

April 30, 2020

Dear Lisa, Tony & Dawn,

We are writing to request that a formal Equity & Inclusion Plan be developed for the Hunter College Campus Schools (HCCS). We believe that all of us want to achieve a more diverse learning environment at HCCS **and** continue being a leader in academic excellence. The dual goal of excellence and diversity is, in fact, enshrined in the HCCS mission statement:

*“Our schools strive to reflect the city they serve by admitting and educating a population of students who are culturally, socio-economically, and ethnically diverse. We seek to serve as a model for combining excellence and equity, serving as a catalyst for change in New York City and the nation.”*

We believe that excellence is contingent on diversity<sup>1</sup> in our student body and in fostering an inclusive climate and curriculum. Moreover, at this time when the COVID crisis has underscored the deep racial and economic divides in our city, we believe it is more urgent than ever that Hunter’s special learning community be accessible to students who represent all of our diverse city.

In this spirit - and encouraged by many members of our community seeking more action toward equity at HCCS - we want to support your leadership towards achieving this. Our unique governance should enable us to take proactive steps to address the problem - and there are numerous models across the country from which we could learn. In fact, there are 3 NYC-wide gifted and talented programs that have made changes to their admissions policies including:

- Brooklyn School of Inquiry gives priority to students residing in selected school districts for 40% of their seats. Half will go to students from families with low-income and half to students living in districts 18 or 20.
- Tag Young Scholars gives priority to students from families with low-income for 40% of their seats.
- The Anderson School will give priority to students residing in selected districts in northern Manhattan and the South Bronx for 30% of their seats.

Ten years ago (in 2010), the Middle States Accreditation process highlighted how HCCS continues to achieve academic excellence, but had not achieved its mission of educating a diverse student body. The April 2010 Oral Report to HCCS from Dr. Valenti (Chair of Middle States Validation team) framed the problem of diversity at Hunter as follows:

*“4. Reconciling the debate about admissions practices Hunter is steeped in proud history and beloved traditions... History has worked well for those of you who came before- but it may be serving as an obstacle for some whose time is now. We have heard a great deal about how one*

*gains admission to this club-enough to know that feelings about your current processes run quite high and may even threaten to destabilize relationships. You are smart people-you have to be able to serve these students. Surely there is a solution? Certainly reasonable people can strike compromises that can reconcile the differences? Everyone we met- including the President to the College- clearly stated that the attainment of diversity is a goal for the Hunter College Campus Schools. The Team has concluded that it is not a matter of gathering good ideas, identifying research-based methods, or resolving logistics- it is a matter of will and true motivation. The Validation Team believes that accepting challenges is bedrock in the Hunter culture. Take on this challenge and find a way to make Hunter look more like the vibrant city it has called home for more than 100 years.”*

While the above feedback addressed diversity in HCCS’s student body primarily through admissions, we believe we also need to work beyond a revised admissions process. Our goal is to create a more diverse student body **and** to address the many aspects necessary to create a more inclusive environment for all students, families, faculty and staff.

We recommend that an HCCS Equity & Inclusion Plan would include the following areas and that baseline data be collected for each to support ongoing data collection and accountability:

1. **Faculty.** *We seek a more representative faculty and intentional efforts to advertise to, hire and retain more teachers of color. Alongside this, we would like to see annual and ongoing training for faculty on equitable and inclusive teaching practices.*

We recommend that Hunter develop policies to ensure that hiring is not only equitable but ameliorates the lack of racial diversity in its faculty. This would require that Hunter actively recruit candidates of color. Hunter could also follow recommendations for best practices<sup>2</sup> in developing job ads and creating criteria for positions; expanding and training search committees and following retention practices for underrepresented faculty of color.

At the October 2019 PAAC gathering, one HCHS parent shared: *“My child is going to graduate soon. We live in New York City and he will graduate not having had one African-American classroom teacher.”*

2. **Curriculum/Pedagogy.** *We seek a culturally responsive and relevant curriculum that draws content from a variety of perspectives and cultures and engages all students in critical analysis. Whose stories, perspectives, and histories are being represented or not being represented? What methods are being employed to examine existing curricula across grades?*

We know that there are some faculty who are actively working on revising curricula and we would like to learn more about this work. We want to know that these are not anomalies, rather, intentional, department-wide efforts to review, revise and implement more relevant curricula. We would welcome knowing more about specific changes that have been made. And although the move to online

instruction is incredibly challenging, it can also be an excellent opportunity to examine both the content of our courses and methods of instruction.

There are numerous resources and research that support the rationale for culturally responsive education, its impact on academic achievement and cross-racial cooperation, frameworks for multicultural and anti-racist curriculum, and tools for auditing curricular materials. We would be happy to share these.

- 3. Student Body.** *We seek far more representation in our student body of African-American, Latinx, and lower-income students. A key first step is evaluating what components of the HCCS admissions system are driving the current exclusion of these groups. Only then can Hunter implement solutions that will produce a student body that is more representative of this city and of the HCCS mission.*

While there has been progress in the number of African-American and Latinx students being accepted into HCES, the representation in HCHS continues to be very low. Moreover, in both the elementary school and the high school there are very few students from low-income homes -- and far fewer than at other selective schools in the city. Today, just 2.4% of the HCCS high school student body is African-American, 6.2% is Latinx, and 9% are students who are eligible for free/reduced price lunch.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, NYC's student population is 25.5% African-American, 40.6% Latinx and 72.8% of students are eligible for free/reduced price lunch.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in terms of economic diversity, Hunter is far less representative than some specialized high schools, e.g.: at Stuyvesant High School, 42% of students are eligible for free/reduced price lunch<sup>5</sup>, 59% at Brooklyn Tech<sup>6</sup> and 42% at Bronx Science.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, citywide data shows that within the pool from which HCHS draws its applicants (5th graders who score at Level 4 on their NYS Math and ELA tests), greater than 40% are African-American or Latinx and more than 50% are economically disadvantaged.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the demographics of the HCHS 7th grade class each year are drastically incongruous with this fact. The under-representation of African-American, Latinx and economically disadvantaged students at HCCS cannot simply be explained by an under-representation of such students among high-achieving NYC school students.

Next year, HCHS will need to adjust its' 7th grade admissions system since 5th graders will not be taking the state tests. We recommend that the school take advantage of this opportunity to assess other options that would help admit a high-achieving, more diverse student body.

- 4. School Climate & Relationships.** *We seek a school climate that is inclusive of individuals from all backgrounds, that is empathetic of the identities of all students, different family structures and that helps build relationships across group identities. We seek greater opportunities for anti-bias training and self-awareness workshops for faculty, staff, students and parents.*

There are plenty of resources and examples at our disposal to embark on this work, from sister schools, books, online guides, our faculty, parents and more. We request baseline quantitative and qualitative data so that we can start with a transparent and accurate picture of our school, including:

- What has the student attrition been over the past 7 years. Who has left and why?
- How many incidents of bias have occurred, to whom and by whom?
- How do students and staff learn about race, gender, sexuality and how our school confronts bias incidents?
- How are staff held accountable for creating an equitable and inclusive school?
- Have steps been taken to address concerns raised at the HS Diversity Committee meetings?
- What do AACs, HOLA, LGBTQQ, SAYA, ACS, ACT, and religious student affinity group members and club advisors feel about the school climate? (Survey)
- What do parents of children from underrepresented groups (PAAC, Latino parents, CAPA, KAPA) feel about the school climate? (Survey)
- What do faculty, staff and students feel about the school climate? (Survey)

We believe that it is an incredible privilege to be part of the Hunter College Campus Schools community—as faculty, parents, and students—and that with great privilege comes great responsibility. There are many HCCS parents who are eager and able to contribute experience, skills and ideas alongside yours in undertaking this important equity work. We hope that we can work together and help Hunter once again realize its mission to combine excellence and equity.

We would like to schedule time in the coming weeks to speak about how we can move forward and would appreciate your time. You can respond to the Mosaic co-chairs by email ([mosaic@hcespta.org](mailto:mosaic@hcespta.org)).

Sincerely,

*-Parents affiliated with Mosaic and PAAC (Parents of African-American Children)*

## Endnotes

1. Smith, D.G., & Associates. (1997). Diversity works: The emerging picture of how students benefit. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities; Antonio, A. L., Chang, M. J., Hakuta, K., Kenny, D. A., Levin, S., & Milem, J. F. (2004). Effects of racial diversity on complex thinking in college students. *Psychological Science*, 15(8), 507–510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0956-7976.2004.00710.x>; Wells, A. S., Duran, J. & White, T. (2008). Refusing to leave desegregation behind: From graduates of racially diverse schools to the Supreme Court. *Teachers College Record*, 110(12), 2532-2570.
2. Guide to Best Practices in Faculty Search and Hiring, Columbia University available at: <https://provost.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/BestPracticesFacultySearchHiring.pdf>

3. HCHS, BEDS data, Oct. 2019, available at [https://hunterschools.myschoolapp.com/ftpimages/602/download/download\\_3120551.pdf](https://hunterschools.myschoolapp.com/ftpimages/602/download/download_3120551.pdf)
4. NYC DOE, "DOE Data at a Glance," <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>
5. Inside Schools, Stuyvesant High School, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/02M475>
6. Inside Schools, Brooklyn Technical High School, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/13K430>
7. Inside Schools, Bronx High School of Science, available at <https://insideschools.org/school/10X445>
8. NYC DOE data