional action because of how they have been covered traditionally; the media often portrays calls for integration as radical or out of the mainstream, ginning up fear and alarmism among elites. For public leaders, simply calling out segregation and calling for integration are rare steps, owing to their fear of the media’s coverage and public response. When Richard Carranza began his tenure as the city schools’ chancellor, he made waves by using terms that his predecessors explicitly avoided. In a headline emblematic of this paradigm, a *Politico* article that ran shortly after the chancellor took up his position said: “Richard Carranza wants to talk about school segregation. Is New York ready?” (Shapiro, 2018).

## Facts: Segregation and Integration in New York City in 2020

A thorough study of what would be required of an integration effort in New York City necessitates understanding the degree of extant segregation, how integration is defined, and on what grounds those advocating for integration make the case for it. Although there are many ways to measure segregation (i.e., isolation, exposure, dissimilarity), I first aim to examine the most important demographic variables in as few pages as possible, focusing specifically on racial and socioeconomic diversity. Next, I distinguish between desegregation and integration and offer a definition of integration. Finally, I lay out the various arguments made on behalf of integration.

### Segregation in New York City

To quantify segregation, one must first look at some basic demographic data on New York City public schools. The total population as of 2018 is 1,135,334 students who attend approximately 1,800 schools (NYC DOE, 2019). Approximately 74% of students are economically disadvantaged, 19.7% have a disability, and 13.5% are Multi-Lingual Learners. Table 1 below shows the demographic breakdown by race.

**Table 1**  
*New York City Public School Demographics*

NYC Public Schools 2018–2019	City-wide demographics				
	Asian	Black	Latinx	White	Other
	16.1%	26.0%	40.5%	15.0%	2.4%

Source: (School Diversity Advisory Group, 2019a)

New York City has five boroughs and 32 community school districts. Demographics can vary greatly across boroughs and districts. As an example, in the student body of the Bronx, 85% of students are economically disadvantaged, 62% of students are Latinx, and 4% are White. By contrast, in Staten Island, 58% of students are economically disadvantaged, 29% of students are Latinx, and 46% of students are White. Examples from the district level show that 85% of District 6’s (Manhattan) student body is Latinx and 5% is White, while 28% of District 31’s (Queens) student body is Latinx and 47% is White (School Diversity Advisory Group, 2019a).

In terms of school segregation by race, Gary Orfield and John Kuscera characterize segregation in terms of three categories: (a) 99%–100% Non-White schools, which they call “apartheid schools”; (b) 90%–100% Non-White schools, which they call “intensely segregated schools”; and (c) schools with at least 10% of any three races, which they call “multiracial schools” (2014). Table 2 presents a breakdown of these categories.

**Table 2**  
*Segregation in New York City Public Schools*

New York City Public Schools 2010–2011	School Segregation		
	“Multiracial” 10%–10%–10%	“Intensely Segregated” 90%–100% Non- White	“Apartheid” 99%–100% Non- White
	27.3%	72.1%	30.4%

Source: (Orfield and Kuscera, 2014, p. 90)

The data have some limitations. They are 10 years old, and there have been demographic changes since then. The authors’ definition of a multiracial school is very expansive. Finally, these groups are overlapping and not mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, these categories are widely cited and oft credited with being a catalyst for action on integration in New York City. As shown in Tables 3

through 5, Orfield and Kuscera also provide exposure<sup>9</sup> and isolation<sup>10</sup> data by race, as well as exposure to poverty by race.

**Table 3**  
*New York City Public Schools: White Exposure*

New York City Public Schools 2010–2011	Exposure to White Students			
	White-White	Black-White	Asian-White	Latinx-White
	43.5%	5.7%	18.2%	9.2%

Source: (Orfield and Kuscera, 2014, p. 92)

**Table 4**  
*New York City Public Schools: Minority Isolation*

New York City Public Schools 2010–2011	Minority Isolation		
	Black	Asian	Latinx
	56.3%	38.9%	56.5%

Source: (Orfield and Kuscera, 2014, p. 92)

**Table 5**  
*New York City Public Schools: Exposure to Poor Students*

New York City Public Schools 2010–2011	Exposure to Poor Students				
	Poor	White	Black	Asian	Latinx
	73.7%	53.7%	77.9%	68.9%	79.9%

Source: (Orfield and Kuscera, 2014, p. 92)

The Research Alliance for NYC Public Schools out of New York University (NYU) offers more contemporary data, albeit using a different methodology. Table 6 presents the percentage of elementary and middle schools that are considered “racially representative,” defined as at least 50% Black and Latinx but no more than 90% Black and Latinx, by borough.

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<sup>9</sup> Exposure is defined as the number of students in a given category out of every 100 total students that a student of a certain race, on average, is exposed to in his or her school. For example, in New York City in 2010–2011, a Black student will, on average, attend a school where 5.7% of the student population is White.  
<sup>10</sup> Isolation is defined as same-group exposure. For example, in New York City in 2010–2011, a Black student will, on average, attend a school where 56.3% of the students are also Black.

**Table 6**  
*Percentage of Racially Representative Schools*

	% of Schools That Are Racially Representative					
	All Schools	Manhattan	Bronx	Brooklyn	Queens	Staten Island
New York City Public Schools 2017–2018	26.9%	28.0%	20.0%	24.0%	35.9%	33.9%

Source: (Hill et al., 2019)

## Defining Integration

Just as there are many ways to measure segregation, there are also many ways to define integration. Many contemporary scholars on school integration differentiate between desegregation and integration, where desegregation simply involves dismantling legal or policy impediments to students of different races attending the same school, while integration takes additional factors into consideration. What exactly it is that integration calls for is up for debate, as different scholars and advocacy groups have taken different tacks.<sup>11</sup> In remarks from 1962, Dr. Martin Luther King offered a broad frame:

The word *segregation* represents a system that is prohibitive; it denies the Negro equal access to schools, parks, restaurants, libraries and the like. *Desegregation* is eliminative and negative, for it simply removes these legal and social prohibitions. Integration is creative, and is therefore more profound and far-reaching than desegregation. Integration is the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities. Integration is genuine intergroup, interpersonal doing. Desegregation then, rightly, is only a short-range goal. Integration is the ultimate goal of our national community (King Jr., 1962, p. 118).

A youth advocacy group founded in the Bronx, IntegrateNYC, put forth a comprehensive framework for understanding integration, in the tradition of an expansive understanding of the concept. They argue that real integration encompasses more than just “moving bodies” (what they call “race and enrollment,” the first “R”), as it must also consider resources, relationships, restorative

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<sup>11</sup> Scholar Sonya Douglass Horford offers an important critique of integration in her essay “Whose School Integration?” where she argues that we should prioritize environments that affirm and “want” students of color over focusing on student demographics (Horford, 2019). She draws on a rich legacy of such critiques by scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and Zora Neale Hurston, and engages in an important overview of how the term “integration” has been contested since its first uses in the mainstream.

justice, and representation. ([Exhibit 1](#) in the appendix fully describes the IntegrateNYC approach.)

The SDAG adopted the IntegrateNYC framework as its organizing principle. With its acceptance of the initial SDAG recommendations, the DOE indirectly adopted the 5 Rs framework as its operating framework for tackling integration. But even though the framework is useful for understanding how the DOE plans to address integration under the SDAG prescription, it does not define the term integration.<sup>12</sup>

For the purposes of this capstone, I offer my own definition of integration here, based on my own research and my experiences with integration proposals in schools and districts:

**Integration is the intentional creation and maintenance of schools with racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies, that employ staff who hold all students to high expectations, who teach in such a way that all students improve academically and as critical thinkers, and who promote a culture where people respect, affirm, and learn from each other and about each other, especially across lines of difference.**<sup>13</sup>

An integrated school, therefore, is one that has a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body and that employs a staff that meets the criteria laid out above. A desegregated but not integrated school is one that has a racially and socioeconomically diverse student body but does not meet the rest of the criteria. Of note, the research I cite that invokes “integrated settings” or “diverse settings” mostly adheres to a much narrower definition of integrated schools, perhaps something more akin to my definition of desegregated schools. Moreover, the lack of a universal definition of integration prevents a true comparison of effect sizes and impact among various scholars who study integration; nevertheless, it should not take away from the overall finding that diverse settings for students have positive effects that would not otherwise exist in homogenous settings.

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<sup>12</sup> In its glossary of terms, the SDAG does offer the following definition of integration: “policies and practices that actively create demographically diverse schools that support and affirm the identities of all their students. Of note, integration often involves busing students of color into schools that have historically been predominantly run by white leaders, with predominantly white teachers, for predominantly white students. To achieve real integration, more equitable student movement and the integration of staff and leaders are important considerations.” I have not seen this definition widely used at the DOE.

<sup>13</sup> I offer a full rationale for this specific definition in the “implications for sector” section.

## Arguments for Integration

In Figure 1 below, I categorize and lay out the principal arguments made by various proponents for school integration and cite some of the research that supports each argument.

**Figure 1**  
*Types of Arguments for Integration*

Type of Argument	Rationale
Student Achievement Argument	Students in diverse schools have higher test scores and are likelier to enroll in college (Palardy, 2008 2013). Students who attend segregated schools are likelier to have larger achievement gaps (Reardon et al., 2019). <sup>14</sup>
Moral Argument	Segregation is incompatible with the democratic values of equality and fair treatment; therefore, integrated schools are morally required, especially in a nation with a legacy of systemic racism and race-based segregation. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, students who attend integrated schools are less likely to stereotype or harbor racial bias, and therefore are more likely to live up to the democratic values that underpin our society (Kahlenberg et al., 2019).
Legal Argument	Segregated schooling is outlawed by the US Constitution as decided in <i>Brown v. Board</i> in 1954. Moreover, segregation has been sanctioned by all levels of government for most of American history and therefore school systems, as arms of the government, have a legal requirement to remedy this historical injustice (Rothstein, 2017).
Cost-Benefit Argument	In economic terms, socioeconomic integration has the second-highest return on investment of any education intervention, below only high-quality pre-K. That means that for each dollar spent on socioeconomic integration, society receives more quantifiable positive outcomes in return for that dollar than if we were to spend it on any other educational intervention, except for high-quality pre-K (Kahlenberg, 2013). <sup>16</sup>
Global Citizenship Argument	Current students are preparing to enter a global world, in which the jobs and lifestyles of the future require an ability to interact and work with all types of people. Integrated schooling prepares students for this future.
Resource Argument	Large public systems tend to be most responsive to communities that are wealthy or well-connected. Resources flow to those communities over others. <sup>17</sup> Integrated schools ensure equal distribution of resources.

<sup>14</sup> Reardon et al. (2019) show the strong connection between racial school segregation and student achievement disparities, even after accounting for socioeconomic status and residential segregation. “More segregated school systems have larger achievement gaps, on average, and their gaps grow faster during elementary and middle schools than in less segregated ones” (Reardon et al., 2019, p. 33). They find that this is due primarily to the correlation between racially segregated schools and greater exposure to poverty.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. King spoke of the moral imperative: “It is sad that the moral dimension of integration has not been sounded by the leaders of government and the nation. They staunchly supported the principle of the Court’s decision but their rationale fell short of being prophetic. They sounded the note that has become the verse, chorus and refrain of the so-called calm and reasonable moderates—*we must obey the law!* The temper of acceptance might be far different if only our leaders would say publicly to the nation—“We must obey the mandate of the Court because it is right!” (King, 1962, p. 123).

<sup>16</sup> Kahlenberg cites a study that does a rigorous cost-benefit analysis on common educational interventions. It found a public return on investment of 3.3 for socioeconomic integration as an educational intervention (2013).

<sup>17</sup> Resources here are defined broadly and include but are not limited to per-pupil dollars, highly qualified teaching personnel, physical plant and facilities, curriculum, materials, and extracurricular opportunities.

## Systems and Structure: Defining Features of the New York City DOE

Various scholars have documented the history of New York City public schools. Although that history teaches many important lessons that inform the present, for the purposes of this capstone, I will focus on the most recent administrations, specifically on the most relevant defining features at play in today's system: (a) the rigid hierarchy and siloed divisions and offices throughout the system, (b) the significant variation across schools, (c) the vast number of school options for families combined with intense competition for certain schools, (d) the mayor's significant influence over and involvement in DOE policy, (e) the interplay between the public and decision-making at DOE, and (f) the significant influence of organized labor and city politics on DOE policy.

Joel Klein, who served as chancellor for the first 9 years of Michael Bloomberg's mayoralty (2002–2010), had one of the most change-inducing and controversial tenures of any big-city superintendent in modern times. His tenure coincided with the beginning of “mayoral control,” which essentially shifted most power over the DOE from the central Board of Education and the 32 local boards which hired and fired local superintendents, to the mayor (Gewertz, 2002).<sup>18</sup> The mayor appointed the chancellor and controlled board appointments, which now had a much slimmer, narrower role. Mayoral control, which must be reauthorized periodically by the state legislature and was most recently reauthorized in 2019, has had a significant impact on the structure and culture of the DOE. Most critically, mayoral control centralized power with the chancellor (and the mayor), resulting in a clear hierarchy and accountability structure. For schools, this means that there is a direct line of accountability from teacher to chancellor.<sup>19</sup> For the central staff, this rigid hierarchy results in clearly demarcated offices and divisions that all have a reporting structure that leads to the

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<sup>18</sup> The local school boards were established by state law in 1969 primarily as a result of Black and Latinx activism demanding greater local control over schools (see previous section on community control districts). Many critics of mayoral control pointed out that the local board systems had been responsible for grooming many political leaders of color over the years and that mayoral control would eliminate this as a pathway to elected office for people of color (Gewertz, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Chancellor Carranza created the executive superintendent position, which reports to Carranza's first deputy chancellor and line manages the city's superintendents. Principals report to superintendents and teachers report to principals.



deputy chancellor at the top of a given vertical. The silos and vertical accountability remain a defining feature of the system today. Understanding how to navigate the hierarchy is crucial to getting things accomplished.

Diane Ravitch has pointed out that centralizing power away from 32 different school boards and one central elected board may have cured some of the ills of the previous structure, such as corruption and lack of accountability, yet centralization alone is not a panacea.

Centralization has its own pitfalls: An organization that is as large as the New York City public school system becomes bureaucratic, inefficient, and rigid; it lacks flexibility, ingenuity, and a commitment to results. Worse, it tends to devote its energies to the protection of adults and their job status, rather than to children and their educational needs. (2000, p. xxvii)

Joel Klein attempted to ward off some of the potential negative by-products of centralization of power by decentralizing in other ways. Specifically, his administration empowered principals by giving them more control over their budgets and autonomy over their core functions, but held them accountable to results (Hill, 2011). He also shut down low-performing schools and attempted to encourage innovation by opening new schools, many of them much smaller than their predecessors. Because of all the autonomy, many schools specialized in different ways, which accentuated the variation that to some degree always existed among New York City schools. Schools varied greatly by size, type, and selection criteria (“screen”), among other features. Paul Hill calls Klein’s strategy a “business decentralization,” which “strengthens both the top and the bottom of the organization, but weakens the middle—the central and regional office bureaucrats who stand between the CEO and the people doing the day-to-day work” (2011, p. 20). He described the Klein administration’s theory of action as:

strengthen the top and bottom (i.e., schools) against the middle (including unions and central and regional administration), let local productive units (schools) make the consequential decisions that affect their productivity, encourage innovation, centralize accountability via common outcome measures, make all arrangements contingent on performance, and continually search for better people and providers . . . [and] continuously improve the options available to customers (families). (2011, p. 20)

While the top and “bottom” were indeed empowered in the Klein years, the unions were forced to accept changes to their collective bargaining agreement (even though salaries increased) that made

them less influential and the DOE regional support structures went through drastic overhauls that required them to compete with one another for schools' business.<sup>20</sup> As school choice was expanded, students and families had ever more options for where to send their students and a highly competitive landscape for both schools and families emerged. While some of the hallmark features of the Klein strategy would be rolled back in subsequent administrations, the key ones that have endured to today's DOE that are critical for understanding the system are the high levels of individualization across schools that resulted from the vast autonomy granted principals, as well as the highly competitive and choice-based school admissions structures that resulted from the Klein theory of change and expansion of charter schools.

When Bill de Blasio ran for mayor of New York City in 2013, a key part of his education platform was undoing some of the policies that came from 12 years of a Bloomberg-run DOE (Layton and Chandler, 2013). In a story familiar to many school districts across the country, many in the public had tired of the current (Bloomberg) administration's policies and were ready for the pendulum to swing back in the other direction. There are three critical areas where the de Blasio-era and Bloomberg-era education policies vastly differ that are important for our purposes.

First, Mayor Bloomberg gave his schools chancellor significant leeway in both big picture and operational decisions. "In general, Bloomberg operated as a CEO of a conglomerate, overseeing a trusted and competent CEO of one of the conglomerate's businesses: He did not dictate Klein's actions, but wanted to be consulted and informed, not surprised" (Hill, 2011, p. 20). Mayor de Blasio by contrast, had a greater command of education-related issues when he took office, having been the public advocate (a citywide elected position) prior to his election as mayor and the parent of two DOE students. His campaign platform publication, "One New York, Rising Together," listed several components of a years-long strategy on education, long before he ever chose his first chancellor (Bill de Blasio for Mayor, 2013). As a result, he more strongly imposed his will on the DOE, leading on

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<sup>20</sup> Under this system, which is a hallmark of the Klein administration but was later dismantled, schools were allowed to choose the support center that would provide their support services.

many of the signature education issues during his tenure (e.g., pre-K and 3-K expansion) and wanting to be heavily involved in regular operations.

A major criticism of the Klein tenure was the perceived loss of family and public engagement and input into the DOE's direction. "Mr. Klein's elimination of the old neighborhood districts was intended to reduce corruption, but it also closed down the lines of communication to which parents and community members were accustomed" (Sparks, 2010, p. 1). De Blasio intended to chart a different course. He sought to involve parents and community members much more significantly than his predecessor. Some examples of policies he pursued in the name of either greater community engagement or enacting things he heard on the campaign trail as being the wishes of the people were (a) empowering local Community Education Councils, (b) significantly expanding the community schools model, (c) dramatically reducing school closures, and (d) slowing support for charter schools. As a result, under de Blasio's two chancellors, Carmen Fariña and Carranza, the DOE has valued robust community engagement processes and attempted to position itself as an agency that is particularly interested in hearing from the public. The implications on policy are that Mayor de Blasio requires a high threshold for community engagement and overall buy-in for policy ideas before their enactment—a marked departure from the Klein years, when the administration was constantly accused of steamrolling through policy changes regardless of how people felt about them and often before even asking their opinions.

Finally, despite large teacher raises over the course of the Bloomberg years, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) gave up many concessions that were unpopular among some rank-and-file members and national union bosses during that era. For example, Klein instituted a teacher evaluation system and made it easier for principals to terminate teachers. By contrast, de Blasio had the firm backing of the UFT, stating after his election in 2013, "They [the teachers] haven't been given what they need to succeed and they've been under attack the whole time" and winning praise from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) national president Randi Weingarten, who was even rumored to be on the shortlist for schools' chancellor (Layton and Chandler, 2013, p. 1). The

influence of the union has increased dramatically under de Blasio. The evolution of the union's stance on mayoral control substantiates this shift. Despite vehemently opposing mayoral control during the Bloomberg years, the union most recently came out in favor of maintaining mayoral control in the 2019 renewal under de Blasio, a sign that the unions feel they have appropriate influence under the current arrangement.

## Research: Implementation, Collaboration, and Strategy in Systems

Abundant frameworks, literature, and research are available on organizational theory and strategy in large organizations. The challenge for this Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA) was to find the most useful tools for explaining a few key phenomena about making change happen in the New York City DOE and to have some theories and frameworks at my disposal before engaging in the work of my project. First, given that my project would entail coordinating the implementation of several initiatives, I felt it was important to have a strong understanding of common pitfalls and facilitating factors for successful implementation in bureaucracies. Second, because the recommendations involved offices across the entire DOE, I anticipated that successful implementation would require cross-functional teaming. Finally, I knew that in order to successfully change enrollment policies, a sound strategy would be critical. Here, I focus on scholarly research and frameworks on implementation, cross-functional teaming, and strategy in large, complex public sector organizations.

Scholarly work on policy implementation, which first gained traction in the 1970s, is a robust field with many contributors who have adopted myriad unique lenses through which to understand it. As Richard Elmore wrote in 1980, "implementation research is long on description and short on prescription" (p. 601). Rather than utilize any specific framework, I drew on a select set of principles that I curated from Lindquist and Wanna's 2015 comprehensive literature review and analysis of research on policy implementation in order to inform my future work. I home in specifically on two areas: obstacles to policy implementation and principles for effective policy implementation. For each

category, I have selected a handful of the most relevant aspects of implementing integration-related policies in the New York City DOE.

The Lindquist and Wanna (2015) review highlights some commonly described obstacles to implementation in public agencies that are highly relevant to implementing integration-related initiatives and policies at the DOE. First, for major implementation efforts, there is always the question as to whether the proper organizational structures and personnel are in place to support the change. The authors describe this obstacle as “insufficient political and administrative leadership assigned for implementing the policy reform” (2015, p. 229). Moreover, there is the dilemma of the burden of too many priorities, in which “lead agencies are given other government priorities or crises to manage” or “government interest in securing reform dissipates” (Ibid). Another obstacle to guard against includes “unclear or inconsistent policy designs” (Ibid). Having read the first SDAG report and discovered that many of the recommendations were vague and open to interpretation, I anticipated that this would be a key factor to mitigate in this project. Moreover, an “inability to work in new ways” and an “insufficient recognition of the inherent complexity . . . of the problem seeking to be remedied” can present barriers to effective implementation, particularly in an agency that is not habituated to working cross-functionally on complex matters—two likely obstacles at DOE, given how separately the divisions operate (Ibid).

On the other side, the research presented some principles to keep at the forefront of the implementation effort to increase its likelihood of success. Many in the literature write about the importance of the support of senior leadership. Success is likelier when implementers “negotiate and work with political leaders to elicit ongoing support for implementing initiatives” and keep top leaders “informed of progress and identify how they might make strategic contributions as required, even if not a top . . . priority” (Lindquist and Wanna, 2015, p. 229). The prospects for successful implementation also are improved when implementers focus on forging strong working relationships across divisions and create “regular opportunities for reporting and strategizing” (Ibid). Finally, it is vital to sequence and set realistic expectations. Implementers should “develop realistic time frames

for anchoring reforms (two years or a decade) to manage internal and external expectations and focus energies on foundational elements of reforms” (Ibid). Figure 2 lists Lindquist and Wanna’s most relevant obstacles and principles in policy implementation.

**Figure 2**  
*Obstacles and Principles in Policy Implementation*

Obstacles to Policy Implementation	Principles for Effective Policy Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclear or inconsistent policy designs, including poor choice of instruments.</li> <li>• Insufficient recognition of the inherent complexity not only of the problem seeking to be remedied but also of the solution arrived at as a ‘public policy’</li> <li>• Insufficient political and administrative leadership assigned for implementing the policy reform.</li> <li>• Shrewd political and other interests actively seeking to undermine adopted policies</li> <li>• Agency leaders have insufficient repertoires for collaboration and for anchoring change</li> <li>• Inability to identify new external partners and/or work in new ways in order to achieve the objectives inherent in the policy reforms.</li> <li>• Lead implementing agencies are given other government priorities or crises to manage, government interest in securing reform dissipates, and turnover in top executive leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiate and work with political leaders to elicit ongoing support for implementing initiatives.</li> <li>• Keep ministers informed of progress and identify how they might make strategic contributions as required, even if not a top government or ministerial priority.</li> <li>• Map the full range of implicated interests, networks and coalitions at play.</li> <li>• Find ways to strengthen entities that will benefit from and support reform implementation.</li> <li>• Forge strong working relationships with agencies across levels of government to build and strengthen a reform coalition and institute regular opportunities for reporting and strategizing.</li> <li>• Develop realistic time frames for anchoring reforms (two years or a decade) to manage internal and external expectations, and focus energies on foundational elements of reforms.</li> <li>• Ensure sufficient implementation resources to support administrative and delivery staff.</li> <li>• If required, institute sufficient structural change at appropriate junctures, but otherwise rely on good communications, temporary task force and coordination structures.</li> </ul>

Source: (Lindquist and Wanna, 2015, pp. 229-231).

For the cross-functional teaming aspect of my work, I borrowed from the world of healthcare, where effective collaboration across departments can be matter of life and death. The key distinction that Morley et al. make in their framework is the difference between a multifunctional team, where discrete tasks can be passed from one division to another, and an interdisciplinary team, which requires a collaborative workflow and interdependent work processes and behavior (2015). My assumption early in the residency project was that the people I would work with would be much more used to working on multifunctioning teams than on interdisciplinary ones, but that the work

itself would require interdisciplinary collaboration. Morley et al. state that interdisciplinary teams are “coherently bound by shared goals, trust, open, and collaborative interdependency . . . [and] features strong communication, a common understanding of the interconnected work process, and shared ownership of the inputs and outputs of the overall process . . . In the long term, such a team may also have a greater capacity for organizational learning, process improvement, and capability generation” (2017, p. 3).

The question at hand for the other part of my strategic project was: “How can we successfully reform our admissions process in a way that makes it more equitable and facilitates the existence of diverse and integrated schools across the system?” The answer to that question requires a firm understanding of strategy in large public systems and the forces that affect it.

Mark Moore, for instance, puts forth a normative (rather than positive) argument for how managers in public agencies *should* behave in order to succeed in moving work through complex, bureaucratic systems (1995). His theory is anchored in a particular notion about public agencies, that “the aim of managerial work in the public sector is to create public value, just as the aim of managerial work in the private sector is to create private value” (Moore, 1995, p. 28). It is incumbent upon leaders in the public sector who want to get work done to be able to define what the public value of their actions is. In school district administration, public value is often defined narrowly as improving student achievement as measured by standardized assessment scores for students.<sup>21</sup>

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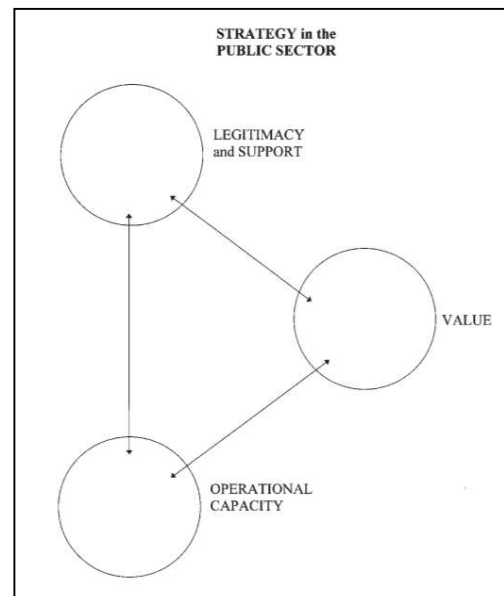
<sup>21</sup> Given that improving test scores is the predominant frame for understanding the role of school systems, this capstone argues that its inclusion in a statement of public value for school systems is vital, even if it should be one of many outputs (some of which can be measured more easily than others) used to determine the value produced by a school system.

Mark Moore's "strategic triangle" (see Figure 2) offers a simple framework for situating the DOE's strategy for reforming the admissions process. At its most basic level, the framework's core assumption is that "in order for a strategy to be a good one, it has to be valuable, authorizable, sustainable, and doable" (2000, p. 198).

Translating that to my strategic project at the DOE, in order for our effort to be successful, three things would need to be true. First, we would have to make a clear value proposition about school integration, a compelling reason for people to get behind it and buy into the notion that it was worth the investment of time and energy and it would support the core function of

schools: improving student outcomes. Second, we would need buy-in from those in the authorizing environment, including but not limited to the chancellor, the mayor, citywide elected officials, the media, and various constituencies. Finally, we would need the desire, the know-how, the resources, the time, and the people to make the change happen internally.

**Figure 3**  
*Mark Moore's Strategic Triangle*



Source: (Moore, 2000, p. 197)

## Theory of Action: Advancing the Conditions and Policies for Integration

Going into my 10-month residency, I had several aims. One aim was to make significant progress in ensuring implementation of key recommendations from the first SDAG report, which were designed to create the conditions for integration. Another aim was to generate a strategic integration plan that would put the DOE in the best possible position to make its schools more integrated. A third aim was to create a process and a strategy that would lead to specific changes to school enrollment policies. As with all leadership efforts, the work I would need to do to accomplish these aims required considering and learning from historical events, organizational context, and



environmental conditions—hence, my attention to these issues in the RKA, which formed the basis of my theory of action at the beginning of my project.

First, I considered the legacy of segregation and the historical precedent of the previously mentioned Commission on Integration in New York City in the 1950s. A key learning from the commission, given its failure to result in meaningful change despite its adoption, was that it would be critical to generate internal buy-in among DOE leaders to get traction on the integration initiatives. The rigid hierarchy and siloed divisions of the DOE's systems and structures, as well as politicized decision-making (given public involvement, mayoral influence, and the demands of organized labor), also suggested the importance of internal buy-in. This indicated to me that during the residency it would be important to cultivate key relationships with leaders across the DOE and invest them in the substance and potential of the SDAG recommendations. The DOE's organizational context also suggested the importance of fostering new ways for people to collaborate across divisions, using an approach informed by the above-described research on policy implementation and interdisciplinary teams.

Given that traditionally, integration has been subject to negative and alarmist coverage in the media and limited understandings or negative perceptions among laypeople, I reasoned that my framing of the integration conversation during the residency would be crucial. This meant it would be important that I use—and encourage others to use—strategic and deliberate language when talking about the state of segregation in the city and the need for school integration. Doing so would help to generate a public narrative, a key element of Mark Moore's strategic triangle, that would make people more amenable to change. Moore emphasizes that a compelling public narrative creates a clear, compelling value proposition. In the context of New York City public schools in an era of accountability, any value proposition for integration would need to be linked to positive academic outcomes. Thus, to accomplish the aims of my residency, I would need to develop messaging that included a direct link to the research-backed academic benefits of attending an integrated school. Finally, a critical point on Moore's triangle is generating legitimacy and support for the endeavor. The

research supporting his strategic triangle indicates that legitimacy and support are vital to strategy in the public domain (Moore, 2000). I reasoned, then, that enlisting the support of senior leadership would be critical, a key tenet in Lindquist and Wanna's principles of implementation.

Building on this reasoning, my theory of action for accomplishing the goals of the residency project addressed the relevant historical and organizational context as well as the environmental conditions and actual realities for the DOE's school integration efforts. It also was informed by existing research on policy implementation, cross-functional collaboration, and strategy in public systems.

#### Summarized Theory of Action

If I:

- cultivate key relationships with leaders across the DOE and invest them in the substance and potential of the SDAG recommendations,
- create systems to facilitate collaboration on integration across divisions,
- use and encourage others to use strategic language to frame integration in a way that is compelling to external stakeholders and highlights its academic benefits, and
- enlist the senior leadership to make the case for change in public and with elected officials,

Then I will make significant progress in ensuring implementation of key recommendations, successfully generate a strategic integration plan to best position the DOE to make progress on school integration, and increase the likelihood of changes to the student enrollment policies that maintain a segregated system.

## The Strategic Project

In 2017, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio established the SDAG (School Diversity Advisory Group) and tasked it with providing recommendations to the DOE on how to integrate its schools. The SDAG issued its recommendations in two waves. The first set of 67 recommendations was released on February 12, 2019 (before my residency) and the second set of 28 recommendations was released on August 26, 2019 (during my residency).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 4**

*Overview of the Two School Diversity Advisory Group (SDAG) Reports*

<b>Report</b>		
<b>Referred to as</b>	“SDAG 1”	“SDAG 2”
<b>Release Date</b>	February 12, 2019	August 26, 2019
<b># of Recommendations</b>	67	28
<b>Primary Contents</b>	Goals for Integration and Conditions Necessary to Create an Integrated System	Enrollment Changes and Structural or Programmatic Changes Required to Integrate the System
<b>Status</b>	62 of 67 Recommendations Adopted on June 10, 2019	Under consideration by the DOE

<sup>22</sup> The exact number of recommendations varies depending on how they are counted; however, the DOE numbered the recommendations for internal use. One key point: the DOE combined all Restorative Practices recommendations into one, since they recommended enacting a set of recommendations previously issued to the Department on Restorative Practices by a Mayoral Task Force, resulting in the widely used number 67. If each Restorative Practices recommendation was counted individually, the number would be higher.

The first set deals with the overall goals to which the DOE should aspire on integration and the conditions necessary to create truly integrated schools. The second set of recommendations deals with changes to enrollment policy and special programs like Gifted and Talented (G&T), which would enable a more integrated system by changing the demographic makeup of schools. This strategic project was designed to include aspects of communicating, circulating, workshopping, prioritizing, delegating, and implementing the SDAG's recommendations to the DOE. Given the high-profile subject matter and the wide-ranging nature of the recommendations across the DOE, my residency was positioned in the Chancellor's Office, a team of nine individuals who centrally manage the agency's strategic priorities and organize the chancellor's time and attention.

## Project Goals

With the SDAG recommendations as the focal point for my work on school integration at DOE, my supervisor and I broke down the overarching aims for my residency into five goals:

1. Maintain integration as a key focus for DOE over the course of the 2019–2020 school year.
2. Create systems to ensure offices make progress on high-priority recommendations from the first SDAG report.
3. Connect all existing integration-related activities into a coordinated strategy.
4. Create a clear process for internal deliberations on the second SDAG report that results in short- and long-term policy proposals.
5. Contribute to and help coordinate a strategy and engagement plan to achieve progress on integration policy objectives that emerge from the second SDAG report.

The sections that follow detail the actions I took to accomplish these strategic project goals, as well as events in the 10-month period that impacted the outcome of the project. This description is grouped into three sections and various subsections. Although the overall description (and each section itself) is *loosely* linear, for the integrity of the narrative of each subsection certain events from each section may overlap chronologically. The first goal, maintaining a focus on integration, is covered in all three sections. The second goal, creating systems, is chronicled in the section “Creating Systems for the Implementation of the First SDAG Report.” The third goal, creating a coordinated strategy, is covered in the section “Building Off Existing Work to Create a Coherent Integration

Strategy.” The final two goals, creating a policy process and strategizing for how to achieve policy objectives, are covered in the final section “Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy from the Second SDAG Report.” This structure is mirrored in the evidence section.

## Creating Systems for the Implementation of the First SDAG Report

This section describes the evolution of the systems I put in place to make progress on the implementation of the first set of SDAG recommendations. It begins with their adoption in June, adds some context from the time between their release and their adoption (before my residency), and culminates with the progress made to date.

### **A Mandate on My First Day: SDAG 1 Adoption**

The very first day of my residency featured a significant event in the world of integration. Shortly after getting settled at my new desk, I walked up to a large room on the third floor of the Tweed Courthouse (the building where DOE senior leaders have their desks) and entered to a festive atmosphere. The chancellor was holding a press conference. On June 10, 2019, in front of dozens of press and DOE staff and flanked by School Diversity Advisory Committee members, the chancellor announced that the DOE was formally adopting 62 of the 67 recommendations from the first SDAG report: “Today we’re adopting changes that will expand opportunity for all students and ensure our school system better reflects the diversity of New York City. This set of recommendations affects every facet of our organization and furthers our commitment to equity” (Office of the Mayor, 2019b). Advocates and staff members alike were jubilant and there was a sense of momentum on this giant issue that so many previous leaders had refused to touch or mention for so many years. Moreover, a wide variety of politicians and civic leaders praised the action, a rarity for integration-related initiatives.

Just after the event, the chancellor hurried off to his next commitment. When he did, it seemed as though the attention of the entire agency immediately moved on to the next issue of the

moment. That press conference on my first day and the agency's quick attention shift was emblematic of the challenges I would face over the coming months. How do you prioritize a given body of work in an agency with so many priorities?

One thing that was clear to me on that first day was that I needed to use the adoption of the vast majority of the recommendations from this report as a mandate, both for me to gain access to people and offices necessary to move integration work forward, and for me to push people to take action on work that created favorable conditions for integration to take root. Over the coming weeks and months, the SDAG mandate became my rationale for meeting leaders throughout the organization; “the Chancellor committed to that in June” became a common refrain.

### **One-on-Ones with Chiefs of Staff: Learning the Content and Mapping the Agency**

In my first few weeks, I set out to learn about the report, its origins, its contents, and how the agency had worked with it thus far. I also studied the organization and mapped out who would be instrumental in the report's implementation.

To start, I learned that when the report had been released in February 2019, the Office of Enrollment (OSE) owned its dissemination and input collection because that office had been significantly involved in the SDAG meetings since 2017. (Their office's director was a nonvoting member of the group.) Upon the report's release, the OSE took each of the 67 recommendations and transcribed them onto a digital spreadsheet, paraphrasing where necessary for clarity and brevity, and assigned them to a “lead office” as well as “secondary offices.” Figure 5 shows the distribution of recommendations by office. ([Exhibit 2](#) in the appendix shows how they are distributed by division—as offices fall under divisions.)

**Figure 5**  
*Distribution of SDAG Recommendations Across Offices*

**NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY OFFICE**

Acronym	Office	#
CAO	Chief Academic Office	7
-	Chancellor's Office	1
-	Community Affairs	8
DHC	Division of Human Capital	3
FACE	Family and Community Engagement	3
-	Finance	9
ODP	Office of District Planning	1
OEA	Office of Equity and Access	1
OFDC	Office of the First Deputy Chancellor	3
OPE	Office of Policy and Evaluation	1
OSE	Office of Student Enrollment	12
OSYD	Office of Safety and Youth Development	3
RPSG	Research and Policy Support Group	7
SCW	School Climate & Wellness	6
SDCP	School Design and Charter Partnerships	1
T&I	Translation and Interpretation	1
T&L	Teaching and Learning	1
TRQ	Teacher Retention and Quality	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>72*</b>

*\*Five are co-owned*

The OSE spreadsheet was then shared digitally with all offices for input as to whether they recommended adoption by the DOE. Finally, the spreadsheet was forwarded to the Chancellor's Office and the Press Office for final comment ahead of the press conference in June. On the day of the press conference, the list of 62 accepted recommendations as amended and 5 rejected recommendations were released to the press (and ultimately published online). [Exhibit 3](#) in the appendix lists the recommendations with their adopted language from June 10.

The SDAG committee organized the recommendations of its first report using the "5 Rs Framework" for integration, described in the previous section. The recommendations were wide-ranging: some projects could be accomplished on relatively short order, others would take years, and still others would be ongoing in perpetuity. Some were exceedingly clear and specific, and others could be interpreted in different ways by different people. Finally, the recommendations varied in

terms of who could implement them. Although a few fell squarely in the domain of one office, the vast majority were heavily cross-functional.

Recommendations 57 and 28 illustrate the difference between a relatively isolated recommendation and a cross-functional recommendation. Recommendation 57, “Increase translation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and provision of interpretation and translation support for IEP-related meetings,” was easily delegated to the office of Translation and Interpretation. With some collaboration with the Special Education Office, they were off and running in their mandate to improve translation of IEPs and support for IEP meetings. By contrast, recommendation 28, “Invest in programs and offerings that will attract more diverse families to schools they might not have considered before,” which had been delegated to Finance on the spreadsheet, was not a simple line-item shift of funds that Finance could initiate in order to accomplish the recommendation.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, an entire sequence of events involving various offices would be necessary. First, the OSE would need to run projections to know what types of schools certain demographics of families consider in applications. Another office would have to run focus groups and surveys to learn which schools certain families would be willing to consider. Then, depending on the program or offering, yet another office would need to create a proposal for an expansion, detailing the scope and collaborating with enrollment folks on where expansion should focus. Finally, Finance could come in and make a proposal to the chancellor to send over to the Office of Management and Budget for funding a new need in an already tight budget. Figure 6 gives a further sampling of five recommendations, one per category, to demonstrate how widely they vary in scope, lift, and cross-functional collaboration required.

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<sup>23</sup> Finance is housed under the Chief Operating Officer’s division.



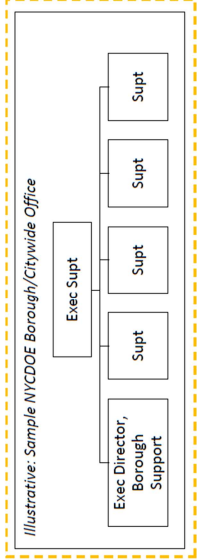
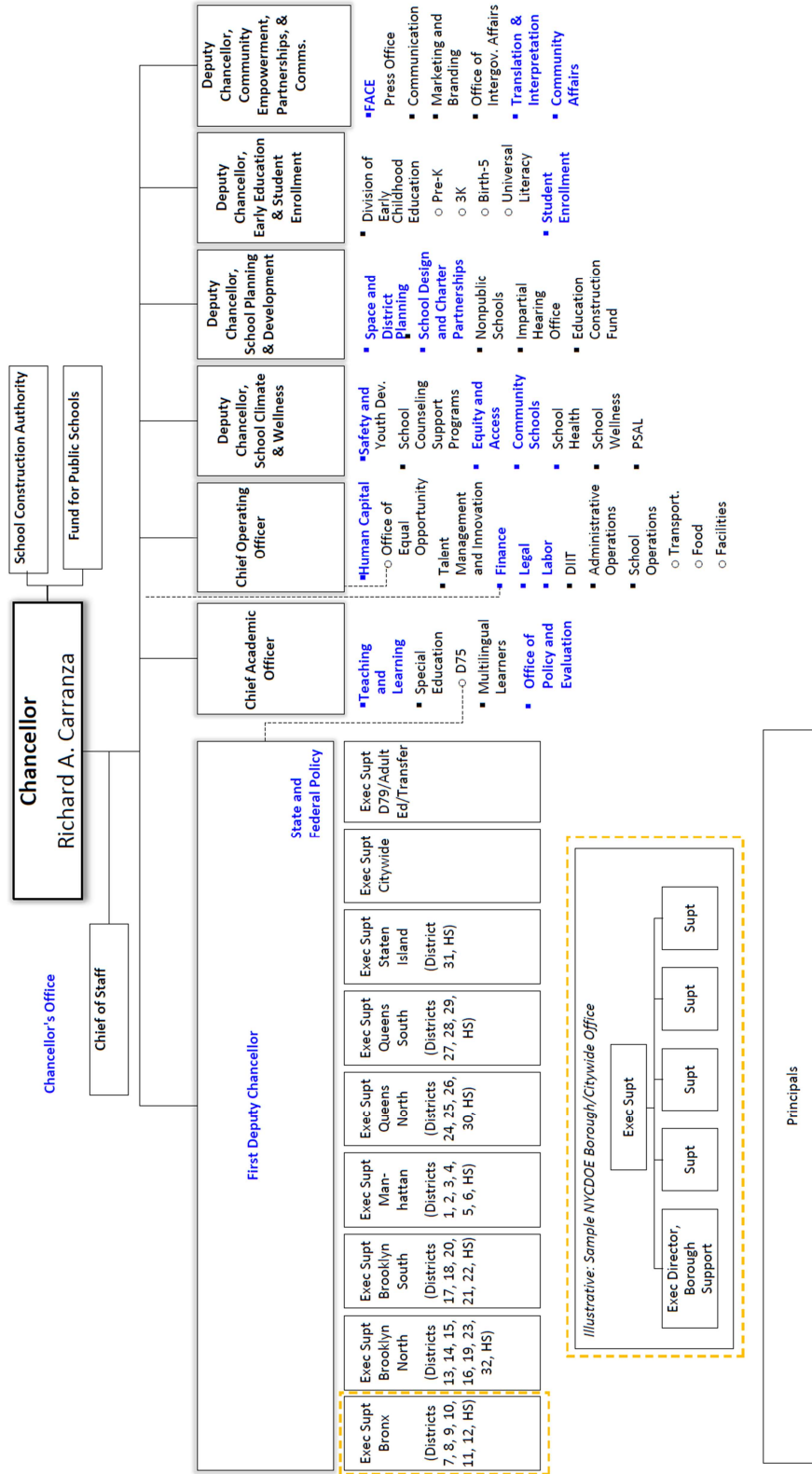
**Figure 6**  
*Sampling of SDAG Recommendations*

<p><b>Goals, Metrics, and Accountability</b></p> <p>7. Track and publish a single set of metrics related to diversity in an annual report.</p>
<p><b>Race and Enrollment</b></p> <p>12. Require all nine districts with sufficient demographic diversity of population to develop diversity and integration plans (Districts 1, 2, 3, 13, 15, 22, 27, 28, 31)</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>27. Invest in programming that intentionally creates diverse populations through its admissions such as dual language programs and integrated learning environments for students with disabilities to ensure that programs will be attractive to a broad cross section of families in a community, the choice of new themes for non-selective magnet schools should be based on survey research.</p>
<p><b>Relationships</b></p> <p>37. Create a new leadership position within the central DOE office to focus on student voice.</p>
<p><b>Restorative Justice and Practices</b></p> <p>61. Implement the recommendations from the Mayor’s Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline and share an update on the recommendations implemented to date.</p>
<p><b>Representation</b></p> <p>67. Launch a task force to investigate the current state of the DOE’s workforce in greater detail and make recommendations about best practices learned from existing efforts. This task force should also look at examples of success from other school districts and sectors.</p>

After acquainting myself with the recommendations, I mapped each lead office to the DOE’s organizational chart, noting the office director and any relevant context. Each office falls under one of seven divisions. Figure 7 shows the organizational chart, with bolded, blue font indicating the offices designated as lead office in the original spreadsheet disseminated by the OSE. I set up a series of meetings with the chief of staff of each division to gather important context on each relevant office and to probe each deputy chancellor’s (DC) level of understanding and prioritization of the SDAG recommendations. Only one DC was intimately acquainted with the recommendations before the meetings, and none had a strategic plan in place for implementation. I leveraged these meetings to build relationships with the heads of each office and key staff members who would interface with SDAG recommendations. This also gave me a sense for which teams and individuals were most energized to work toward integration. Offices’ receptiveness and capacity varied widely. At one end of the spectrum, in response to my initial meetings, the Chief Academic

Officers' division designated a staffer to track all of its designated recommendations and regularly convene a small team internal to the division to monitor and drive progress. Correspondingly, that division had the one of the highest rates of progress on SDAG completion (see exhibits on SDAG progress and designated offices). By contrast, I found it difficult to schedule meetings with another chief of staff. We pushed through several postponements and cancellations, and when we finally met, the office expressed reservations about its capacity to work on the recommendations. Progress in that office was painstakingly slow.

**Figure 7**  
 DOE Organizational Chart (“Lead Offices” for SDAG Bolded and in Blue)



Principals

## Launching the Implementation Team

As I learned how broadly the work was spread across the agency, as well as how much offices needed to coordinate with one another, I saw the need for a mechanism that brought people across offices together, rather than via the one-off meetings I was having with each office's chief of staff. By leveraging the relationships I had built as well as the expertise and credibility of two people who had helped disseminate the SDAG recommendations (from the OSE and the Office of Community Affairs), and earning the buy-in of people in my office, I launched a cross-functional team which I designed to operate as an interdisciplinary team, rather than a multifunctioning team (see Morley). At our first meeting on July 2, we set the following group purposes:

- Create a space for cross-functional collaboration on recommendation implementation (many of which are cross-functional in their nature).
- Build alignment by communicating externally to the public, the SDAG, and others and internally to DOE and to schools the progress that is being made and how it relates to our broader agenda.
- Provide regular progress updates as well as mutual support and accountability.
- Create a forum for dynamic, creative and cross-functional thinking on issues beyond the SDAG while thinking of SDAG as a floor, not a ceiling, of what we can achieve for diversity and integration in our schools.

The team was composed of individuals who fell into one or more of three categories: (1) individuals appointed by their chief of staff as the official designee from their division, (2) office heads within divisions with particularly large representation in the SDAG recommendations, or (3) allies and integration advocates across the agency interested in moving the work forward. This team began meeting in July 2019 and consistently grew over the subsequent three meetings, drawing 35 attendees representing 18 offices at the August 13 meeting.

Throughout July and August, we continued to meet biweekly, building relationships across offices, engaging in conversations about integration that were designed to deepen our knowledge and increase our fluency in the subject, and sharing progress and best practices for moving work forward within our own offices. ([Exhibit 4](#) shows an agenda from a typical meeting.) While the atmosphere was positive and good conversations took root, tangible progress on recommendation

implementation was slow, particularly on complex, cross-functional implementation. For example, in August, the Office of District Planning (ODP) came to present a process they hoped to use to rezone a community school district in a way that would promote greater integration; this was informative for the group to know how zoning impacted integration and gave the ODP a chance to get feedback on talking points and strategy. At another meeting, the Office of Policy and Evaluation (OPE) came to ask the group questions about how diversity and integration data were used across the agency to fine-tune a tool they hoped to roll out in the following year's School Quality Reports related to school diversity. In both cases, valuable information was being shared across the system and important pieces of work were workshopped to ultimately strengthen them. However, in neither case was a major project or initiative moved forward cross-functionally—each office went back to work on its own piece of the pie.

I began to experiment with a new structure for the meetings, one that enabled us to more clearly define the work we hoped to accomplish in the coming months. I developed a proposal for five working groups (one for each “R” from SDAG) that members of the team could join and execute over the course of 6 months. These were designed to tackle groups of one or more recommendations from specific “R” sections of the recommendations that groups of our team would help define, set goals for, and collaborate to complete in the span of a few months. In the proposal, I deliberately chose recommendations that I perceived to be high-impact, yet attainable within a 6-month span. I also wanted input from other members of the team, so in late October, the team met to review and give feedback on the parameters of the working groups. ([Exhibit 5](#) shows the working groups and their primary charge.) In November and December, the teams began to meet independently, facilitated by one member in each group. I aligned with group facilitators and attended as many of the meetings as possible. Groups progressed at different rates and experienced different levels of success, but most experienced two similar obstacles: members had limited time to work on implementation goals given their other DOE responsibilities, and groups reached an impasse when they felt they lacked authority to make critical decisions related to their project scope.

For example, one working group formed around the mandate SDAG gave for the department to set ambitious short- and long-term goals vis-à-vis integration, which recommendations 1-6 collectively named. This group was paralyzed by all the possibilities. There were so many different types of metrics one could use to set goals around integration (see previous section on “Facts”). Even once they decided on a methodology, there were so many geographic sizes one could consider: districts, zones, neighborhoods, radii from school. Moreover, what constituted ambitious, yet attainable? Who were they to decide something so consequential? These conundrums were emblematic of other recommendations that had wide latitude for interpretation within an agency not structured to give nonsenior leaders discretion to make these types of decisions.

### **Enlisting the Cabinet**

Informed by an implementation group debrief in January, I decided to change course. To get the level of direction that implementers needed, as well as the resources required to execute, I knew it was important to get in front of the Cabinet (all deputy chancellors and the chancellor). I assembled a small team of four of the most involved members of the implementation team to plan a presentation to the Cabinet. I secured a date from the chief of staff, and on February 3, our “SDAG 1: Updates and Future Action” presentation provided a thorough update on progress thus far, took a deep dive into some of the thorniest issues from the first report, and solicited input on how we should prioritize our energies that spring.

In preparation for the meeting, I coded each recommendation as complete, in progress with a major milestone complete, in progress, or not started. (The full visual progress update for all 62 recommendations is included in the Evidence section and [Exhibit 6](#).) The progress update showed that 18% were fully complete, 25% had a major milestone completed, 43% were in progress, and 9% had not yet been started. (I also provided an addendum which detailed the update on each recommendation in narrative form, with much more detail.) In addition to the status update, I

presented my findings as to why certain recommendations were making progress and others were not. That was summarized in the slide shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8**  
*Factors Contributing to Progress or Lack of Progress on Implementation*

## Takeaways: SDAG 1 Progress

- **Significant progress** has been made on a core set of recommendations
  - Trends for these recommendations:
    - Clear owners (one sole office leads, maybe two)
    - Clear mandates
    - Overlap with existing priorities
  
- **Slow progress or no progress** has been made on a core set of recommendations
  - Trends for these recommendations:
    - Complex or vague / open to interpretation
    - Require collaboration across many offices
    - Lack of clarity around importance to agency or lack of directives from supervisors

Then we, as a team, presented the Cabinet with a series of opportunities for advancing the more difficult, cross-functional elements of the work that had stifled our implementation team and proposed a new cross-functional structure. We ended by soliciting input from the senior leaders around the table about their thoughts on what should be prioritized and how we might achieve these goals. There was palpable excitement on the part of the Cabinet; in an unusual move, they allocated an additional 45 minutes to discuss the topic. The meeting ended with support for the following: formalizing a school integration team (establishing a cross-functional integration team with members from various divisions who have time allocated to be a part of the team), developing a set of options for long-term goals for school diversity at the DOE and sharing them with the chancellor, formalizing a proposal to develop an annual diversity report, and creating a task force on equitable resource allocation in DOE schools. (Many of these projects made quick early progress following the meeting, but the full status of these projects was not available in time for inclusion in the Capstone.)

## Building Off Existing Work to Create a Coherent Integration Strategy

Part of my mandate was to make sense of the various integration-related initiatives already in progress at the DOE and assist in aligning and coordinating them. The following section documents how I attempted to develop context for, involve myself in, and build relationships with the leaders of various initiatives across the agency to help develop a potential coherent school integration strategy. The experiences described in this section culminated in the drafting of a strategic integration plan for the system.

### Learning from Success in District 15

One of New York City's 32 community school districts was ahead of the curve in implementing meaningful changes that would lead to integrated schools: District 15, which encompasses the Park Slope, Red Hook, and Sunset Park neighborhoods (and parts of others) in Brooklyn. During the 2017–2018 school year, in advance of any SDAG recommendations being released, District 15 engaged in a community-driven effort that overhauled its middle school admissions process, slated to take effect the following school year and impact students entering middle school in the 2019–2020 school year. For over a year, community members met in what was widely hailed as an extremely successful community engagement, in particular because it was able to bring in community members from parts of the district that were historically underrepresented and because it resulted in a concrete, tangible plan with broad support. Prior to the plan, District 15 had a set of highly sought-after middle schools that were “screened,” meaning they admitted students on the basis of any combination of grades, test scores, attendance records, or behavior records from children's elementary school performance, as well as, in some cases, interviews in the fifth-grade year. The process of applying to middle school had been notoriously stressful for children, families, and principals, and the calls for change grew louder over time. At the same time, the district, which was one of the most diverse in the entire city, had middle schools that were very segregated along both socioeconomic and racial lines. The result of the plan that the community came up with in 2017–



2018 was to remove all screens from middle schools in the district, and admit students via an algorithm in which students' choices were taken into account, as well as a 52% priority at each school for students who qualified for free and reduced lunch (FRL), were English language learners (ELL), or who were students in temporary housing (STH).<sup>24</sup> This admissions policy was implemented in 2018–2019 and took effect the year of my residency.<sup>25</sup>

Several lessons gleaned from District 15 in the 2019–2020 school year were instrumental to informing the work taking place in the rest of the city, so I made it a focal point of my work, particularly in the summer and fall of 2019. I spent time with the superintendent of the district to learn more about the history of the district and their community-driven process. I spent significant time working with one of the district's new principals, whose school was predicted to have one of the most dramatic demographic shifts, including leading instructional walkthroughs with her and her senior team. I also toured all the district's middle schools to interview every principal to learn about some the challenges and new dynamics they encountered as their demographics changed from one year to the next. I compiled the findings into a report, which informed the school support and improvement pillar of the strategic integration plan I drafted. The principal findings from my engagement in District 15 are listed in [Exhibit 7](#).

In October, the official enrollment numbers for the district were released. They showed that 8 out of the 11 middle schools in District 15 fell within the target range of 40%–75% of their enrolled sixth-graders being students with FRL, ELL, or STH, in comparison to the prior year, when only 3 of the 11 middle schools fell within the target range. In 1 year, the sixth-grade class of the most highly sought-after middle school in the district, MS 51, went from 34% FRL, ELL, STH to 56% FRL, ELL, STH. One of the most popular schools for White families in the district, New

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<sup>24</sup> The district's average of FRL, ELL, and STH was 52%.

<sup>25</sup> The "offers" of admission were made in spring 2018. An analysis showed that 9 of the 11 middle schools in District 15 fell within the target range of 40%–75% of their offers being made to students with FRL, ELL, or STH, in comparison to the prior year, when only 4 of the 11 middle schools fell within the target range. (Note that "offers" are different than actual enrollment numbers, which are cited in the text above.) Nonetheless, some students might still opt out of the system, so the fall enrollment numbers were highly anticipated.

Voices, went from a sixth-grade class of 56% White students to a class of 31% White students in one year. From the standpoint of enacting changes that lead to more integrated student populations, District 15 was an unqualified success. The internal (unreleased) offer numbers for next year are even more promising.

### **Collaborating on Key Work: District and State Grants**

In addition to the SDAG recommendations and the pioneering work done in District 15, two other established and promising work streams were in progress. The OSE made five grants of \$200,000 each to Community School Districts 9, 13, 16, 28, and 31 to engage in a year-long community planning process during the 2019–2020 school year. Meanwhile, Community Districts 1, 2, 3, 10, 13, 15, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 30, and 31 were all in the second phase of a state integration grant, and were eligible for up to \$3 million to “fully implement an integration strategy” in phase three.

The two DOE employees overseeing the district community planning grants, from the OSE and Community Affairs, coordinated the District 15 process. They also saw the need for a unified strategy for integration at the DOE, and we collaborated closely to draft a plan. To get a better feel for how all the work fit together, I attended onboarding, planning, and logistical meetings for the approximately 20 DOE and partner agency staffers working on the district grants. I also met with the New York City state grant recipients in Albany, and co-led a workshop that explained the implications of the SDAG recommendations and offered a vision for the support we would be able to offer centrally to ensure coordination and consistency with the school integration work happening under the state grants. I worked with leaders to organize a strategy for districts applying for the \$3 million phase three grant opportunity and met with each of the superintendents in eligible districts. I then consulted with teams working on the grants from each district and provided multiple rounds of feedback on every single grant application. Both state and district grants became key levers in the strategic plan because of the benefits of local, community-driven action and the additional resources to advance integration.

While the district planning processes, which were modeled after the highly successful District 15 process, were largely successful, the process in District 28 in Queens turned out to be hugely controversial. It dominated headlines in late fall, before the process had even begun to kick off in earnest. Upon hearing about the plans to have a working group of District 28 community members facilitate a series of community workshops and meetings to create a customized plan to improve the diversity of the schools in the district, an opposition immediately mobilized. A group petitioned against the process, stating “We, the members of Queens Parents United and other interested parties, are deeply concerned that parents and stakeholders may not have a ‘seat at the table’ when designing recommendations for our own schools” (Clark, 2019, p. 1). Groups like QPU and others began to raise the specter of busing in community meetings and in the press. The vocal opposition ultimately forced the district to substantially change the process, prolong the engagement period, and add new members to the working group. The negative press on District 28 reverberated across all the integration work and led to some important lessons about tailoring integration plans to specific communities, messaging, and countering misinformation.

### **Seeking Opportunities to Broaden the Scope: ODP and Mergers**

In addition to existing initiatives, I also sought out opportunities to expand integration work in places where it might not yet formally exist. One such place was the Office of District Planning (ODP). That office oversees new school siting, school mergers, and all the demographic planning that goes into understanding the capacity of all the schools in the DOE and the decisions made to optimize it. ODP leaders enthusiastically joined the first few SDAG implementation group meetings. In the fall, the director of the office met with me and asked if I could brief her team on the state of school integration at DOE and provide some language to her team for how to talk about race, diversity, and integration, as the office was encountering many more conversations that dealt with these issues. In fact, they were seeking out opportunities to make proposals that led to greater school diversity (for instance, redrawing zone lines to optimize diversity), which struck me as a huge

untapped opportunity for furthering integration at the DOE. I was also asked to help facilitate conversations between community members of schools that had been proposed for merger and whose mergers would lead to more integrated schools in Districts 1, 11, and 13.

Although the ODP largely was not implicated in the SDAG recommendations (nor for that matter were mergers or new sites), I believed the functions of the office represented tremendous opportunities for increasing integration in New York City, and found its leaders willing and excited to embrace these opportunities. My exposure to promising mergers that I was able to take part in and district-wide re-zoning efforts that were planned while I was in residency led me to conclude that an optimal DOE-wide integration strategy had to include the activities of the ODP.

### **Pre-K for All Hits Another Milestone: An Opportunity for Integration?**

One final initiative that I felt held broad promise for furthering the cause of integration was New York City's expansion of public education into early childhood. At the beginning of the school year in September, the mayor and the chancellor celebrated another milestone in the provision of free, high-quality early childhood education in New York City: the expansion of free early childhood education to 3-year-olds in every borough in New York City, a program known as 3-K. The 3-K program built on the work of universal pre-K, a campaign promise made and fulfilled by Mayor de Blasio.<sup>26</sup> The pre-K initiative was named "Pre-K for All" and the pledge by the administration was to "offer a free, full-day, high-quality pre-K seat for every four-year-old who wants one" (Office of the Mayor, 2019). In 2019–2020, 73,000 New York City children benefited from public pre-K.

I strongly believed that the city's foray into early childhood education presented a unique opportunity for integration, since so many new centers and programs were being built and certified across the city. Moreover, the same division that oversaw student enrollment, the Division of Early

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<sup>26</sup> Only 19,000 students were enrolled in Pre-K at the end of the Bloomberg administration, making the achievement of the free provision of a Pre-K spot to every New York 4-year old who wants it a significant achievement for the de Blasio administration.

Childhood and Enrollment, oversaw early childhood education. Nonetheless, the nascent early childhood system in New York City was segregated, more so even, than kindergarten. A 2016 report by the Century Foundation found that while the overall population of students that attended pre-K in the city was diverse, “in one-sixth of all pre-K classrooms, more than 90 percent of students come from the same racial or ethnic group,” a much higher proportion than in kindergarten, which is itself fairly segregated (Potter, 2016, Section 4). Advocates across the city proposed solutions to the issue of segregation in early childhood education that mirrored many of the SDAG recommendations: track and publish the data, set goals for integration, and encourage diversity at individual sites by enabling them to use innovative enrollment mechanisms. Nonetheless, I found it very hard to gain traction in early childhood because none of the SDAG recommendations explicitly named it, and because some individuals felt that there were already so many mandates and policy prescriptions for other SDAG recommendations that attention should be focused there. Despite the tremendous promise in this area, there are no concrete plans yet for making early childhood education dramatically more integrated in New York City.

## Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy for the Second SDAG Report

This final section of the project description focuses on the lead-up to the release of the second set of SDAG recommendations, the immediate aftermath, and the attempts to strategize and organize engagement in the weeks and months that followed.

### **The SDAG Finalizes Its Recommendations for SDAG 2**

In July 2019, the SDAG was already behind its deadline for releasing its highly anticipated second set of recommendations on G&T, school admissions screens, and other topics related to promoting diverse student bodies at DOE schools. Although I was not an official member, nor an official DOE staffer to the committee (it had been running for 2 years when I started), I attended the

meetings in order to gather information that would help DOE strategy when it came time to consider and potentially implement whatever came of the deliberations.

The SDAG was a group of 45 people handpicked by the mayor and his team to tackle the issue of school integration in New York City. The majority of the people de Blasio selected for the group were school integration experts, or at the very least were people who had spent time thinking, reading, and researching the issue or had first-hand experience working on it. They were all in favor of integration as a concept, although they had individual differences in terms of strategies and policies to pursue integration. By July, all the members had been meeting for more than a year and a half, and most were eager to wrap up the process. “I’ve given almost two years to this thing, I need a break!” one of the four executive committee members told me. At this point, the group’s fault lines were significant, with certain members calling for radical proposals such as eliminating or changing district boundaries or mandating certain admissions schemes that would ensure diversity across DOE schools, but potentially drive certain communities away from DOE schools. At the same time, some group members supported what other members perceived to be only modest changes to the status quo, arguing that the committee needed to be realistic in what it was recommending to DOE for it to have the greatest chance of success. For instance, some more cautious members of the group thought they should advocate for better identification methods for G&T, rather than calling for its replacement. Attempting to thread the needle appropriately proved to be a challenge. As an interested observer, I found some of the initial ideas about high school screens to be impracticable and the ideas on eliminating G&T to be too politically charged. The time crunch led the group to lean heavily on the executive committee to draft a final set of recommendations and use a simple majority vote to approve final recommendations where compromise could not be reached. (The high school screening proposal I referred to was removed, but the proposal to eliminate G&T remained.)

The final agreements were then rushed to the organization in charge of editing, publishing, and releasing the recommendations.<sup>27</sup> [Exhibit 8](#) shows the full list of recommendations from SDAG 2.

## **The Release of SDAG 2: Internal Action**

The end of August marked two momentous occasions. First, on a personal note, my first child, my daughter Zoë, was born. Less than two weeks later, the SDAG released its second set of recommendations, centered on enrollment and other structural changes that the DOE would need to initiate in order to make significant progress on integration. Our team was focused on short-term wins: we would have approximately 3 weeks to get clear policies written and approved by City Hall in order to enact them for the 2019–2020 admissions cycle, which began later in the fall.

On August 20, the week before the recommendations were released, my office held a phone call with key senior leaders to preview the final recommendations and prepared a strategy for addressing them once they were released. Knowing the release would be met with a lot of attention, we agreed to stand-up a “war room,” an internal DOE term used to denote an ad hoc group of people prepared to make rapid decisions and issue relevant communications on a fast-moving issue. The war room included key DOE members from the Offices of Enrollment, Press, Communications, Community Affairs, Operations, Legal, and Labor, along with the Chancellor’s Office. It would disseminate the appropriate information across divisions, consider the policy implications of the recommendations, and issue rapid, strategic responses to the press and community reactions to the release of the recommendations. I prepared the first official “war-room” meeting for August 28, the morning following the SDAG’s press conference announcing the recommendations. [Exhibit 9](#) shows the structure and process I proposed for the ad hoc committee through September 2019. First, I asked each deputy chancellor to weigh in on each recommendation, indicating whether they agreed with the recommendation, their rationale, their suggested timeline for

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<sup>27</sup> This organization (WXY) had partnered with the DOE on the District 15 process and helped facilitate much of the SDAG’s process.

implementation and to add any flags or suggestions. From the feedback we received, we established six policy areas where we believed we could take quick action and announce the changes to the public. To be fully prepared to do that, we commissioned six policy recommendation memos in the September 6 war room meeting to outline the exact policy changes being proposed and the key implications for students, families, schools, districts, and the overall system in the following areas: (1) reforming admissions screens for behavior, attendance, and lateness in middle school and high school; (2) reforming screens for geographic zone priorities in middle school and high school; (3) reforming all other screens (academic, audition, and interview); (4) keeping and expanding inclusionary admissions practices in middle and high school; (5) expanding and resourcing diversity grants; and (6) mandating greater transparency in admissions. While the policy recommendations memos were being researched and written, I compiled the feedback we had received along with our proposed policy areas and created a presentation summarizing both the contents of the recommendations and the strategic direction we were recommending via the policy memos to the senior Cabinet and the executive superintendents (in separate meetings). Both meetings provided vital input on how we might be strategic about announcing and rolling these policies out across the city. All the while, my colleagues in the Chancellor's Office and Intergovernmental Affairs were testing the waters in City Hall to gauge the appetite for any type of substantive reform.

## **The Release of SDAG 2: Reception in the Press and Public**

The recommendations were met with immediate interest and coverage by the media, followed quickly by local politicians, teachers, and local unions all weighing in on the report. In contrast to SDAG 1, the contents of the second report were perceived to be much more controversial, and people particularly seized on the recommendations the SDAG made pertaining to G&T programming in New York City.

On August 26, 2019, the evening of the release of the second set of SDAG recommendations, the *New York Times* got the exclusive scoop and its New York City education beat



writer Eliza Shapiro penned an article with the headline: “Desegregation Plan: Eliminate All Gifted Programs in New York” (2019d). Shapiro was able to release the article simultaneously with the online release of the recommendations because the SDAG executive committee offered her an early peek and the opportunity for an exclusive that they hoped would give them positive coverage that would buoy the next day’s press conference. The plan did not quite work as the SDAG had hoped.

Dozens of news outlets quickly seized on the “gifted” issue. The press conference the day after the release did little to reframe the narrative, as members found themselves on their heels, struggling to reclaim the story they wanted to tell the DOE and the public. [Exhibit 10](#) lists all the headlines from the 5-day period following the release of the recommendations. Of the 19 articles that appeared in reputable news outlets in the 5 days following the release, 17 had the word “gifted” as part of the headline. Only 1 of the 19 articles mentioned anything about selective admissions or school screens in its headline. The tone of the coverage was particularly alarmist and mostly negative, with headlines like “Proposal to scrap city Gifted/Talented classes draws heavy criticism” (Lewis, 2019). It seized on many politicians’ and upper-class New Yorkers’ deepest fears about integration, chief among them the concern that real integration would lead to a middle-class/upper-class or White/Asian flight from the system, exemplified by a *New York Post* article printed 2 days after the release: “Gifted-and-talented purge will spark Asian exodus: activist” (Algar, 2019b). Other articles seized on the common anti-integration narrative that seeks to portray diversity initiatives such as affirmative action or busing as ways of “watering down” academic excellence and placating a far-left social justice agenda. The Fox News Headline epitomized this stance: “‘Diversity Panel’ recommends eliminating gifted student programs for allegedly perpetuating ‘stereotypes’” (Halon, 2019).

The media’s treatment of the report influenced the political establishment, as politicians sought to distance themselves from the G&T recommendations. Although initially the mayor and chancellor struck optimistic tones about the report’s release, intimating that some things could be on the table for the coming admissions cycle, as the media’s negative coverage picked up they moved quickly to assure people that there would be no short-term action on G&T issue and that the

recommendations required “a public conversation” in the coming weeks and months before any action could be considered (Amin, 2019).<sup>28</sup>

## **An Opposition Mobilizes and Students Get Involved**

The media’s response to the second SDAG report helped craft a dramatic and effective narrative for those who opposed reform. There was already an organized opposition coalition that had formed from the previous year’s failed attempt to reform the admissions criteria to the city’s eight specialized high schools in order to make them more diverse. This group saw the SDAG’s report as an extension of the efforts to reform the specialized high schools. Their collective message can be synthesized as follows: “This administration is trying to dumb down our schools in the name of diversity. They are on a social justice crusade and will stop at nothing to tear down the few academic institutions we have in the city that stand for excellence and merit.” These groups put significant pressure on their local politicians to oppose the recommendations and disavow the entire SDAG. The pressure worked in many quarters. For example, the education council from District 24 in Queens passed a resolution stating that the council:

Demands the NYC Department of Education, Chancellor Carranza and Mayor de Blasio reject all the recommendations of the SDAG;

Demands the NYC Department of Education, Chancellor Carranza and Mayor de Blasio, maintain all gifted and talented programs, screened high schools, District 24 preference and zoned high schools. (CEC 24 Resolution Passed October 22nd, 2019).

While the opposition was mobilizing, student groups from across the city also began to organize in favor of the recommendations. IntegrateNYC, which had some representation on the SDAG, publicly supported the recommendations. Another group, Teens Take Charge, argued that the recommendations did not go far enough, particularly since their recommendations on high

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<sup>28</sup> There was some hope that we would have approval for some enrollment changes by late-September, which would have enabled the OSE to implement them for the 2019–2020 enrollment cycle which began in October. On September 5, Mayor de Blasio said, “If we get to a point when we see changes that can get implemented at the beginning of the new school year . . . if we think we’re ready, we’ll move” (Amin, 2019).

school were limited. They organized weekly school walk-outs to protest what they perceived to be inaction on the part of the administration and to demand immediate changes to the system. As we began to consider strategy for advancing policy objectives, we had to consider how and when to engage these groups that represented such drastically different viewpoints.

## **COVID-19 Precipitates Policy Progress**

In late February 2020, US schools and districts began to realize that the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, was more than an abstract fear and would force them to make real decisions that had significant impact on students and families. Early in the spread of the pandemic in the United States, before states began to mandate school closures, some parents in New York City wanted to keep their children home from school if they were sick or out of precaution to prevent illness. Many of these parents took to Twitter to advocate for a temporary suspension of the use of attendance and punctuality records for schools that used them to screen students. As of fall 2019, 155 middle schools (33% of all New York City middle schools) and 118 high schools (28% of all high schools) considered attendance and/or punctuality as a criterion for admitting students.

In early March, the OSE drafted a two-point policy recommendation memo. First, it proposed removing attendance and punctuality records as criteria for admission for schools for the upcoming admissions cycle (for students beginning middle and high school in September 2021). Second, it proposed eliminating the use of attendance and punctuality in admissions at the DOE entirely in the future. I advocated for using the public awareness about the inclusion of these criteria in screening decisions as a result of COVID-19 to do away with these screens entirely. Not only does their inclusion as admissions criteria create barriers to access that disproportionately affects low-income students, it promotes the unhealthy practice of sending students to school when they are ill. After deliberations with City Hall, the final decision reached was to issue a “moratorium” on using attendance or punctuality for the coming admissions cycle, with no decisions on the future.

## Coming Up with a Community Engagement Plan

In late fall 2019, it became increasingly clear that the political winds were not ripe for changes to enrollment policy. The strategy shifted from getting ready to announce policy changes to planning a community engagement process that would solicit input from the community about the proposals to overhaul the admissions system by the SDAG before making any changes.

Conversations about what this engagement should look like began in earnest in October but continued without clear resolution or mandate through the duration of the residency in April. This required collaborating with colleagues across the agency, colleagues in City Hall, and colleagues in the Fund for Public School to solicit funding. Those with input (representatives from my office, the Community Affairs team, the Press Office, the Communications Office, the OSE, and the mayor's team) often disagreed substantially about key aspects of the plan:

- Whether the engagement series should prioritize breadth and include events in all 32 community districts or prioritize depth and include fewer, more intensive events
- Whether the engagement series should attempt to galvanize public support for the reform endorsed by the SDAG or attempt to capture objective feedback on proposed changes
- Whether the engagement series should be branded an "SDAG Recommendation" series or a series on admissions screens and G&T programming
- Whether the engagement series should include or discard G&T proposals, given the public and media outcry
- Whether the events in the series should be town halls, community meetings, focus groups, or some combination of events
- Whether the public announcement of an engagement series should accompany some policy changes (to signal what we were going to change regardless and what we wanted to hear from the public about) or precede any policy announcements and be used to gauge public support to help determine which policies to pursue

Between November and March, I attended or coordinated eight meetings about this community engagement plan. In February, I advocated for making the strategic decision to split the planning into two different groups: one group on the more controversial G&T engagement, and one group on the admissions screens. Even within those two subcommittees, disagreements about strategy continued. The resulting delays meant that only limited engagement had been accomplished through February, and by the end of my capstone no comprehensive plan existed.

## Evidence

This section considers the degree to which the goals from the strategic project were met. Each original project goal was reframed into a question, and this section is organized by answering each question with the evidence available through the beginning of March 2020. Questions one through three are each analyzed separately, and four and five are analyzed together.

- (1) Has focus been maintained on integration for the 2019–2020 school year as a result of the project?
- (2) Were systems created that led to progress on high-priority recommendations as a result of the project? Was progress made on high-priority recommendations?
- (3) Is there a coordinated integration strategy as a result of the project?
- (4) Was there a clear process that led to thorough policy proposals for short-term and long-term implementation as a result of the project?
- (5) Was there a sound strategy for achieving progress on SDAG 2 policy objectives as a result of this project? Was there a comprehensive community engagement plan that furthered integration policy objectives as a result of the project?

## Maintaining a Focus on Integration

How might one gauge whether an agency has “maintained focus” on a strategic priority for a duration of time? Here, I am using three questions to judge the answer to that question. First, to what degree are senior leaders intimately aware of the priority and its initiatives and how the offices they oversee play a role in them? Second, to what degree have organizational structures and resources changed to support the priority? Finally, to what degree is the priority seen as such by mid-level leaders and employees in the field?

During my residency, I gave two presentations to the Cabinet (all deputy chancellors and the chancellor) on school integration. The first presentation was on September 6, which was a summary of the input given by divisions and executive superintendents on the second set of SDAG recommendations and a summary of the policy recommendation memos that we had commissioned, which served the dual purposes of acquainting the Cabinet with the recommendations and the input their staffs had given as well as giving them an opportunity to give input in advance of deliberations. [Exhibit 11](#) has two sample presentation slides from that meeting. The second presentation, on

February 3, updated the senior leadership on progress on SDAG 1 recommendation implementation, gave trends on successes and shortcomings, and highlighted opportunities for future action. [Exhibit 12](#) has two sample presentation slides from that meeting. These meetings demonstrate that at minimum, senior leadership was well acquainted with both sets of SDAG recommendations. By contrast, there is little evidence that organizational structures or resources changed significantly to support the priority. No new offices were created or new hires made. No new funds were made available to support the effort. Finally, the evidence suggests that the vast majority of DOE employees, particularly those in the field, were largely oblivious to the SDAG efforts and unaware of centrally initiated efforts to promote integration, beyond the chancellor's public statements of his philosophical support for integration. As a case in point, I had to begin many of my meetings with office heads by explaining what the SDAG was, what its recommendations were, and why they should care about them. When I went into the field to meet with teachers and principals, they very rarely had ever heard of the SDAG, nor were they aware of the fact that the DOE had adopted the vast majority of the first set of recommendations.

That said, the evidence suggests that there was broad awareness that things related to “integration” were happening because of its coverage in the media. With the exception of early statements made by the chancellor about tackling integration, the upbeat stories about the success in District 15, and the positive press around the adoption of the first set of recommendations, the vast majority of the coverage was about integration-related controversies and opposition, particularly in relation to the proposed community engagement plan in District 28 and the SDAG's G&T proposals. In this sense, there was attention paid to integration consistently in the public domain throughout the 10 months, but not the proactive, positive attention that occurred as a result of our actions that was implied by this project goal.

Finally, the release of the second set of recommendations also served to deprioritize the first set of recommendations—which were the only ones that actually had been adopted. As an example, in mid-February, I met with the Press Office to prepare for the potential for press inquiries on the

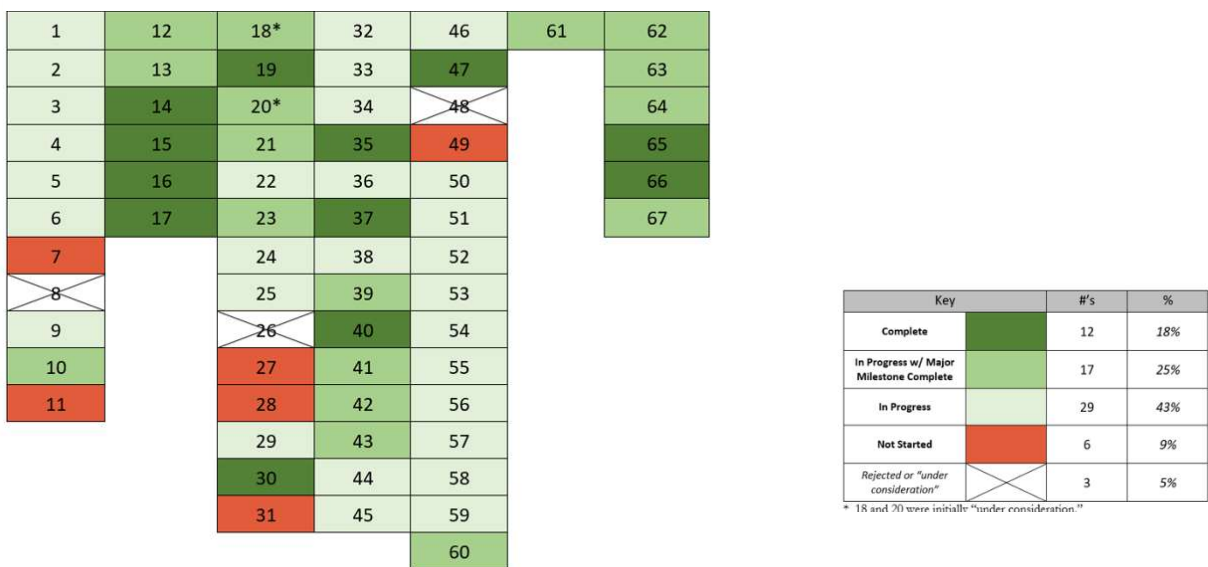
first anniversary of the release of the first set of SDAG recommendations (February 12, 2020). Assuming the focus would be on SDAG 1 progress-to-date, I reviewed with them the status update that I had given the Cabinet as a potential starting point for how we might frame what work was being done. The press secretary made it clear that it was unlikely that any media outlets would be interested in updates from SDAG 1; rather, they would use the opportunity to ask what progress had been made on the second set of recommendations. These recommendations had been released in August and we had not yet publicly responded to them, beyond saying that we would engage in a “public conversation” before taking action. Moreover, the press secretary pointed out that while *we* separated the SDAG recommendations into two categories, most people thought of them as one thing: the second, more controversial set of recommendations. Because of how controversial they were and their potential for dramatic change, when most people referred to the “School Diversity Advisory Group Recommendations,” they likely meant SDAG 2, and that is how the press increasingly referred to them. Even the integration advocates, who had put a lot of time and effort into the first set of recommendations and into making the argument that integration was about more than just the policies that dictate the movement of bodies, showed little interest in hearing about how we were creating and improving the conditions for integration to take root, and were preoccupied by what would happen with the second set of recommendations.

## Creating Systems for the Implementation of the First SDAG Report

There is clear evidence that I put systems in place to monitor and spur progress on the implementation of the SDAG’s first set of integration recommendations. The impact of these systems demonstrates that they helped stimulate progress on simpler, clearer recommendations for which there was perceived to be a mandate, but were less successful in making transformational change on the most difficult recommendations, many of which had the potential for larger impact than the simpler ones. These systems include regular check-ins with the division chiefs of staff, attending chiefs of staff meetings, creating the implementation team ([Exhibit 4](#) shows a sample

meeting agenda), launching working groups ([Exhibit 5](#) shows the working groups that were launched in November), and briefing the Cabinet. There are questions as to whether these practices will continue in my absence. The visual below demonstrates progress on recommendations through January, with the full-sized visual available in [Exhibit 6](#). As seen in Figure 9, the data reveal that by the beginning of February 2020, 18% of recommendations were fully complete, 25% had a major milestone completed, 43% were in progress, and 9% had not yet been started.

**Figure 9**  
*Progress on SDAG 1 Implementation*



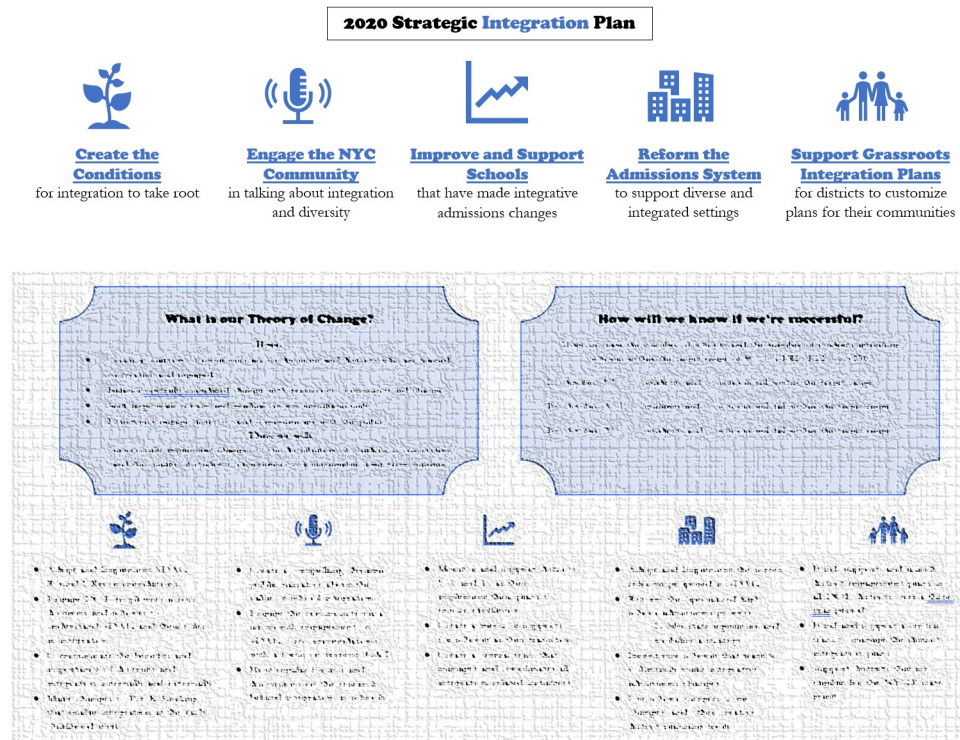
As indicated by the chart data, there is evidence that some high-priority recommendations made progress, including adding metrics to the School Quality Report related to diversity and integration (#10), supporting districts with substantial demographic diversity to develop integration plans (#12), creating a leadership position to focus on student voice (#37), adopting a common definition of culturally relevant education (#39), increasing translation of IEPs (#58), and investing in expanding staff diversity (#63). However, some high-priority recommendations made little progress, such as incentivizing charter schools to commit to integration (#11) and investing in programs to attract a more diverse range of families in certain city schools (#s 27–28). Finally, some recommendations, such as those in the goal-setting category (#s 1–6), only made progress after the February presentation to the Cabinet.



## Building Off Existing Work to Create a Coherent Integration Strategy

As a result of the time spent engaging the various DOE stakeholders involved in integration work, I worked with some colleagues in the OSE and Community Affairs to create a strategic integration plan for the district. The plan includes core principles, a theory of action, and sample metrics. Figure 10 presents a one-page snapshot of the draft plan from January. The response to COVID-19 has prevented opportunities to brief or invest senior leaders in non-COVID-19–related strategy. Therefore, given that it has not been officially reviewed or adopted, the substantive details have been grayed out.

**Figure 10**  
*Strategic Integration Plan (Unadopted Draft)*



## Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy from the Second SDAG Report

As detailed in the description section, the process I laid out led to six policy recommendation memos that had in-depth input from executive superintendents in the field; key offices such as labor, legal, communications, and press; and deputy chancellors. After my Cabinet presentation in September, one deputy chancellor remarked, “I really like how we did this—it has been a really clear process and we’ve all been able to provide our input.” The memos that came out of the process are listed in Figure 11 below. Each memo varied in length from 5 to 18 pages and was replete with details and data to inform an ultimate decision.

**Figure 11**

*Policy Recommendation Memos Commissioned from SDAG 2*

	Memo Topic	SDAG 2 Recommendations Addressed
A	Eliminating Attendance, Punctuality, and Behavior Screens	7, 13
B	Expanding and Resourcing District Diversity Plans	6
C	Reforming Geographic Priorities and Eligibilities	13
D	Maintaining and Expanding Inclusionary Admissions Policies	8, 12, 14
E	Improving Transparency in Admissions	15
F	Creating a Special Education Integration Task Force	20

The evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that despite the work done preparing policy memos, there was not, at any point in the process, a coherent strategy for getting the political buy-in needed to enact them. The most concrete evidence is that just before the COVID-19 pandemic took up all of the agency’s attention, the two subcommittees formed (one for G&T and one for screens) were both still divided on key questions about the nature of community engagement that would give specific policy objectives the greatest chance of success—the same disagreements present in October when these conversations first began in earnest. This demonstrates that the agency is still many months away from launching a serious community engagement plan that could advance any policy objectives from the second set of SDAG recommendations.

Taken collectively, the evidence paints a nuanced picture. On the one hand, it suggests that the actions undertaken in the strategic project helped maintain widespread awareness of the recommendations at a central level, led to a proposal for a coordinated strategy, made progress on certain high-priority recommendations, and yielded clear and robust policy recommendation memos that could lead to more integrated schools. On the other hand, there is little evidence that significant resources were devoted to integration or that structures changed significantly to enable real action on integration. The evidence also demonstrates that some high-priority recommendations from SDAG 1 were not enacted. Finally, in the end, some of the work we failed to make progress on would have directly yielded more integrated schools, such as eliminating screens that would increase diversity in certain schools for the 2020–2021 school year or publishing high school admissions rubrics to lead to more equitable access. In this regard, the project did little to move the needle on student demographics or enrollment patterns in any schools or districts for the coming school year. Figure 12 below summarizes progress toward project goals.

*Figure 12*  
*Summary of Progress on Project Goals*

	Evidence in support of a “yes” answer			
	No evidence	Limited evidence	Some evidence	Substantial evidence
(1) Has focus been maintained on integration for the 2019–2020 school year as a result of the project?			✓	
(2) Were systems created that led to progress on high-priority recommendations as a result of the project? Was progress made on them?			✓	
(3) Is there a coordinated integration strategy as a result of the project?		✓		
(4) Was there a clear process that led to thorough policy proposals for short-term and long-term implementation as a result of the project?				✓
(5) Was there a sound strategy or comprehensive engagement plan that furthered integration policy objectives as a result of the project?	✓			

## Analysis

This section analyzes the underlying causes for the outcomes described in the previous section by delving into contributing factors from within the organization, the external environment, and my own actions and behaviors as a leader over the course of 10 months. If the evidence holistically suggests that the conditions for integration were furthered in certain aspects—with major progress on certain recommendations, a blueprint for a strategic integration plan, a mobilized group of central staffers, and a set of well-thought-out policy proposals—but we do not anticipate that schools will become more integrated as a result of the work of the past 10 months, then this section seeks to answer the question “why was that the outcome?”

This section focuses on several contributing factors for why the 10 months unfolded as they did. Some of these contributing factors are relevant to more than one aspect of the project, thus the section is organized by contributing factors. In it, I consider the organizational structure of the DOE, the adoption of an expansive vision of integration, the lack of a compelling public narrative, the forces of the external environment, the composition and activities of the SDAG, and my own leadership. I then analyze the impact that all these factors had on various aspects of the project.

Perhaps the most pressing question for outside observers has been why sweeping revisions to the DOE’s admissions policies that would lead to greater school integration failed to be enacted within the immediate 6 months following the release of the SDAG’s second set of recommendations. Despite years of mounting anticipation, a general climate of attention and focus on the issue of school segregation, and a promising initial release of recommendations earlier in the summer, the second set of recommendations fell flat and elicited even greater backlash than had been seen previously. Because of the import and interest in this question, as well as its complexity, in the analysis I focus a disproportionately large amount of attention on this issue.

## Organizational Structure, Priorities, and Capacity as Contributing Factors

At a high level, many of the successes and failures of various aspects of the project were heavily shaped by features of the DOE. As previously noted, the DOE is large, hierarchical, and siloed. Like many large bureaucracies, it has multiple competing priorities. In order for a large strategic initiative to be executed in such a large, complex organization, it must be able to transcend one particular division and be recognized as a strategic priority across the agency. Additionally, it must have sufficient organizational capacity for execution, one of the three vertices of Moore's strategic triangle. The following section demonstrates the impact that the DOE's structure, the lack of recognition of integration as a major priority, and the lack of organizational capacity to execute integration-related initiatives had on various aspects of the project.

### Impact on Maintaining a Focus on Integration

The evidence demonstrates that while the senior Cabinet was kept abreast of the major integration-related initiatives, this did not translate to a widespread understanding of integration as a priority throughout the agency. This was due, I found, in large part to the unmanageable number of competing priorities that exist at the DOE and that overburden the internal communication mechanisms intended for the field. The failure of integration to supersede other priorities ultimately means the goal of maintaining a focus on integration over the course of the year fell short. Additionally, the lack of organizational capacity for executing integration-related work contributed to the failure to make and keep integration a focus throughout the agency.

As the largest school system in the country serving 1.1 million students and employing 135,000 full-time workers, priorities for the agency are set on many different levels (NYC DOE, 2020). The mayor has high-level priorities he promised during his campaigns. The chancellor has his own priorities, and all division and office heads have their own priorities for the teams they lead. Additionally, the media and the public's attention also drive priorities. Each workday at the DOE, the Office of Communications sends out a daily press clippings email, which is a compendium of all

news stories from the previous day that pertain to the DOE. On a typical day, these emails will include links to between 10 and 20 news articles. Countless issues require attention. Given all the demands on the overall organization's attention, the threshold for what is a true, long-lasting, and cross-cutting agency priority must meet a high bar. The implementation literature explored in the first section specifically described an unmanageable number of priorities as a hallmark of government agencies, and a key obstacle to successful implementation.

One example of an initiative that was treated as a major organizational priority throughout the entire agency was the de Blasio administration's focus on ensuring universal pre-K. Pre-K was set out as a priority from the beginning (the campaign trail) and was broadly understood throughout the agency and by the public. The DOE invested significant resources and organizational restructuring to ensure its success. By contrast, despite the upbeat press conference from June 10, 2019, the generally positive press coverage that week, and the chancellor's genuine desire to see progress on integration, the implementation of the first set of the SDAG's recommendations did not rise to the very high bar required for an issue to be an agencywide sustained priority over other initiatives and tasks. Why did it fail to meet this bar? One reason is that the breadth and complexity of the integration recommendations themselves do not lend themselves to being easily understood either within the agency or by the general public. The mission for pre-K was clear; the mission for integration as not. Second, especially after the initial defeat on reforming specialized high schools in 2017 (which will be discussed in greater detail below), the mayor did not consider school integration to be a legacy initiative—in contrast to universal pre-K, one of his crowning achievements—and thus it did not receive that same level of support from City Hall.<sup>29</sup> Finally, and relatedly, major initiatives require resources for execution. The lack of additional resources devoted to integration limited the organizational capacity to execute on it, and in turn, limited its recognition as a major focus for employees throughout the agency.

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<sup>29</sup> The implementation literature in the RKA from Lindquist and Wanna (2015) highlights the importance of political support to implementation success.

## **Impact on Implementation of Recommendations from the First SDAG Report**

The evidence points out the characteristics of the recommendations that had the lowest success rate of implementation during the first 8 months of the project. They tended to be broadly cross-divisional, vague, or open to interpretation, while those that succeeded were more narrowly focused in one to two offices, were simple, or overlapped with existing priorities. I argue that specific features of the DOE led to this outcome: hierarchy stifled creativity and discretion by mid-level managers, and siloed divisions stifled collaboration. A lack of organizational capacity for integration amplified these structural shortcomings.

The DOE's central structure is hierarchical and rigid, with clear reporting structures that go from any one of the 135,000 employees straight to the chancellor. This feature was buttressed by the Bloomberg-initiated mayoral control over schools, which centralized power at Tweed Courthouse (the contemporary headquarters of the DOE). The natural tendency of the organization is to operate within the office/division paradigm, with few examples of substantive projects that work across multiple divisions for sustained periods. This explains why the first action of the administration upon receiving the first SDAG recommendations in February 2019 was to divide them up into lead offices and send them out to those offices for feedback on whether they should be accepted. Splitting tasks into various offices and holding those offices accountable for the outcome is the norm. Working across offices on complex issues is not. In fact, for employees the incentive is to shy away from such projects so as to avoid any blame should an effort not succeed.

A subset of recommendations also required discretion, creativity, and judgment in order to implement because the original recommendation either was vaguely written or theoretically could be taken in a number of different directions. Of hierarchical structures, Elmore writes, "the tighter the structure of hierarchical relationships, the greater the number of checks and decision points required to assure compliance, the more opportunities for diversion and delay, the greater the reliance of subordinates on superiors for guidance, and the lower the reliance on individual judgment and problem-solving ability" (1980, p. 608). Bloomberg's administration compensated for this tendency

by allowing for great autonomy at the school level, which, for the most part, continued into the de Blasio years to the present. However, promoting innovation at the school level does not help promote innovation within the central organization. Thus, even for recommendations that arguably could be addressed within one or two offices but had wide latitude for implementation, employees felt stuck without specific directives from above. In most cases, senior leaders had too many competing priorities to weigh in directly. This is demonstrated by the anecdote shared in the project description section about how the group tasked with establishing agency goals for integration hit an early impasse.

Throughout the implementation process, I made several strategic changes in order to attempt to overcome the structural obstacles, to varying degrees of success. As mentioned in the Evidence section, the creation of the cross-functional implementation team was designed to address the problem of operating within the siloed world of the central office. Nonetheless, these meetings alone were not enough to promote the intentional cross-divisional collaboration required for the right players to come to the table to solve for difficult issues. From this team, we established five working groups in areas where we thought significant progress was possible; still, we ran into the issues of having enough dedicated time for people to work together, and a lack of confidence in acting as the deciders when faced with gray areas. Finally, I arranged for the February Cabinet presentation described in the Evidence section, which ultimately set the stage for direction on key implementation issues and the mandate for a new cross-functional structure and more resources.

## Expansive Vision of Integration as a Contributing Factor

The DOE adopted a broad framework for understanding school integration by endorsing the 5 Rs framework from IntegrateNYC. Considering such far-reaching elements as the demographic representativeness of teachers, the nature of the curriculum, and the disciplinary interventions employed as part of the conversation on school integration had several important implications, positive and negative, for the strategic project.



## Impact on Maintaining a Focus on Integration

The evidence on whether this project was able to maintain an organizational focus on integration showed that over the 10-month period, there were a lack of structural changes and resource allocations that would be typical for a major organizational priority, as well as a widespread lack of awareness of integration initiatives among mid-level and field-based employees. This section argues that because the paradigm used for integration was so expansive, it caused confusion about what exactly the DOE's integration initiative actually was, and often overlapped with other existing agency priorities such that it failed to distinguish itself from them, preventing appropriate treatment as a major strategic initiative.

The DOE's framework for integration encompasses the 5 Rs (see [Exhibit 1](#) for complete definition). This structure incorporates the question of how students are enrolled and enrollment's impact on student body makeup, and also addresses the distribution of resources among schools, the health of relationships among different types of people within schools, the disciplinary procedures in schools, and the demographic representation of staff. For many people, the latter four categories are not integration, particularly the emphasis on ensuring equitable resources for both high-poverty and low-poverty schools. In the days after the DOE adopted the first set of SDAG recommendations, for example, *New York Times Magazine* columnist Nikole Hannah-Jones commented on Twitter, "Most of the 62 recommendations have nothing to do with integration . . . if bodies are not moving around, it's not integration. Guilding [sic] segregated schools is the same neo-Plessyism that we've been doing" (Hannah-Jones Twitter Feed, 2019). Many folks inside and outside the DOE, who thought of integration as changing the demographic makeup of schools, echoed her sentiment—even though the first SDAG report, for the most part, did not address this issue. I hypothesize that some practitioners were confused about these "integration initiatives" that did not impact student enrollment, many did not understand the value in creating the conditions necessary for integration, and still others simply saw the SDAG 1 initiatives as more of the same centrally initiated projects that were unlikely to have a major impact on schools or classrooms. Centrally, there was also confusion,

as many recommendations called for similar things that ongoing major strategic initiatives were already doing. For example, recommendation 31 calls for the DOE to “Invest in growing and strengthening high-performing schools in communities with historic underinvestment.” This aim matches that of the “Bronx Plan” DOE initiative—despite its name, it is not focused only in the Bronx—which pays more for teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools and provides money for resources and building upgrades in schools that historically have not received sufficient investments.

Finally, when the second set of recommendations (which actually dealt with student enrollment issues) was released, their effect was to diminish the relevance of the first set of recommendations. As is detailed in the Evidence section, even advocates became less interested in the first set of recommendations, and “SDAG” essentially became synonymous with the second set of recommendations because the second set aligned more with common conceptions of integration. In the end, because the DOE’s adopted framework for integration was so broad, it resulted in a lack of understanding as to why certain issues being referred to as integration, particularly insofar as they overlapped with existing agency priorities, which resulted in fewer resources being devoted to integration centrally and less understanding and dedication to the effort by those in the field.

### **Impact on Creating a Coordinated Integration Strategy**

Although the expansive view of integration may have hampered efforts to appropriately prioritize the initiatives from the first set of recommendations, it helped bring together efforts that were happening across the agency. With a broad definition, it became much easier to explain internally how various initiatives fit together and served to make the school experience better for all students. Using the 5 Rs framework galvanized a broad coalition of people across the agency who saw a place for themselves and their work in helping to integrate New York City’s public schools. It laid the vital groundwork that many unsuccessful desegregation efforts, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, had failed to do, such as ensuring that equitable practices happen within newly diversified schools and that representation and culturally relevant curricular choices receive due attention.

## Lack of Public Narrative as a Contributing Factor

Although Chancellor Carranza’s initial public comments about segregation in New York City were promising, even inspiring, the DOE never evolved its language to the level of a strategic public narrative that could bring others along. Calling out segregation in the system as one of the findings from his initial listening tour was a shrewd move, as many advocates around the city and internal employees who had been hoping for bold words from their educational leader were given a signal that there would be action in this administration. However, from there, it was unclear where the agency was headed with regard to addressing segregation. What were the end goals? Why was it a worthy endeavor? What did it have to do with student achievement? The lack of a compelling public narrative hampered the progress of integration efforts at DOE over the 2019–2020 school year, particularly when it came to pushing for specific policies from the second set of SDAG proposals.

### Impact on Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy for the Second SDAG Report

Powerful messages about key priorities are not valuable merely for passing policies or responding to naysayers; compelling narratives are proactive and help set the stage for changes to come. Effective ones even serve to assuage people’s fears about potential change. Perhaps most critically, they clear a path for internal actors to create a strategy that is aligned to the vision set forth by the narrative. The evidence suggests that the DOE lacked a strategy for moving key policy objectives forward in relation to student placement. I argue that the lack of a cogent narrative played a key role in a murky strategy and stifled overall progress on integration.

A solid example of a compelling narrative that set the stage for transformative change at the DOE was the campaign for universal pre-K. The narrative for expanding pre-K to be universal in New York City framed it as a positive move with clear links to the core business of schools: academic achievement. There was compelling branding: “Pre-K for All,” a simple and clear statement that explained the mission of the entire effort in three words. The language used to describe the work was inspirational, with a set of phrases used regularly and echoed by the mayor, then-Chancellor Fariña,

and all involved in the initiative. “A new foundation for our city,” “the cornerstone of the plan to transform education in New York City,” “building the future,” “an unprecedented effort,” and “creating quality early learning” were some of the omnipresent talking points used in the build-up to and execution of the universal Pre-K effort in New York City (NYC Office of the Mayor, 2014). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there was a clear line connecting the expansion of pre-K to improved student outcomes. Leaders regularly cited the research demonstrating that high-quality pre-K was one of the most (if not the single most) effective educational interventions for students. The message was so effective that the DOE’s decision to add an entire grade level to its school system, with its significant financial costs, faced relatively little political opposition. Overall, the effort was an unquestioned success, ultimately leading to the enrollment of 73,000 eligible 4-year-olds in New York City’s pre-K program, and almost universally earning top mention as de Blasio’s crowning achievement of his two terms in office.

One must acknowledge that pre-K expansion and integration are not directly comparable. Almost universally expanding access to pre-K is more politically palatable than integrating schools. Nonetheless, the core tenets of clarity of goals, clear and inspiring messaging, and a connection to the core business of schools are transferrable. Moreover, pre-K expansion comes with a giant price tag that integration does not, and polls indicate that broad majorities of Americans support school integration (see Torres and Weissbourd (2020) and footnote 40).

Given that the DOE demonstrated its ability to craft a compelling message to drive an agenda, what was it that prevented it in the case of integration? First, because the SDAG was tasked with providing recommendations to the DOE, it never truly felt like the DOE owned the initiative until the SDAG handed it over. However, by the time SDAG released it, the media had already created its own narrative. Second, the administration had been burned by the bungled roll-out of the Specialized High School proposal one year earlier (explained in greater detail below). This bad experience made some leaders wary of leading from the front on the issue of integration.

How could a compelling integration narrative have enhanced chances for success? District 15 had success by combining a near-universal dislike of the intensity of the admissions process for 10-year-olds with an inspiring vision of the district's diversity being reflected in its classrooms. Moreover, the working group set a clear target for its middle schools: for all its schools to serve between 40% and 75% FRL, MLL, and STH students. The DOE could have built off a goal it set in 2017, targeting the number of students attending racially representative schools, and in doing so creating an idea that a lay audience could comprehend easily (as it was in the case of the 73,000 pre-K seats). Additionally, we could have poll-tested or examined in focus groups any number of talking points to use to frame the debate: integration as a moral imperative, integration as a bet on a global and diverse future, integration as a means to social cohesion, or integration as the fulfillment of the pride New Yorkers have in being the most diverse city in the world, to name a few. Finally, an unambiguous body of research demonstrates the positive effects of school integration on student achievement, particularly for low-income students (highlighted in the RKA section above). This package of strategic talking points could have been used to set the terms of the debate far in advance of the SDAG's release and to illuminate an attractive path for others.

## **SDAG Composition and Decision-Making as a Contributing Factor**

The SDAG's composition and final deliberations played a critical role in shaping how the recommendations were received in the public and subsequently dealt with by the DOE. In particular, key choices that were made, especially near the end of their 2-year commitment, were crucial to how the story unfolded in the public and dealt the DOE a difficult hand of cards.

## **Impact on Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy for the Second SDAG Report**

Two key features of the SDAG contributed more than any others to the decisions made by the group, and ultimately to how the second report was received publicly: the composition of the group and the desire of its members to wrap up a lengthy process that was already overdue.

To the credit of the advisory group, they appear to have thought about strategy, regardless of the outcome. They coordinated with a high-level journalist and gave her advance information in hopes that she would cover the issue favorably. However, there is no evidence that they had a plan to mitigate the natural tendency of news organizations to craft attention-grabbing headlines, nor that they had authored a media-savvy report that would minimize focus on its most controversial aspects.

The group composition had several important effects. First, as people who had all had significant previous exposure to the topic, and who spent countless meetings, retreats, and public meetings talking about it—the SDAG took 2 years to issue their reports—they were highly susceptible to thinking in esoteric ways that did not translate to ordinary people. Second, given that there were no anti-integration group members (an understandable scenario, given their mission), they were not able to fully anticipate how skeptical members of the public or press might receive the recommendations. Finally, with no members that had expertise in media relations (at least explicitly as their current job), the group was limited in its ability to professionally prepare for high levels of media scrutiny. In particular, it would not have given the exclusive scoop to the *New York Times* had its members anticipated the resulting headline.

By late summer of 2019, the group had been working on the issue for 2 years and was behind on its deadline to produce the anticipated second report. Throughout deliberations, the group's ideas on integration ranged from more moderate to more radical. It is unclear whether some of the ideas the media seized on, such as the elimination of G&T programming, were included to appease members of the group who could not get traction on more radical ideas, or whether they truly represented the consensus.

## The Media, the Public, and Elected Officials as Contributing Factors

As described in the RKA, historically, the media, the public, and elected officials have seized on particular narratives to stifle integration. In the case of the effort to advance pro-integration

policies in New York City in 2019, the reception of the SDAG 2 recommendations in the media, by the public, and by elected officials played a key role in stymying the chance for real change.

### **Impact on Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy for the Second SDAG Report**

The project description section clearly depicts how the release of the report unfolded in the media. But why did it unfold that way? And what was the interplay between the media, the public, and elected officials? The focal point of the media’s coverage, and a key element to understanding the dynamic interplay that doomed the second set of recommendations from the start, was the slice of the recommendations that pertained to G&T education, a lightning-rod issue in New York City. G&T is a potent issue for two reasons: first, it is a key sorting mechanism used by certain New Yorkers, typically middle- and upper-class citizens, to guarantee placement in certain elementary schools; and second, it is widely misunderstood among the lay public.

An analysis of the report’s recommendations shows that only a small proportion of the recommendations dealt with G&T. Of the report’s 28 recommendations, only 4 pertained to G&T (1–3 and 9), while the rest addressed admissions, academic diversity, special education, and district boundaries. ([Exhibit 8](#) lists all of the recommendations from the second SDAG report.) The G&T recommendations were couched in a strong historical context for the program and how it perpetuates inequities in the system—a well-reasoned context that led the SDAG’s highly capable and intelligent members to conclude that the best course forward was to replace New York City’s “gifted” programming with alternate models, but also the type of nuance and detail that does not translate to today’s fast-paced, often clickbait-oriented media culture.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The advisory group recommended that the DOE begin by piloting alternatives to G&T that would provide enrichment in elementary schools in a research-based, equitable manner. Next, it urged the elimination of testing 4-year old children as a means to identifying “gifted” students in the system. In the context, they offered that a 4-year old’s ability to pass a test was more likely an indicator of their parent’s financial means than the child’s “giftedness.” Finally, they recommended the phasing-out of G&T programs and the resourcing of districts to scale up schoolwide enrichment models that could benefit all students.

For some upper-class New Yorkers, G&T has been a key tool used as a sorting mechanism to effectively guarantee that their children will attend a school with other students from a similar social class.<sup>31</sup> Such outcomes lead to disproportionate racial demographics and the uneven geographic distribution of G&T school locations.<sup>32</sup> It is an extension of the mechanisms used in later grades to guarantee admission to certain schools. In New York City, there is a system of priorities, screens, and informal mechanisms (e.g., rankings, waiting lists) employed to ensure that parents with connections can send their children to “acceptable”—that is, often (but not always) segregated—schools. Attempts to expose or change the power that this class of New Yorkers have on the system run into strong opposition or strategic taciturnity, in part because many of these communities have direct access to politicians, and in part because many politicians benefit from the system themselves.

G&T is also subject to many misperceptions in the public, and attempts to reform it or eliminate it are broadly unpopular. Most people assume the test (administered to 4-year-olds) is an objective measure of giftedness, when in reality it mostly reflects family socioeconomic status, giving an advantage to children who grow up in upper-class homes, by virtue of exposure or access to test preparation. Moreover, most lay people are unaware that “giftedness” is a social construction; rather, they assume that there is an objective, universally accepted definition of what it means to be a gifted child.<sup>33</sup> This misperception leads the average New Yorker to support gifted programs as they are and plays into the media narratives that would form about the SDAG’s recommendations.

In the echo chamber of the New York media and the city’s elite influencers, the word quickly got around: these SDAG recommendations were a step too far. This reaction was not lost on

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<sup>31</sup> In New York City, there are two examinations (one written, one oral) that are given to 4-year-olds. A child’s score on these two examinations is combined, then normed, and then scaled to 100. Students who score above a 90 are eligible for G&T programs. A lucrative “test-prep” industry has built up around preparing 4-year-olds for the Pearson-created examinations that are used to determine G&T eligibility in New York City. This gives students of parents with means and who pay for preparation services an advantage over students who cannot or do not pay for “test prep.”

<sup>32</sup> Although 17% of DOE public students are White, 42% of kindergarten G&T students are White. Similarly, 23% of DOE public students are Black, but only 8% of kindergarten G&T students are Black. Also, 46% of G&T programs are located in one borough, Manhattan (School Diversity Advisory Group, 2019a).

<sup>33</sup> There is no universally accepted assessment for testing giftedness, as there cannot be one assessment to test many different constructs.



Mayor de Blasio, who was not eager to engage in the controversy on the heels of his announcement of a 2020 presidential run. Other elected officials, inundated with calls and messages by G&T parents, made public statements against the G&T recommendations. In the absence of a coherent counternarrative, the media narrative won the day and effectively paralyzed the political establishment that may have initially been sympathetic to reform.

In the ultimate irony, one of the SDAG recommendations—which called for the elimination of attendance and punctuality as factors in admissions screens because of their disproportionate impact on low-income students and students of color—had been quickly discarded by many well-connected New Yorkers but would be in high demand among those same people barely a few months later. As the new coronavirus pandemic reached New York City, a chorus of mostly middle- and upper-class New Yorkers began to demand that elected officials pressure the DOE to suspend the use of student attendance and punctuality by screened (selective) public middle and high schools for the subsequent admissions cycle for rising sixth- and ninth-graders. It happened within a matter of days. On March 4, the day after the change was made official, the official Twitter feed of the student activist group Teens Take Charge posted the following: “This confirms what we already know, that the DOE can change attendance screens. Now that all students are being hurt by them, not just low-income students, it’s not a coincidence we see change being made” (Teens Take Charge, Twitter, March 4, 2020).

## Misaligned Perceptions of What Is Possible as Contributing Factors

Despite months of lead-up time to the release of the second report, a preview into what that report would contain, and a robust history that foreshadowed reactions from the media and the public, we still failed to produce a compelling narrative or strategy in advance of the release. Even once the backlash was evident, we failed to counter with a compelling message. And then, after it was apparent that there was no momentum for policy change, disagreements about strategy prevented progress. I argue that these disagreements stemmed from fundamental disagreements about two

things: belief in the DOE’s ability to execute sound public engagement and beliefs about the public’s receptivity to changes that would lead to more integration in the system.

### **Impact on Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy for the Second SDAG Report**

Disagreements about the DOE’s capacity for execution on engagement and the feasibility of engagement on integration manifested in circular debates about strategy. These disagreements led some to argue that engagement had to precede policy changes. Yet others argued that engagement was futile, and that the DOE should simply move ahead with policy changes. As demonstrated in the evidence section, these disagreements led to stalled progress, with no breakthrough in sight.

Several key DOE and City Hall leaders believed that the DOE was not capable of executing an effective public campaign designed to win over the public on a policy issue. This sentiment stemmed mainly from problems with the 2018 rollout of the proposal to reform admissions to New York City’s Specialized High Schools.<sup>34</sup> Admissions to these eight schools is based on student performance on one test, the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), taken in a student’s eighth- or ninth-grade year (NYCDOE, 2020).<sup>35</sup> It results in student bodies that are highly unrepresentative of the DOE’s overall student body, with relative underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students and relative overrepresentation of White and Asian students (Shapiro, 2019b). On June 3, 2018, the mayor and chancellor announced a proposal to dramatically change the way students are admitted to the city’s Specialized High Schools that would dramatically increase the diversity of the admitted students (NYC Mayor’s Office, 2018). The announcement was made with little to no prior outreach and faced swift opposition, in particular from members of the Asian

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<sup>34</sup> There are eight Specialized High Schools in New York City: Bronx High School of Science; Brooklyn Latin School; Brooklyn Technical High School; High School for Math, Science and Engineering at City College; High School for American Studies at Lehman College; Queens High School for Sciences at York College; Staten Island Technical High School; and Stuyvesant High School.

<sup>35</sup> The admissions process for three of the eight high schools is dictated by state law (known as Hecht-Calandra) from the 1970s. The other five schools’ admissions processes are controlled by the city, but the chancellor has stated a desire to set a uniform process for all Specialized High Schools.

American community. Needing to make up for whatever engagement failed to happen prior to the announcement, the DOE sent staffers to present at all 32 of the city's Community Education Councils. At these meetings, staffers were mostly met with fierce opposition. Instead of gaining traction, the proposal earned an organized, vocal opposition that ultimately spent more than \$1 million to ensure its demise in the state legislature (Touré and Gronewald, 2019).

The SHSAT experience had several lasting effects. First, some City Hall staffers believed that the proposal had failed because of the DOE's shortcomings in engaging the community, causing them to doubt the DOE's ability to perform successful community engagement on future politically sensitive topics. Others were traumatized by the experience and simply did not want to have it happen again. A DOE staffer who facilitated the majority of the Community Education Council meetings on the SHSAT proposal and was on the receiving end of much of the vitriol told me, "No one would want to repeat that experience. It was awful!" At the same time, several DOE leaders felt that it was unfair to think that the SHSAT failure meant that the DOE could not plan and execute a successful engagement on new issues brought up in SDAG. They countered by proposing ideas for a well-thought-out strategy that was far more detailed and comprehensive than the preparation for the SHSAT engagement.

An additional factor was the wide disagreement about the feasibility of winning a public conversation about such controversial topics as G&T and screen reform, regardless of capacity. Some leaders felt that public forums on these topics were a losing proposition, and that engagement should take the form of cultivating key allies for an inevitable fight, if and when the DOE is able to move forward with policy changes. Other leaders argued that if planned appropriately, certain strategic topics could and should be presented to the public for input. These debates also contributed to the holding pattern on making substantive progress on reform. Finally, there were some leaders who appeared to be satisfied with the lack of strategy or progress. Even if they might not admit it out loud, they already seemed to have concluded that the entire endeavor was futile.

In the end, if the hope for quick policy wins was dashed by the media's coverage of the second SDAG report, then the hope for immediate-term policy wins fell apart because of internal disagreements about capacity and possibility.

## My Leadership as a Contributing Factor

In what ways did my own behavior, expectations, and relationships contribute to the outcomes of the various facets of this project? This next section seeks to answer that question as dispassionately and objectively as a central figure in a narrative can.

### Impact on Maintaining a Focus on Integration

Throughout my DOE residency, I demonstrated an ability to bring issues that were important to my area of focus to the senior leadership. This was particularly helpful to the cause of maintaining agency focus on integration by keeping senior leadership connected with the work. Having demonstrated an ability to handle challenging tasks, both related and unrelated to integration, and having built strong relationships with senior leaders in the organization, I was able to secure significant time with senior leaders, in formal and informal settings. (In addition to Cabinet meetings, by the end of my 10-month residency I had had at least one personal, one-on-one meeting with every single Cabinet member.) Whether it was facilitating topics in senior Cabinet meetings, being tapped to facilitate the agency's EduStat session (involving the 60 most senior leaders at DOE), creating and leading trainings for entire offices (ODP), facilitating negotiations on school mergers, training and coaching principals (District 15), briefing and staffing the chancellor, or any other number of opportunities, I showed that I was capable of independent action and initiative, and thus was entrusted with more responsibility. Of course, my surroundings and support contributed to my success in this arena—access to sources of formal and informal authority, such as my hugely advantageous residency placement in the Chancellor's Office and the trust and advocacy of my

manager, the chief of staff, as well as the leadership and wisdom of the chancellor, all provided space and opportunity for me to lead.

As I worked on my strategic project, I often tended to devote my energies into getting traction at the central and senior leader level, rather than concentrating on reaching a broad audience in the field. This was intentional on my part, as I felt that given my short tenure and my access to senior leaders, there was more impact to be had by leveraging my connections with them and their expertise. I prioritized engagements strategically and built strong relationships with a few people who gave me great insights. As a result, my overall strategy gave me a much stronger awareness of senior-level integration work but relatively thin field penetration, as noted in the Evidence section.

### **Impact on Implementation of Recommendations from the First SDAG Report**

I had key early successes in creating the systems that led to progress on recommendations from the first report. Despite the DOE's size and complexity, I was able to quickly learn, map, and navigate the centers of influence and power relative to work I needed to accomplish. Additionally, I was able to get to know and gain the trust of many senior and mid-level DOE leaders on relatively short order, and work with them to move important work forward, whether it was related to integration or not. This enabled me to build relationships quickly. By early August, the end of my second month, I had met with the chief of staff for every DOE division and already held and facilitated numerous cross-divisional meetings of at least 20 people. As a result, most of these connections yielded engaged people ready to tackle the SDAG's first set of recommendations.

Much of the work that I was attempting to coordinate needed to be done outside of my office and with people over whom I had no formal authority. As a result, I relied on skills of influence and persuasion, which only got me so far. When it came down to requiring more of people's time and the authority to make decisions on key questions, I was severely limited. This in turn limited some progress on recommendation implementation, with key recommendations going untouched or making very slow progress. In retrospect, a key shortcoming of my work at DOE was

failing to be more skillful about getting more out of people over whom I had no formal authority. The presentation to Cabinet in early February demonstrated that buy-in from leadership could help overcome these obstacles, but it came relatively late in my 10-month term.

### **Impact on Creating a Coordinated Integration Strategy**

Before I even officially started at the DOE, I began cultivating key relationships with integration allies. Over time, I built an extremely close relationship with staffers in the Office of Enrollment and Community Affairs, and we were able to regularly coordinate strategy together and maximize the impact we were individually having in our own offices. Moreover, we modeled the type of cross-divisional relationships we were attempting to foster as we built the case for a unified integration strategy. Both individually, and with my colleagues, we regularly got in front of audiences and drew them into the integration work by offering a compelling and expansive vision for integration at the DOE. Through repeated experiences, I demonstrated the ability to be a spokesperson for the DOE's integration efforts. Throughout my residency, leaders and employees from across the agency called on me for advice, assistance, or support on varied integration-related events such as leading trainings, facilitating school-based conversations, coordinating work across divisions, and speaking on panels. This strategic cultivation of relationships and broad agencywide exposure gave me a solid foundation for drafting a comprehensive strategic plan for integration.

### **Impact on Creating Policy and Aligning on a Strategy for the Second SDAG Report**

Of all the goals I established with my supervisor at the beginning of the residency, by far the most nebulous in my mind was that of supporting the planning and execution of a community engagement process in the wake of the release of the second set of the SDAG recommendations. My supervisor even noted that we would not necessarily know exactly what this would entail until we knew what direction we were taking the SDAG recommendations; nonetheless, she wanted to me to start brainstorming and planning far in advance of the release, so that we would be ready. I had many

questions. During their deliberations, the SDAG had conducted town halls in every borough; was this not sufficient community engagement? What were we still hoping to learn that would require community engagement, and who exactly would we engage? Were we hoping to change minds during this engagement or get feedback for our own implementation?

In reality, despite all the work I had put into reading about the work happening in New York, building relationships, and making trips before my arrival, I lacked a great deal of context. For example, I had not been around for the universally maligned SHSAT rollout or subsequent engagement. I did not know what the policy processes between the DOE and City Hall looked like. I had little exposure to the intensity of the New York media scrutiny. All of these crucial pieces of context and many others, prevented me from truly understanding what it would mean to develop a strategy and community engagement plan for advancing controversial policy objectives, particularly since the SDAG 2 release happened so early in my tenure (my third month). This significantly hampered my ability to contribute to a winning strategy.

Even though I was missing certain aspects of relevant context, at times my instincts still flagged certain issues that later proved consequential. As a new leader lacking context in a complex system, I deferred to others, or held back in meetings so as to avoid sounding ignorant or arrogant. For instance, during the SDAG deliberations I was concerned that some of the recommendations would not be well received in the mainstream, particularly around G&T. (Of course, I cannot say I predicted or even considered how much the G&T controversy would overshadow everything else.) Who was I to speak up, I thought? Not only was I not an official SDAG member—the group had been meeting for a year and a half prior to my arrival at DOE—I was a new member of the DOE itself, and could not compete (as I felt) with the more experienced people at the table. My early reticence and deference thus played a role in the lack of positive narrative or clear strategy for advancing these crucial policy objectives.

Finally, in looking carefully my own biases, I have a tendency to rely too heavily on what I presume to be rational action on the part of others that limits my ability to accurately forecast future

realities based on conditions at the time. As a result I did not imagine a reality in which one particular issue—the SDAG recommendations made about eliminating attendance screens that penalized even elementary school students applying to middle school—might not even be addressed because it was overshadowed by another issue, in this case the fate of G&T programming. All in all, the totality of these issues prevented me from being as effective in moving our policy agenda forward as I could have been.



## Implications

Sixty-six years after *Brown v. Board*, school integration may be entering a new phase of consciousness in the American psyche. A few phenomena drive this trend. First, the parents of the busing era (people who were parents of children who were subject to busing) are giving way to the children (and grandchildren) of the busing era as the primary decisionmakers in local communities and states. This generation is not as traumatized by the events of the 1970s and instead wants to find better ways of integrating schools than what they experienced.<sup>36</sup> Another simultaneous trend is that school districts across the country are grappling with rapid demographic shifts and gentrification. White families are repopulating and, in many cases, displacing people from urban cores, while more and more families of color are settling in suburbs. And finally, there is a new racial literacy and consciousness in the field of education and society at large, whereby people pay attention to the impact of race on student outcomes and “disproportionality” and “equity” are common expressions. All these factors have combined to put school integration (back) on the map.<sup>37</sup>

The following sections describe the implications of the strategic project for both the New York City Department of Education and the field of education at large, especially in light of the salience of the issue of school integration to American society in the future.

## Implications for Site

The New York City DOE is truly a special institution—at once reflective of all the issues facing school districts across the country, and completely and utterly unique, given its massive size and deep-rooted institutional idiosyncrasies. The work of the past 10 months, grappling with one of

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<sup>36</sup> This was exemplified by the flurry of attention paid to the topic of integration and busing in the fall of 2019 when former Vice President Joe Biden (who was a parent in the 1970s) and Senator Kamala Harris (who was a student in the 1970s) tangled over the issue in a Democratic debate. Biden was criticized for his past opposition to busing, while Harris credited it with her own success.

<sup>37</sup> Almost every Democratic candidate for president in 2020 had school integration as part of their campaign platform.

the most sensitive issues in education, has revealed both the challenges and opportunities that exist in the system and for the hard-working people who propel it. The following section contains a concise set of implications for the site that I think will help move the work forward.

### **Develop an Effective Public Narrative about School Integration**

The findings from this capstone demonstrate the evident need for a persuasive public narrative about school integration in New York City. This is the first and most important step for the DOE to take. It must include a clear and compelling message that lays out why integration is important, how the DOE plan to integrate schools, and how accomplishing integration will further the core aims of the school system at large, especially academic excellence, for all students. It will have to contend with the fact that a counternarrative has been propagated for months, and thus will need to attend to the fears generated by this counternarrative (e.g., watered-down standards, preferential treatment, discrimination against Asian Americans). The benefits of a compelling public narrative are that it makes an aligned strategy possible and provides clarity for internal and external actors. The narrative around DOE's "Pre-K for All" initiative offers an excellent model. Recent polls indicating broad majorities in favor of school integration are also good resources (see Torres and Weissbourd, 2020).

### **Create a Formalized Structure for Cross-Divisional Initiatives**

The results of the implementation of the first set of recommendations demonstrated that complex initiatives that require the collaboration of multiple offices are hard to get off the ground in the DOE. There are no natural mechanisms at the central level to enable nimble, organized cross-functional work. School integration is not unique in terms of the type of coordination required across divisions. The Chancellor's Office can serve that function for a few core initiatives, but it does not have the capacity to manage all cross-functional projects. The DOE requires a new structure (i.e., a new office or ad hoc team of senior leaders) that has the capacity to call up short- and long-term

cross-functional teams, manage and coordinate their activities, and liaise directly with Cabinet members to update them and to get the necessary buy-in—not just on integration but on any number of initiatives. Rather than hiring new people, this team, a version of which existed in the Fariña administration, can be drawn from the existing divisions. This group would act as the project managers of cross-functional (“interdisciplinary”) teams composed of unique sets of people from various divisions based on the specific issue.

### **Give Due Attention to the Final Phase of State Integration Grants**

The findings demonstrate that district-based, community-led integration efforts have significant promise (see District 15), especially in the wake of stalled citywide efforts. Moreover, the evidence demonstrates a need for specific resources to be dedicated to integration. The state is awarding \$20 million to 4 to 6 of the 19 eligible New York State school districts, 13 of which are New York City school districts. A single award of \$2–\$3 million for any one of New York City’s 13 eligible districts would have a tremendous impact on integration, but the winning districts need to be prepared for the attention they will receive in advance of this summer’s decisions by the state being made public. There needs to be central planning and coordination to maximize the chances of success for the winning districts.

### **Align on a Strategy for SDAG 2**

DOE and City Hall leaders have spent the past 7 months going back and forth about the strategy for screens and G&T reform. Yet despite the promise of a “public conversation” by the mayor and chancellor over the course of this school year, there still is no firm plan for either. Recently, a politically prudent strategic move was made to separate G&T from screens. These subcommittees need to be held accountable for developing and executing a plan on short order; moreover, city leaders need to indicate that it is a priority in order to get real momentum going.

## **Capitalize on COVID-19's Impact on Screens**

In light of the new coronavirus pandemic that became pervasive in the United States in mid-March 2020, the State of New York canceled all state testing for third- through eighth-graders for the end of the school year. This will impact hundreds of DOE-screened schools that use state assessments in their admissions rubric. The lack of state assessments for this year presents a unique opportunity for the DOE to tackle the issue of screens in schools and offer a vision for a future without screens, or screens that are more equitable and lead to integrated schools.

## **Endorse a Strategic Plan for Integration**

The chancellor repeatedly has named integrating DOE schools as a top priority of his tenure at DOE. Major priorities require strategic plans and strategic allocations of resources and personnel to execute them. This is a prime opportunity to create and endorse a strategic plan that includes a high-level short-term goal for the final 2 years of this mayoral administration. I have put forth a draft plan that lays out key pillars, a theory of action, and a set of metrics. This could serve as a starting point for the Cabinet to adopt a strategic plan and allocate the resources and organizational capacity necessary to execute it. The DOE should draw inspiration from the words of the Cooperative Review Board of the New York State Department of Education in 1962 regarding the recommendations of the Commission on Integration:

Many of the major recommendations of this report can be carried out without greatly increased expenditures...What is needed in New York City...is not merely money, it is imagination, leadership, and the willingness to try new practices, not merely in a single school or class but as bold changes affecting the lives of all pupils and teachers in the City (Harlem Parents Committee, 1965, p. 34).

## **Harness Youth Voice**

Some of the most intelligent and respectful conversations, debates, and protests over the past 10 months have come from student activists. In many cases, they have modeled the type of behavior that has been lacking from adults who have engaged in these types of conversations over

the last year. Students deserve a seat at the table and can help generate support for common-sense measures to improve integration in New York City schools. Groups like IntegrateNYC and Teens Take Charge have well-thought-out policy proposals at the ready. As one young advocate likes to remind me, “I’m halfway through high school. I don’t have time to wait.”

## Implications for Sector

The lessons of implementing the SDAG recommendations and making the case for broader integration-oriented reform in New York City have implications far beyond the five boroughs. The subsequent section describes takeaways for the field.

### **Integration Must Be Approached Differently Today Than It Was in the 20th Century**

The first major implication for the field is that integration in 2020 must look different than desegregation in 1954. The New York City experience demonstrates the importance of the consideration of a wide range of issues that pertain to integration and the complexity of the endeavor. History teaches that the era of desegregation in America, in the places it occurred, was not integration at all. Rather than integrating the ideas, the personnel, the names and mascots, and the spirit of both Black and White schools into one, the period was marked by the firing of Black teachers and leadership, the discarding of traditionally Black pedagogical practices and curricula, and efforts to promote Black students’ assimilation. The work undertaken in New York City was undergirded by the “5 Rs Framework” created by IntegrateNYC, a youth-led organization created in the Bronx, which posits that enrollment practices must pay attention to other factors, such as culturally responsive practices, teacher representation, a focus on disparate outcomes, responsible disciplinary measures, and equitable resource distribution. Any district looking narrowly at school placement issues is not looking expansively enough.

Earlier in this capstone, I offered a definition of integration for the 21st century:

**Integration is the intentional creation and maintenance of schools with racially and socioeconomically diverse student bodies, that employ staff who hold all students to high expectations, who teach in such a way that all students improve academically and as critical thinkers, and who promote a culture where people respect, affirm, and learn from each other and about each other, especially across lines of difference.**

The definition is crafted to highlight several factors that are usually omitted from definitions of integration. First, I use “intentional” purposefully, to emphasize that intent is required to undo centuries of deliberate segregation; moreover, intent is often required to ensure integrated schools remain integrated. Secondly, I frame the criteria as dependent on staff behavior (instead of passively on the school), because I believe teachers and principals are the most influential factors in creating school culture.<sup>38</sup> Third, I limit the definition to race and socioeconomic status on purpose. It is not to diminish or deprioritize the importance of diverse and equitable distributions of students with other identities and differences; rather, there is a danger in making the definition so broad that it becomes unwieldy. Moreover, socioeconomic factors typically (but not always) are closely aligned with other common classifications (e.g., disability status, language status).<sup>39</sup> Fourth, in the criteria, I attempt to capture the principal concerns of people of color during the period of desegregation following *Brown* (and forecasted by some prior to *Brown*), namely that students of color would be mistreated or not held to the same standards as White students and that they would be taught in a manner that debased them and their sense of self, both in *how* they were taught and *what* they were taught. This definition highlights the additive nature of integration, whereby faculty from all different backgrounds should learn from each other and be critical curators of curriculum and teaching practices. Fifth, the definition articulates the instructional obligation as “teach such that all students improve academically and as critical thinkers” rather than frame it in terms of test scores, to acknowledge that there are real issues with how we measure academic progress in K-12 education and allow for a more expansive

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<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that students are not integral to a school culture; rather, it highlights teachers and principals as the most important dependent variables over which those charged with educating children have control.

<sup>39</sup> Other technical reasons should not be overlooked. For students with disabilities: the distribution of students with disabilities is already well-established and subject to legal requirements (though the issue certainly is not solved). For multilingual and English-language learners, the distribution of students of varying language statuses depends on particular models used for instruction, with different ideal ratios for different models.

view. It thereby also explicitly avoids the language of “closing the achievement gap” or “eliminating disproportionality.” Finally, the definition acknowledges that some aspects of integration are unquantifiable; therefore, research that focuses exclusively on student demographics should recognize it as one element of integration, or a measure of desegregation or diversity. For these reasons, I offer this definition as a workable definition for 21st-century school integration.

### **Compelling Messaging Is Crucial to Effective Integration Efforts**

The second major implication for the sector is that the treatment of the issue of integration in the media and the public arena is subject to antiquated belief systems and paradigms about its value and its possibility. A formidable effort must be devoted to establishing a clear and compelling narrative about the value proposition of integration—formidable enough to overcome decades of outmoded thinking. Polling from 2020 suggests that a majority of Americans view integration favorably but are still subject to problematic opinions about its relationship to school quality and safety.<sup>40</sup> A substantial body of research has demonstrated the positive effects of school integration when done correctly—including but not limited to academic benefits, especially for low-income students—and a host of desirable social outcomes.

### **Student Assignment Matters**

Despite the importance of paying attention to additional factors, integration ultimately requires ensuring a diverse racial and socioeconomic demographic makeup of students. Moreover, the politics of where children attend school will always be the most controversial part of any integration plan. Districts must expect pushback, especially (but not exclusively) from wealthy and

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<sup>40</sup> Torres and Weissbourd conducted a large online poll and found that “unlike many politically divisive issues, parents of all backgrounds tend to agree that racial and economic integration is important—at least in principle—and state that they would prefer that their children attend schools that are substantially integrated both racially and economically. This preference is true for men and women, Democrats and Republicans, and people of all races, levels of education, and income levels” (2020, p. 2). They also found that discipline/safety issues were one of the top three concerns of families seeking out a school for their children.

politically well-connected community members. The more radical the proposal, the louder the noise; the more carefully planned out and inclusive of community input, the greater the chance for success. On student assignment, the specifics matter. School districts must consider every tool at their disposal to increase the demographic diversity of schools under their control. This includes changing district boundaries, proactively planning new sitings, experimenting with choice, strategically using priority admissions schemes, and considering school mergers. One of the learnings from New York City is that the splashiest reform effort does not always have the greatest impact. Absent information to the contrary, skeptical community members will always assume an integration plan calls for busing and will weaponize historical connotations of busing against the effort.

### **The Authorizing Environment Matters**

Finally, major integration efforts cannot happen without buy-in from their authorizing environments. Mark Moore's strategic triangle hinges on legitimacy and support: this requires that the authorizing environment, which includes "citizens, elected representatives, interest groups, and the media," is on board with any change effort in order for it to succeed (2000, p. 197). Cultivating support for integration must be a primary consideration, not an afterthought. It requires careful forethought on persuasive messaging, a sustained community organizing effort that involves listening to and talking to as many stakeholders in the community as possible, and shrewd strategizing.



## Conclusion

When the Commission on Integration finished its report in 1958, it included the following line about its marching orders to the school board: “The task we have set them—to march, ‘with all deliberate speed,’ on the road toward the integration of our schools—is not an easy one. But the terrain has been surveyed, the route mapped, and, without any question, the people of the City of New York want to travel that road to the end” (Kahn, 2016). Posterity would prove the committee wrong, for 62 years later, the state of the New York City public schools is still segregated.

The latest bite at the integration apple, represented by the dedication of the SDAG and the determination of the system’s leader, has perhaps positioned the DOE further along than it was 1 year ago, but the agency finds itself stalled nonetheless. The DOE was able to capitalize on some but not all of the components required to mobilize an integration effort in a large system.

First, by adopting the 5 Rs Framework and the first set of SDAG recommendations, the DOE successfully embraced an expansive, inclusive vision of school integration that considers a wide range of factors. Unfortunately, the DOE was never able to develop a persuasive public narrative that captured the value proposition of integrated schools as a desirable goal and a vehicle for student achievement; instead, the opposition’s messaging carried the day by framing the effort as a social justice mission designed to remove excellence from the system. Even though there were opportunities for reforming student assignment policies in innovative ways, they were not enacted. The DOE was never able to gain support and legitimacy from the media, the public, or politicians. All the same, it did demonstrate some potential for overcoming structural barriers in implementing some complex, interdisciplinary work.

Hope is not lost for the DOE to fulfill the commitments of its 1958 commission and to travel the road of integration “to the end,” but new tactics are required to shift the narrative. The most important work for the future—no small feat—is winning back the public conversation about school integration, in order to enable the rest of the work. It goes beyond shrewd politics and clever policies. It demands a little political courage and a lot of attention to hearts and minds. Dr. Martin

Luther King reminds us of this imperative in his 1962 speech “The Ethical Demands of Integration,”  
a fitting close to this capstone:

The demands of desegregation are enforceable demands while the demands of integration fall within the scope of unenforceable demands. . . . The former are regulated by the codes of society and the vigorous implementation of law enforcement agencies . . . but unenforceable obligations are beyond the reach of the laws of society. They concern inner attitudes, genuine person-to-person relations, and expressions of compassion which law books cannot regulate and jails cannot rectify (1962, p. 123).

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## Appendix 1: Exhibits

### Exhibit 1. The 5 Rs of Real Integration from IntegrateNYC<sup>41</sup>

The 5Rs is a collective impact framework to address segregation in public schools. The 5Rs speak to a broad set of questions we need to ask ourselves when we look at whether our schools are diverse, equitable, and integrated. The SDAG has adopted the 5Rs framework to structure this report, in part to honor the dynamic voices of students, and to engage the public in a more complex and comprehensive conversation about desegregation and integration in New York City. For many communities, particularly communities of color, the history of desegregation elicits painful memories of forced busing, disinvestment in schools serving students of color, and initiatives that focused solely on the movement of bodies. We seek to do more.

#### The 5Rs

1. **Race & Enrollment** – Who is in your school? How are students admitted?
2. **Resources** – What is in your school?
3. **Relationships** – How do people in your school relate to one another and their differences? How do students, families, and teachers learn to build across difference?
4. **Restorative Justice & Practices** – Who is punished in your school and how? What can schools do to create a more positive school climate and culture?
5. **Representation** – Who teaches and leads in your school?

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<sup>41</sup> From “Making the Grade Part 1” – the School Diversity Advisory Group’s first report that included recommendations to the DOE (School Diversity Advisory Group, 2019a, pp. 61-62).

Exhibit 2. SDAG 1 Recommendations by Division

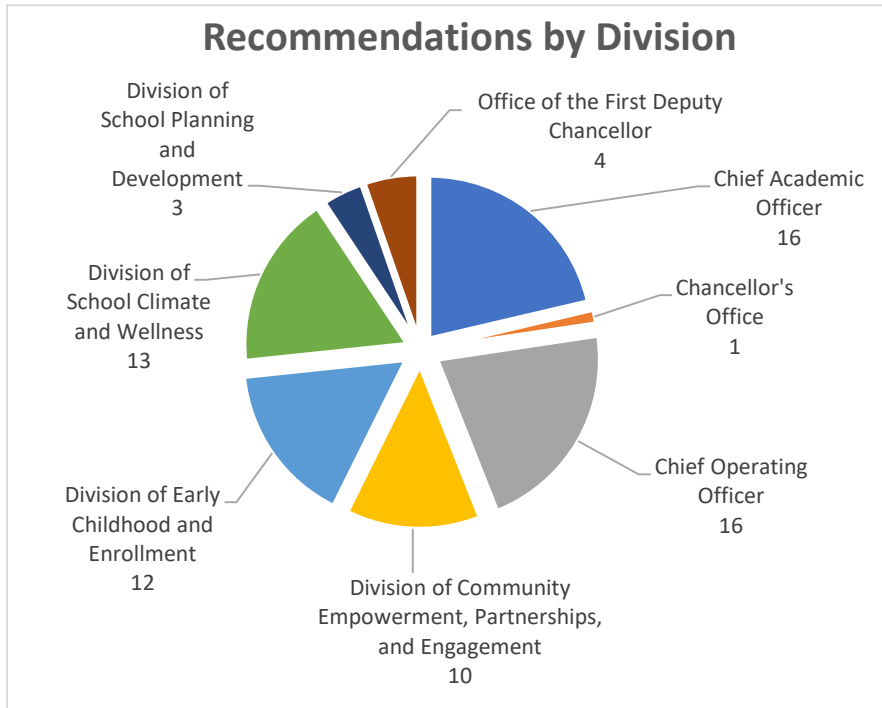


Exhibit 3. SDAG Recommendations from Making the Grade 1<sup>42</sup>

#	Section	Recommendation with UPDATED LANGUAGE	Lead office
1	Goals, metrics & accountability	In the short-term, DOE’s goals for diversity at the elementary and middle schools should be based on district demographics, and goals for diversity at high schools should be based on borough demographics. In the medium-term, goals for all schools should be based upon borough demographics.  In addition to the goals set by the DOE in its 2017 report, which will be amended based on SDAG recommendations, goals for diversity should be developed by school, district, and community leaders based on the racial, economic, Multilingual Learner (MLL), and Students with Disabilities (SWD) percentages of their community.	OPE (was: RPSG)
2	Goals, metrics & accountability	Long-term: DOE should aim for all schools to look more like the city. This will encourage the DOE to challenge the neighborhood segregation that exists and support schools in further diversifying their populations	OPE (was: RPSG)
3	Goals, metrics & accountability	In 2017, the DOE set a goal to increase the number of students in a racially representative school. Based on the SDAG’s recommendation, the DOE will expand its definition of representative to include a broad range of racial groups.	OPE (was: RPSG)
4	Goals, metrics & accountability	School- and district-level goals for socioeconomic integration should be based upon research.	OPE (was: RPSG)
5	Goals, metrics & accountability	In 2017, the DOE set a goal to increase the number of inclusive schools that serve Emergent Multilingual Learners (MLLs) and Students with Disabilities (SWDs). All schools should serve MLLs and SWDs; based on the SDAG’s recommendations, the DOE encourages communities, schools, and districts to strive to enroll MLLs and SWDs in proportions close to district averages.	OPE (was: RPSG)
6	Goals, metrics & accountability	For schools in economically stratified communities, we should consider other factors beyond poverty to ensure that schools are serving representative populations of students.	OPE (was: RPSG)
7	Goals, metrics & accountability	Track and publish a single set of metrics related to diversity in an annual report.	RPSG
8	Goals, metrics & accountability	Create the position of "Chief Integration Officer"	Chancellor's Office
9	Goals, metrics & accountability	Goals should be developed by communities and districts, and we will support mechanisms for students, parents, and others to reinforce these goals and ensure transparency and progress at the district/community level.	OFDC (was OSYD)
10	Goals, metrics & accountability	Add metrics to the School Quality Report related to diversity and integration	OPE
11	Goals, metrics & accountability	Consider incentives to secure charter school commitments to diversity and integration goals	Charter Office
12	Race, diversity & enrollment	Strongly support and encourage the nine districts with sufficient demographic diversity of population to develop diversity and integration plans (Districts 1, 2, 3, 13, 15, 22, 27, 28, 31).	OSE

<sup>42</sup> As adapted for adoption by the DOE for “Making the Grade Part 1” – the School Diversity Advisory Group’s first report that included recommendations to the DOE (School Diversity Advisory Group, 2019a). The DOE altered language before accepting the recommendations. The recommendation numbers were not originally assigned by the report, but assigned internally to facilitate use. A “lead office” was originally designated for each rec, and sometimes reassigned after certain periods of time. Recommendations 8 and 48 were rejected. Recommendations 18, 20, and 26 were listed as “still under consideration.”

13	Race, diversity & enrollment	DOE will strongly support and encourage districts to examine different admissions policies and programs as they explore potential changes. The specific programs and policies under consideration may vary by district.	OSE
14	Race, diversity & enrollment	All admissions fairs and events should be held in fully accessible buildings.	OSE
15	Race, diversity & enrollment	School staff should be trained to welcome and accommodate students and family members with disabilities as well as immigrant families, and students and families who need interpreters on tours and school visits, as well as at school fairs	OSE
16	Race, diversity & enrollment	All Family Welcome Center staff should be trained to support students with disabilities and should be prepared to help students consider all school options within their community	OSE
17	Race, diversity & enrollment	As the City moves more of its admissions processes online, we have aligned materials to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.	OSE
18	Resources	Make resources available for any district to receive support for planning diversity, if it receives more applications than the \$2 million can support.	Finance
19	Resources	Permit districts to apply jointly for school diversity planning funds	OSE
20	Resources	Consider a separate pot of funds for districts that have not yet begun conversations about integration	Finance
21	Resources	Consult the SDAG on the roll-out of the grant program	OSE and Community Affairs
22	Resources	Support efforts in Albany to collect all Campaign for Fiscal Equity funding owed to the City's schools.	Finance
23	Resources	Launch a Task Force to examine PA and PTA capacity – including with resources/fundraising and structure/organizing– to make recommendations to increase capacity for PTAs overall	FACE (was Finance)
24	Resources	Examine Title 1 and its relationship to integration	Finance
25	Resources	Gather information from schools to determine what resources and changes in policies they feel they need to create greater diversity in their communities	OFDC (was Finance)
26	Resources	Develop and invest in accelerated enrichment programs in elementary schools	Finance
27	Resources	Invest in programming that would create intentionally diverse communities at all City schools.	Finance
28	Resources	Invest in programs and offerings that will attract more diverse families to schools they might not have considered before.	Finance
29	Resources	Invest in program offerings to ensure high poverty schools have the same curricular, extra-curricular and after school opportunities as schools in more affluent communities.	Finance
30	Resources	Invest in college and career prep resources.	OEA (was Finance)
31	Resources	Invest in growing and strengthening high-performing schools in communities with historic underinvestment	Finance
32	Relationships	Every school should have the resources for a high-quality student council	OSYD
33	Relationships	Borough Student Advisory Councils should be expanded to include seats for student council representatives from every high school	OFDC

34	Relationships	A General Assembly should be created with representatives from every high school to develop a citywide student agenda and vote on key issues	External Affairs
35	Relationships	The Chancellor's Student Advisory Committee should be transformed into a leadership body that utilizes youth-adult committees to promote authentic partnership	OSYD
36	Relationships	Create a Student Leadership Team, comprised of one student from each BSAC to meet regularly (i.e., quarterly) with the Chancellor	OSYD
37	Relationships	Create a new leadership position within the central DOE office to focus on student voice	External Affairs
38	Relationships	Create a standing committee on high school admissions to advise the Chancellor in decision-making	OSE
39	Relationships	Provide culturally responsive pedagogical practices at all schools and for all students.	CAO
40	Relationships	Adopt a common definition of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE) that will inform and shape work across the DOE.	CAO
41	Relationships	Create partnerships with institutions of higher education to ensure CRE is an essential component of all pre-service teacher training efforts.	CAO (was State and Federal Policy)
42	Relationships	Collaborate with the New York State Education Department and Alternative Certification Programs (i.e. NYCTF/Americorps/Teach for America/ NYC Men Teach) to utilize CRE principles as part of teaching certification.	TRQ
43	Relationships	<a href="#">Work with NYSED, under the state's ESSA plan, to secure additional funding to train and support teachers and staff in culturally responsive instruction.</a>	State & Federal Policy
44	Relationships	Develop and implement ethnic and culturally responsive courses that include religious literacy and disability studies, and support teachers to embed culturally responsive material in existing courses.	CAO
45	Relationships	Utilize trauma-informed research to guide the development and implementation of curricula.	School Climate & Wellness (and CAO)
46	Relationships	Seek partnerships with qualified vendors who supply Culturally Responsive instructional materials, training, and resources	CAO
47	Relationships	Assess the roles and responsibilities of School Safety Agents in school communities.	OSYD
48	Relationships	Analyze the benefits and drawbacks of moving School Safety Agents to DOE supervision from NYPD supervision.	OSYD
49	Relationships	Train School Safety Agents, and Family Welcome Center, DOE central-, field- and school-based staff in CRE.	OSYD
50	Relationships	Bolster school-based equity teams and ensure they include parent and student reps to advance welcoming school climates.	School Climate & Wellness
51	Relationships	Require all schools to monitor student discipline practices and develop a plan to reduce any disparities in how students are disciplined.	School Climate & Wellness
52	Relationships	Expand community schools initiative and other models that connect schools to community based organizations.	School Climate & Wellness

53	Relationships	Include metrics for accountability related to school climate directly on Quality Review/School-wide Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP) Goals.	School Climate & Wellness (and OFDC)
54	Relationships	Utilize varied outreach efforts to meaningfully engage parents in school decision-making processes with the goal of including families that have not participated in prior activities. These may include altering the time, location, setting, or language of the gathering to reflect family needs.	FACE
55	Relationships	Increase availability of information in most common languages other than English about changes to admissions policies and procedures.	OSE
56	Relationships	Increase access to tools related to application and enrollment for families without internet access or a computer at home.	OSE
57	Relationships	Consider cultural relevance or acceptance of new tools for families and students (e.g., online application and enrollment) before release and establish supports for families who will likely not utilize new tools.	OSE
58	Relationships	Increase translation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and provision of interpretation and translation support for IEP-related meetings.	T&I
59	Relationships	Support current efforts to share best practices between teachers, administrators and parents on CRE, school climate, and parent empowerment.	FACE
60	Relationships	Create opportunities for all educators, including coaches and school-based mentors, to share best practice across schools, especially as it relates to culturally responsive education.	T&L
61	Restorative Justice & Practices	DOE continues to work through recommendations from the Mayor's Leadership Team on School Climate and Discipline and will share an update on the recommendations implemented to date.	School Climate & Wellness
62	Representation	To the extent that DOE is able to collect this information in a valid and reliable manner, report on the diversity of school-based staff by position at the district- and city-level, and at the school level where appropriate (considering sufficient numbers).	DHC (was: OPE)
63	Representation	Study the impact of current initiatives to recruit diverse staff (i.e., NYC Men Teach) and make targeted investments to expand diversity in staff across the City.	TRQ
64	Representation	To the extent that DOE is able to collect this information in a valid and reliable manner, report annually on the diversity of the DOE's workforce.  DOE OEO already does regular reporting on diversity and inclusion pursuant to 2590-h (see: <a href="https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/att4_-_oediversitynycdoe2016-2017diversityandinclusionannualreportstrategicplanfinal-jg_3-5-18.pdf">https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/att4_-_oediversitynycdoe2016-2017diversityandinclusionannualreportstrategicplanfinal-jg_3-5-18.pdf</a> )	DHC (was TRQ)
65	Representation	Explore career pipeline opportunities for parent coordinators within the school system.	TRQ
66	Representation	Explore opportunities to build an educator career pipeline for high school students.	TRQ
67	Representation	Launch a task force to investigate the current state of the DOE's workforce in greater detail and make recommendations about best practices learned from existing efforts. This task force should also look at examples of success from other school districts and sectors.	DHC (was TRQ)

## Exhibit 4. Sample Meeting Agenda from Implementation Group

### SDAG Rec Implementation Group Meeting #3

Time/Date: Tuesday, August 13, 2019, 3:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.  
Location: Tweed 3rd Floor Conference Room

<u>Agenda</u>	
3:00 p.m. – 3:05 p.m.	<b>Opener and Welcome Back</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Briefly review group objectives, principles (norms), and definitions</li></ul>
3:05 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.	<b>Whiparound</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What continues to excite us about the recs?</li><li>Where do we need support or collaboration as we move forward?</li></ul>
3:15 p.m. – 3:25 p.m.	<b>Brief Agenda Items</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>SDAG Round II Recommendations Update</li><li>Meeting with Teens Take Charge and Youth Involvement in General</li><li>State Integration Grant Information</li><li>Brief History of NYC Int. Work and pertinent updates (i.e. D15)</li></ul>
3:35 p.m. – 3:55 p.m.	<b>Getting more skilled at talking about integration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Digging into the history of segregation, desegregation, and integration in NYC and in the US</li><li>How and when might you utilize this when talking about integration?</li></ul>
3:55 p.m. – 4:10 p.m.	<b>Deep dive into 2 High Priority Recs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>#12: Strongly support and encourage the nine districts with sufficient demographic diversity of population to develop diversity and integration plans (Districts 1, 2, 3, 13, 15, 22, 27, 28, 31).</li><li>#13: DOE will strongly support and encourage districts to examine different admissions policies and programs as they explore potential changes. The specific programs and policies under consideration may vary by district.</li></ul>
4:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.	<b>Debrief, Wrap-Up, and Next Steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Next meeting: Tuesday, August 27th at 3:00 p.m.</li></ul>



## Exhibit 5. Implementation Working Groups Established in November

	Domain	Working Group Goals	Additional details	Reccs	Members
1	Goals, Metrics, Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage six school communities to learn more about how schools understand their goals in relation to diversity and student body makeup in order to inform the DOE's implementation of the SDAG goals/metrics recommendations.</li> <li>Create the prototype for an annual report that is released to the public that details diversity metrics in all DOE schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This group will have two to three focus group meetings with members of six different school communities</li> <li>The schools will be chosen in pairs, in districts that are already engaged via the district grants</li> <li>Schools that meet certain demographic archetypes will be chosen so that the group can learn as much as possible about how different types of schools are thinking about goal-setting</li> <li>The work on an annual report will come after the focus groups are conducted</li> </ul>	1, 3, 5-7	BC KD MC AM HB
2	Race, Diversity, and Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage districts identified by SDAG but not currently supported by the five district grants and learn about their efforts to increase integration as well as supports that might be helpful</li> <li>Prepare and plan for engagement and potential trainings for Family Welcome Center staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This group will plan strategic engagements with the districts specifically called out by SDAG as having sufficient demographic diversity, but that are not covered by this year's districts grants – these include 1, 2, 3, 22, 27</li> <li>The group will engage superintendent, parent coordinators and other district leaders</li> </ul>	12	SBI DG SF AM SC
3	Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study programs and offerings across the city that draw diverse populations, provide an inventory of programs and their effectiveness in drawing diverse populations to a) the implementation team, b) the five grantee district working groups, c) propose policy to fund models that work in furthering integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This group will use a couple of different methodologies to attempt to glean information about which programs lead to diversity</li> <li>The end-goal will be policy recommendations</li> </ul>	25, 27-28	ACC NC AB LW
4	Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage students and members of the public on SDAG recommendations to gather feedback on implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This group will find opportunities to bring stakeholders to the table for different phases of each of the other four working groups</li> </ul>	All	SC KJ AO HS
5	Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This group will seek to launch a taskforce that examines the workforce in the five grantee districts (9, 13, 16, 28, 31). Specifically, the group will seek to supplement, but not duplicate the work underway in the Division of Human Capital and in Teacher Recruitment and Quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a lot of work that has been done in this area more broadly – it will be important for the group to coordinate with folks in the Division of Human Capital and Teacher Recruitment and Quality to ensure efforts are not duplicative</li> </ul>	67	AW AO CS SH

Exhibit 6. Progress Update on SDAG 1 for Cabinet on February 3, 2020

Goals/Metrics	Race/Enrollment	Resources	Relations. 1	Relations. 2	Restorative J.	Representation
1	12	18*	32	46	61	62
2	13	19	33	47		63
3	14	20*	34	<del>48</del>		64
4	15	21	35	49		65
5	16	22	36	50		66
6	17	23	37	51		67
7		24	38	52		
<del>8</del>		25	39	53		
9		<del>26</del>	40	54		
10		27	41	55		
11		28	42	56		
		29	43	57		
		30	44	58		
		31	45	59		
				60		

Key	#'s	%
<b>Complete</b>	12	18%
<b>In Progress w/ Major Milestone Complete</b>	17	25%
<b>In Progress</b>	29	43%
<b>Not Started</b>	6	9%
<i>Rejected or "under consideration"</i>	3	5%

\* 18 and 20 were initially "under consideration."

## Exhibit 7. Principal Findings from Engagement in District 15

Findings for schools undergoing demographic transitions from less integrated to more integrated in District 15:

- Schools required more support and training for teachers to be able to differentiate instructional materials effectively, as they were serving a population with a much wider range in academic abilities than previously.
- Schools required more tools for engaging students and parents who were non-native English speakers, including translation services, interpreters for special events, interpretation technology for community meetings, and access to translation and interpretation assistance on demand.
- Many schools were in danger of losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in Title 1 funds because the transition brought them extremely close to the New York City threshold of 59% students in poverty to be eligible for Title 1 funds.
- The “little things” that the central office was responsible for ended up being extremely important for principals and vexing when they were not done correctly, such as having timely and accurate bus routes.
- Schools had to be proactive about setting up parent organizations for success in light of demographic changes to ensure certain communities did not feel excluded.
- Schools desired greater staff diversity in light of their student demographic changes, but found this to be one of the hardest challenges to meet.
- Schools that were most successful found ways of making students of color and low-income students feel particularly welcomed, through affinity groups, certain extracurricular activities, and advising programs.
- Students and staff were overwhelmingly positive and excited about the simplification and fairness of the new enrollment process, as well as the ensuing diversity of the middle schools in District 15.

Exhibit 8. SDAG Recommendations from Making the Grade 2<sup>43</sup>

#	Time span	Grade Band	Recommendation
1	Short-term	Elementary	Because we believe all students deserve to be challenged, we recommend that the DOE resource community school districts to pilot creative, equitable enrichment alternatives to G&T.
1a	Short-term	Elementary	Provide resources for community school districts to develop enrichment alternatives with community and stakeholder engagement.
1b	Short-term	Elementary	Provide adequate resources for community school districts to implement enrichment alternatives.
1c	Short-term	Elementary	Ensure recruitment to enrichment alternatives is inclusive of multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students who qualify for free and reduced lunch pricing, and students living in temporary housing.
1d	Short-term	Elementary	Measure alternative enrichment program demographics against district demographics
1e	Short-term	Elementary	Track and share publicly the impacts on integrative enrollment of enrichment alternatives.
2	Short-term	Elementary	Discontinue the use of the Gifted & Talented admissions test. Institute a moratorium on new Gifted & Talented programs
3	Short-term	Elementary	Allow existing Gifted & Talented programs to continue. Programs will be phased out as students age and will not receive new incoming classes.
4	Short-term	Elementary	Eliminate rigid academic tracking in elementary school that results in economic or racial segregation.
5	Short-term	Middle	Expand and support the use of inclusionary admissions practices that promote integrated schools and ensure that all students are challenged.
6	Short-term	Middle	Provide resources for community school districts to develop district wide admissions priorities with community and stakeholder engagement. District wide admissions priorities must intend to achieve the integration goals adopted by the DOE.
7	Short-term	Middle	Eliminate the use of exclusionary admissions practices that create segregation by race, class, disability, home language, and academic ability. This includes the exclusionary use of school screens such as grades, test scores, auditions, performance in interviews, behavior, lateness, and attendance.
8	Short-term	Middle	Preserve the use of inclusionary admissions practices that are used to identify and serve vulnerable student populations (i.e. International Schools, dual language programs, Diversity in Admissions).
9	Short-term	Middle	Eliminate the use of “Gifted and Talented” nomenclature in middle school programs, to ensure it matches the values and vision of real integration.
10	Short-term	High	Institute a moratorium on the creation of new screened high schools, unless the admissions process explicitly intends to meet the integration goals adopted by the DOE.
11	Short-term	High	Implement new inclusionary admissions practices which ensure all high schools are reflective of their boroughs’ racial and socio-economic demographics
12	Short-term	High	Prioritize high performing selective high schools that have an opportunity to serve a more racially representative student population. Require

<sup>43</sup> Verbatim from “Making the Grade Part 2” – the School Diversity Advisory Group’s second report that included recommendations to the DOE. (No language adaptations since DOE has not issued any official statement accepting, rejecting, or amending these recommendations).

			identified high schools to adopt an inclusionary admissions practice that intends to increase racial and socio-economic diversity.
13	Short-term	High	Eliminate lateness, attendance, and geographic zones as a criteria for high school admissions and enrollment.
14	Short-term	High	Preserve the use of inclusionary admissions practices that are used to identify and serve vulnerable student populations (i.e. International and Transfer High Schools, and Diversity in Admissions).
15	Short-term	High	Ensure that all high school admissions criteria are transparent and designed to reduce the racial and socioeconomic isolation currently prevalent in most high schools.
16	Short-term	System	In accordance with New York State law, the DOE should redraft district lines to support the long-term goal of having all schools reflect the city population and meet the goals accepted in Making the Grade.
17	Short-term	System	Commission group to study academic diversity. Develop best practices and identify the supports required for classrooms serving students with diverse levels of academic ability. Build information on how to best support teachers in these classrooms, and prevent tracking within schools. Share the results of the study publicly
18	Short-term	System	Develop a strategy to support students who enter school outside of the standard admissions process (over the counter, off-season admissions) that improves real 35 Making the Grade II: New Programs for Better Schools integration goals (system wide) and pairs students with schools and programs that meet their specific needs.
19	Short-term	System	Provide students with disabilities in Community School Districts 1-32 and District 75 schools who receive busing pursuant to their IEPs with transportation support they need to be able to participate in after-school programs at their schools.
20	Short-term	System	Convene a DOE or SDAG sub-committee that includes students with disabilities, along with their parents, educators, and advocates, to develop strategies to promote integration of students with disabilities throughout the school system.
21	Short-term	District 75	Promote community integration for students with disabilities by prioritizing enrollment of District 75 students in their school district of residence, rather than enrolling by borough.
22	Short-term	District 75	Require the DOE to report annually on the number of District 75 students enrolled outside their school district of residence.
23	Long-term	Elementary	Evaluate the ways enrichment alternatives are helping or getting in the way of real integration and expand anything that is working.
24	Long-term	Elementary	Require districts to develop new strategies to increase participation from underrepresented groups if the enrichment alternatives are found to have a segregating effect.
25	Long-term	Middle	Evaluate the integrative impact of inclusionary admissions methods and expand anything that is working.
26	Long-term	Middle	Monitor academic tracking within middle schools. Implement the best practices developed by the academic diversity commission to ensure diverse classrooms within schools.
27	Long-term	High	Assess and publicly report on the impacts of the inclusionary admissions practices adopted in years 0 - 3.
28	Long-term	High	Redesign the high school admissions process to ensure all high schools are reflective of citywide racial and socioeconomic demographics.

## Exhibit 9. “War Room” Process following SDAG 2 Release

### SDAG War Room Proposal

#### Phase I Meeting Times:

M,W,F from 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday, August 28 - Wednesday, September 18

#### Background

The School Diversity Advisory Group will be releasing its second report tomorrow that deals with the issues of Gifted and Talented programs and screens, among other topics. There will likely be pressure to respond quickly, including for potential implementation in the coming enrollment cycle (fall 2019 for SY 20-21). This process attempts to balance the need for a quick response with the appropriate internal deliberation.

*NOTE:* Any change to next year’s admissions cycle needs to be determined no later than September 19<sup>th</sup>.

#### Objectives of SDAG War Room

The War Room will be co-led by the Chancellor’s Office and Division of Early Childhood and Student Enrollment. Objectives for the war room are:

- To shepherd the month-long internal (DOE) review processes that will lead to a preliminary response to SDAG II by the Chancellor at the end of September
- To actively collect and report out intel on the public response to SDAG II from the press and community
- To support the rollout of communications for all phases: SDAG release, deliberation phase, announcement at the end of September, and phase II of engagement (following the announcement)

#### Deliverables

After Week 1: Each division will have offered a clean yes/no/wait on each pertinent recommendation and vetting flags from their perspective; recommendations will also include initial assessment of the timeline for implementation (i.e. Do you agree with recommendation? [yes/no] If yes, please vet potential pitfalls from your/your division’s perspective. If no, please indicate why.)

After Week 2: Labor, Legal, and Finance will have weighed in on all recs under consideration and issued guidance on feasibility.

After Week 3: By end of Week 2, share vetted response to the recommendations and flags with City Hall for meeting by Week 3. Clearly indicates for each rec: **YES – implement ASAP** or **YES – take one year (or more) to develop** or **NO – reject**

#### Agenda for Initial Meeting

1. Review timeline and major milestones for coming month
2. Review the contents of the recommendations
3. Review the feedback we need from each division and the process we’ll use for sign off

#### Agenda for subsequent meetings will include

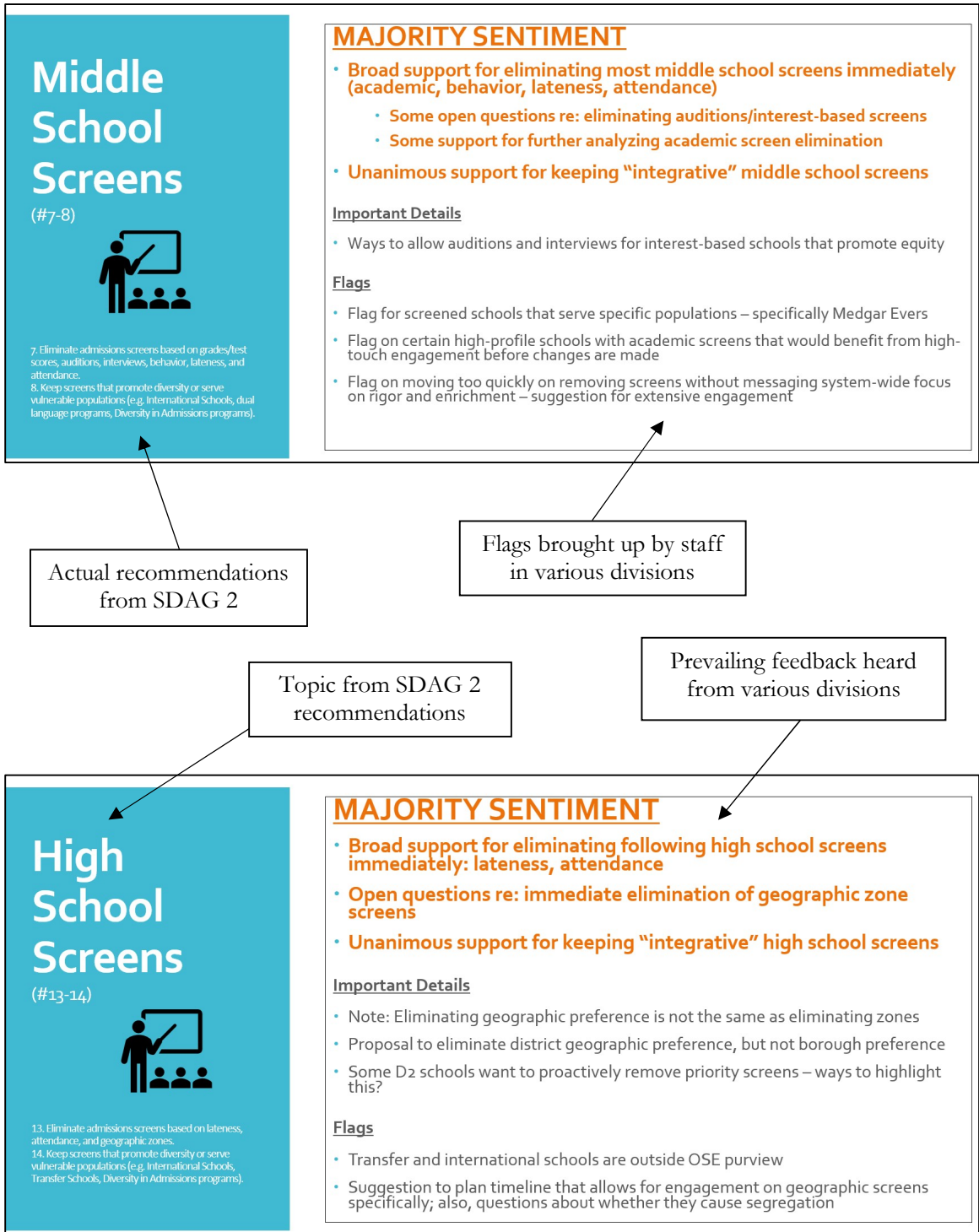
4. Review and get input on initial internal responses
5. Develop proactive outreach and communications plans
6. Manage rapid response/reactive issues related to SDAG report

## Exhibit 10. Headlines from the 5-Day Period after the Release of SDAG 2

Headlines on SDAG Recommendations from August 26 through August 31

August 26	Desegregation Plan: Eliminate All Gifted Programs in New York	<i>New York Times</i>
August 26	School Diversity Group: NYC Should Phase Out Gifted Programs, Curb Selective Screening in Admissions	<i>Chalkbeat</i>
August 26	Panel Recommends Ending Gifted and Talented Programs at NYC Public Schools	<i>Spectrum News NY1</i>
August 26	School Diversity Panel Wants City to Scrap Gifted Programs	<i>New York Post</i>
August 27	NYC School Diversity Panel Recommends Ending Gifted Programs in Public Schools. One Member Explains the Surprising Decision.	<i>Washington Post</i>
August 27	Bill De Blasio's Diversity Experiment Punishes Achievers	<i>Commentary Magazine</i>
August 27	Carranza Hints at Support for School Diversity Proposals, Even as Backlash Grows Against Gifted Changes	<i>Chalkbeat</i>
August 27	Bill de Blasio: Merit is Racist, So We Won't Allow it in NYC	<i>The Federalist</i>
August 27	Panel Softens Tone After Its Call to End NYC Gifted and Talented	<i>Spectrum News NY1</i>
August 27	Eliminate Gifted, Scrap Middle School Screening – but Only Study High School Admissions? A Gap in Diversity Recommendations Draws Attention	<i>Chalkbeat</i>
August 27	The Radical Plan to Redistrict New York City Schools	<i>New York Post</i>
August 28	Gifted-and-Talented Purge Will Spark Asian Exodus: Activist	<i>New York Post</i>
August 28	To Address Inequity, Let's Do More Than Eliminate "Gifted and Talented" Programs	<i>Forbes</i>
August 28	If City Eliminates 'Gifted' Programs, Here's What Could Come Next	<i>The City</i>
August 29	'Diversity Panel' Recommends Eliminating Gifted Student Programs for Allegedly Perpetuating "Stereotypes"	<i>Fox News</i>
August 29	Can Axing Gifted Programs Desegregate New York Schools – Without Triggering "Bright Flight"?	<i>NBC News</i>
August 30	Proposal to Scrap City Gifted/Talented Classes Draws Heavy Criticism	<i>The Chief Leader</i>
August 30	What NYC Must Learn about Gifted and Talented Education: Testing and Sorting Four Year-Olds Is Far Inferior to Other Ways to Challenge Precocious Students of All Backgrounds	<i>New York Daily News</i>
August 31	A Fight Over Gifted Education in New York Is Escalating a National Debate Over Segregated Schools	<i>NBC News</i>

Exhibit 11. Slides from Cabinet Presentation on September 6, 2019



## Middle School Screens

(#7-8)

7. Eliminate admissions screens based on grades/test scores, auditions, interviews, behavior, lateness, and attendance.  
8. Keep screens that promote diversity or serve vulnerable populations (e.g. International Schools, dual language programs, Diversity in Admissions programs).

### MAJORITY SENTIMENT

- Broad support for eliminating most middle school screens immediately (academic, behavior, lateness, attendance)
  - Some open questions re: eliminating auditions/interest-based screens
  - Some support for further analyzing academic screen elimination
- Unanimous support for keeping “integrative” middle school screens

**Important Details**

- Ways to allow auditions and interviews for interest-based schools that promote equity

**Flags**

- Flag for screened schools that serve specific populations – specifically Medgar Evers
- Flag on certain high-profile schools with academic screens that would benefit from high-touch engagement before changes are made
- Flag on moving too quickly on removing screens without messaging system-wide focus on rigor and enrichment – suggestion for extensive engagement

Actual recommendations from SDAG 2

Flags brought up by staff in various divisions

Topic from SDAG 2 recommendations

Prevailing feedback heard from various divisions

## High School Screens

(#13-14)

13. Eliminate admissions screens based on lateness, attendance, and geographic zones.  
14. Keep screens that promote diversity or serve vulnerable populations (e.g. International Schools, Transfer Schools, Diversity in Admissions programs).

### MAJORITY SENTIMENT

- Broad support for eliminating following high school screens immediately: lateness, attendance
- Open questions re: immediate elimination of geographic zone screens
- Unanimous support for keeping “integrative” high school screens

**Important Details**

- Note: Eliminating geographic preference is not the same as eliminating zones
- Proposal to eliminate district geographic preference, but not borough preference
- Some D2 schools want to proactively remove priority screens – ways to highlight this?

**Flags**

- Transfer and international schools are outside OSE purview
- Suggestion to plan timeline that allows for engagement on geographic screens specifically; also, questions about whether they cause segregation



## Highlights of Progress that was Catalyzed by SDAG

- Promoting **Student Voice** by hiring a student voice manager and supporting the mechanisms through which students give input and feedback (**Community Affairs**)
- Establishing community-driven processes to create **District Diversity Plans** in five districts (**Community Affairs and OSE**)
- Adopting a definition for **Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education** and using it to make investments and decisions for the future to impact students in all DOE schools (**CAO**)
- Workshopping new metrics and data for use in the **SQR** related to diversity and integration (**CAO**)

## Progress Due to Agency Priorities that Align to SDAG

- Marshaling resources to historically underrepresented schools and communities, such as through the **Bronx Plan** initiative and expansion as well as **Community Schools** investments (**OFDC**)
- Promoting student well-being and positive school climates, such as through historic investments in **Restorative Practices**, **SEL curriculum**, and **Social Workers** (**DSCW**)
- Improving the pipelines and data-driven processes for bringing **Educators from Diverse Backgrounds** into the classroom and in positions throughout DOE schools (**COO**)