Mid-Term Report on
MITIGATING THE EFFECTS
OF EDUCATION STRATIFICATION
IN NEW YORK CITY

Prepared for PROFESSOR SAMANTHA MACBRIDE
IDC 4001H: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK CITY
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FOREWORD

Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 formally ended racial discrimination and segregation in school, the workplace and in public accommodations, New York City remains one of the most segregated cities and hosts one of the most segregated school systems in the United States. Our white paper will focus on Introduction No. 511-A, a bill recently introduced in the City Council to increase diversity in New York City schools. The following report is a culmination of weeks of planning, research, and debate. In no way does it reflect all the information and data we have gathered and analyzed thus far, but rather, it is a succinct progress report of our coming White Paper.
Our White Paper is going to begin with an introduction, historical, and contemporary context on education inequality in New York City.

New York City has the largest school system in the United States, but the opportunity to learn is so unequally distributed that it prevents many students from taking advantage of everything the education system has to offer. Our white paper will be a response to Int. No. 511-A and will give our recommendations on how the bill can be more effective in producing lasting and prevalent changes that New York City’s education system so desperately needs. While the intro takes steps to increase diversity in schools - such as reporting statistical changes in demographics and creating/implementing “programs” that will create diversity, we feel that it fails to enforce a proactive aspect in diversifying the success levels of student bodies.

After the intro and background, we will dive straight into the various components of our argument, which include a triple-pronged agenda that we believe is essential for making Intro 511-A a more influential piece of legislation.

We want to implement programs that can diversify the successful student body and less so the actual student population. Our three goals are to (1) create specialized high school exam prep in middle schools, (2) instill magnet school type curriculums in high schools (pre-law, pre-med, arts, environmental engineering, and so on), and (3) add diagnostic exams at the beginning of each school year in order to ensure that students are on track with their work-level. Students that are found to be behind will be placed in special courses that will help them catch up. In order for these goals to be met, they need funding. Especially public schools.

We will use a logic-tree approach in our White Paper. This means that we’ll present a few hypotheses that we believe are quite critical to the entire proposal’s credibility and back them up with analysis of various ‘branches’ of the tree. This analysis will consist of statistics, testimonies, historical backing, and fieldwork observations. The main discussion within our White Paper will be proven accurate, holistic, and credible after each branch is proven to be cohesive and logical.

**EXAMPLE:** A hypothesis can be that “certain high schools and districts are at all time lows for performance and attendance because of a pattern of deteriorating work habits, conditions, and motivational factors from middle school onward”.

**SUPPORTING BRANCH 1:** Statistical backing.
Which middle schools do Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Tech, Bronx Science, Beacon, Townsend applicants come from? How many middle schools offer HS test prep programs?

**SUPPORTING BRANCH 2:** Historical backing
Do schools like August Martin in Queens and DeWitt Clinton in the Bronx consistently fail in school performances despite all sorts of initiatives?

**SUPPORTING BRANCH 3:** Case study examples.
IS 318K’s extremely diverse chess team/academic comparison
The goal of the white paper is provide a more robust and targeted plan to mitigate stratification in education than Intro 511A currently proposes. Rather than simply increasing diversity as an end in itself, we provide the following ways to address diversity and student performance:

- Instill magnet school type curriculum from grades 3-12 (pre-law, pre-med, arts, environmental engineering, and so on)
- Integrate diversity in the school curriculum and provide diversity training
- Provide need based enrichment and free preparation for the Specialized High School Admissions Test
- Add diagnostic exams at the beginning of each school year in order to ensure that students are on track with their work-level
- Promote fiscal equality to make sure funds are equitable appropriated

Ideally, we seek to foster educational hubs where a diverse group of students can thrive not just academically, but intellectually, personally, and emotionally. Under “Concepts” we outline the significance of our initiatives through the lens of post modernism. Increasing diversity appropriately will create exposure to different perspectives, viewpoints, destroy assumptions and stereotypes. Magnet School programs will stimulate curiosity in a variety of different subjects - everything from fine arts to environmental engineering - and will ultimately teach the next generation critical thinking. This ability, coupled with high emotional intelligence, will allow students to deconstruct the meta narratives (more on this term later) and social hierarchies around them to be the innovators of the future.
Our group has used a multi-pronged research approach for gathering useful information. The preliminary stage, which usually utilizes secondary research, came back quite fruitful: we have a large number of quantitative data on nearly each of the 1,700 schools in the New York City public education system. Our general field reports are outlined below in general categories.

This first step required a deeper analysis and understanding of the problem. We primarily used the Schott Foundation’s “Rotting Apple” report and the Civil Rights Project very popular study segregation in New York City. Both studies and reports thoroughly depicted the clear extent of racial segregation and eye-opening differences in academic performance. We also had to dissect over 9 hours (400+ pages) of sheer testimony put before the City Council in regard to Int. 511-A as outlined below.

School Visits / School Administration:
- Levy works in three different public schools during the week. Additionally, once a month he travels to 1-2 other schools to participate in chess tournaments. He is in communication with administration at these schools to learn more about school funding allocations, and diversification progress & efforts.
- Nabil is in communication with an admissions counselor at his Alma Mater, Townsend Harris High School. Townsend Harris High School, though not a specialized high school, is extremely competitive. In 2015, it received more applications than any other New York City High School (excluding specialized high schools).
- Levy has also scheduled an interview with Baruch History Professor Clarence Taylor to learn more historical context about education inequality and discuss his opinions on contemporary efforts to desegregate New York City public schools.

Council Members
- Nabil is also in touch with a Baruch student with ties to the Mayor’s Office. The current Mayor is very outspoken about education equality and highly critical of the Specialized High School Test.
- Adona got in touch with her district council member Rory Lancman who has agreed to meet with us to answer our questions.
- Joeleen has attempted multiple times to get in touch with her district council member, Margaret Chin. Unfortunately she has not replied to any of our requests. Joeleen will visit her office in person to schedule an
interview or ask a few impromptu questions if possible.

Non-Governmental Organizations

- We are trying to reach out to several Non-Governmental Organizations. Among those are the publishers of some of source material: Dr. John Jackson and Dr. Pedro Noguera of The Schott Foundation, the United Federation of Teachers; New York Office, and a fiscal equality advocacy group known as Strong Economy for All - NGO

Questions for proposed interview with Margaret Chin:
1. What were the catalysts and what went in to the decision process of drafting Int. No. 511?
2. How do you think the plans detailed in the intro would impact the community?
3. Do you think that the plans are extensive enough, or could they do more?
4. During the process of drafting Int. No. 511, what areas were hardest parts to gain consensus?
5. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge that New York City schools must overcome today?

Questions for proposed interview with Rory Lancman:
1. Districts that provide a greater opportunity to learn for their residents experience a lower percentage of students that need free and reduced lunch. District 24 has a relatively low percentage of students that need free and reduced lunch. How is race associated with this low percentage?
2. Are there any steps being taken to address the lack of diversity in schools as stated in Int. No. 511-A? For example, John Bowne High School has a 95% minority enrollment, 75% of which are at an economic disadvantage. (http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/new-york/districts/new-york-city-public-schools/john-bowne-high-school-13433/student-bod)
3. Based on Int. No. 511-A, each school has to identify whether its admission is based on a lottery, a geographic zone, a screening of candidates for such school, a standardized test, and etc. How can we improve zoned schools to bring them up to par with schools that require a standardized test?
4. Which middle schools in the district do you believe are the strongest? How can the other middle schools be altered so that they reach their full potential?
FOR THE MOST PART, OUR LOGISTICAL STEPS HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED DOWN TO THE DAY.

We have held weekly meetings and implemented our task manager successfully. Organizing the breadth of research has been our biggest challenge when it comes to time constraints - at times we were concerned if we were going to suffer from information overload - but group members have done a good job of screening exactly what is relevant for our final product.

Originally, the most worrying aspect of the timeline was third-parties not responding to e-mails or phone calls, but even this has turned out quite fine, as we are going to be meeting with at least one council member (Adona’s) and have already held an interview with a professor on campus (Taylor). While we are continuing to reach out to council members and other individuals with unique viewpoints on issues in the Intro/our deliverable, we also are pursuing our own areas of secondary research. With Levy, Shujat, and Nabil having some personal connections to school administrations directly, the group is able to mitigate the damages of not being responded to by any of the people we have reached out to.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tentative Schedule and Important Dates:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, 3/9/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework: Everyone familiarizes with</td>
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<tr>
<td>the history and current statistical</td>
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<td>aspects of the topic; create central</td>
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<td>focus and find people to contact</td>
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<td>Wednesday, 3/11/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework: Have reached out to all</td>
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<tr>
<td>contacts; create a diagram for how</td>
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<td>all central themes will connect, as</td>
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<td>well as all readings;</td>
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<td>Saturday, 3/14/15</td>
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<td>Complete 1-2 Interviews (with</td>
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<td>professors and other close contacts)</td>
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<td>and have reached out to proponents</td>
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<td>and opponents of the Intro</td>
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<td>Thursday, 3/19/15</td>
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<td>Homework: finalize report if not</td>
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<td>Monday, 3/23/15</td>
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<td>Thursday, 4/2/15</td>
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<td>Homework: Complete 3 more</td>
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<td>interviews within the next 7 days</td>
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Each person in our group is responsible per one area of research. We are continuing to meet in person and via Google Hangouts to complete work and brainstorm concepts. Levy is researching the United Federation of Teachers and smaller organizations fighting for funding. He interviewed Professor Clarence Taylor who suggested looking into the magnet school philosophy, which has an emphasis on both diversity and excellence in the student body. Magnet schools often use a lottery system for admission and specialize in a specific area of study. Professor Taylor suggested instituting citywide programs in middle school to prepare kids for getting into academically strong high schools. Joeleen is going to focus on nonprofits that try to encourage students in underserved neighborhoods. She emailed her district councilmember, Margaret Chin, but has yet to receive a response back. In the upcoming week, Joeleen plans on calling and going to the office herself to try and get an interview in-person with Chin. Adona is in charge of researching the historical records of any sort of diagnostic exam; if she is unable to find something along these lines, she will pitch the idea to her councilmember, Rory Lancman. Adona has received a response from Lancman’s secretary and is compiling a set of questions to ask him in regard to schools in her own district, as well as others he specifically might’ve had in mind when drafting Intro 511-A.

Shujat is currently in touch with a manager who works at Khan’s Tutorial and is in the process of organizing possible phone interviews with some of the managing directors. The questions to be asked will pertain to topics like standardized testing and specialized tests needed to qualify for technical high schools. The issues that we see with our current educational system have become so severe that the tests gauge students’ intelligence and knowledge based on the curriculum provided in either their respective schools or extracurricular study programs. How will successful organizations like these (Khan’s Tutorial) that make their living off of our current system adapt if any changes were to be implemented? The research done by Shujat will help create a new platform that is solidified in its feasibility and practicality. Nabil has done extensive data collection for the group from the New York website for schools, Schott Foundation’s report, UCLA Civil Rights report, various news articles, InsideSchools.org, and others. He has helped tie together a lot of overarching concepts more concretely through the use of historical data while also sticking to the postmodern agenda of breaking away from structured thinking.
The White Paper we propose deals with diversifying success and challenging the status quo of massively stratified education in New York City – proactively. Originally, the plan had been to emphasize education as laying down the groundwork for what the next century will look like. Our group began with the hypothesis that “diversifying and increasing performances in New York City schools is investing in the future of New York City as a whole.”

However, we came to understand that this was a grandiose assertion without much practical backing. Instead, we chose to take the hybrid approach between diversity and holistic educational success, both of which would connect to the theme of postmodernism in class. At its very core, postmodernism is “incredulity toward metanarratives”, as was mentioned by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Postmodernist thinking, as hard as it is to explain, attempts to challenge erected ‘structures’ in the social, bureaucratic, humanitarian, educational, medical, and even corporate fields. After modernist thinking called on logic to be the ultimate shaper of truths, postmodernism encouraged skepticism of the very same philosophy. Having all of this in mind, our group conferenced and tirelessly debated the true significance of diversifying the successful student body in New York City, ultimately coming up with a lot of interesting points that were sizzling with postmodern thought.

First and foremost, it is imperative to refer to Lyotard once again - this time an excerpt from Chapter 1 of The Postmodern Condition: “The Field: Knowledge in Computerised Societies”. Lyotard states that contemporary education is not categorized by “knowledge and ignorance, but rather, as is the case with money, between ‘payment knowledge’ and ‘investment knowledge’”. What he means by this is quite simple to understand: the learning frameworks of children need to serve a greater purpose than just for routine daily activities. We are in a world of critical thinking. Structured, formulaic curriculums are things of the past, and it is essential to keep this in mind when building curriculums and fostering environments of academic/personal growth in classrooms. This is where our Magnet program recommendation comes in, presenting students with opportunities in a vast array of fields, industries, and services. P.S. 41 is a fantastic example of such a school, where youngsters are exposed to gardens and green rooftop studies that are intertwined with traditional curriculums. There is no reason why this cannot be seen ubiquitously across the five boroughs!

A second profound concept within postmodernism is deconstruction, which is the
process of analyzing and critiquing certain truths that are already held as self-evident (not to be confused with human rights in the Declaration of Independence). Kate Ellis uses this approach with her students, saying this about her classroom atmosphere: “if [I] can first undermine [my] students’ belief in the superiority of capitalist values and of the idea that people make or break themselves, then their core values will be de-stabilized.” (Hicks, 188). This postmodern teaching philosophy can be applied outside the curriculum as well, by deconstructing the underpinnings, values, and frameworks of neighborhoods, school districts, and student bodies. All of the programs that we bring up in our deliverable (special prep for exams, diagnostic test, Magnet Programs) apply to this postmodern style of learning, as well as the Intro 511-A itself. The original piece of legislation can be considered the first step toward a postmodern philosophy being applied to the New York City school system. It calls for a beautiful process: letting kids know from an early age that social hierarchies are there to be challenged and overcome, ideally diversifying everything from Specialized High School application pools to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which currently ranks minority students in the lowest percentiles (Jackson, Noguera, 21).

This is the hybrid version of legislation that we have devised for education and diversifying success. It does not directly relate to our structured topics in class: environment, energy, waste processes, transportation, and so on, but it can - by applying postmodernist concepts and breaking away from the frameworks we know. By empowering students at an early age with the ability to think critically and challenge the status quo, we help them develop a sense of identity. These collective identities, in turn, “are not fixed, but continually in process, as the boundaries between themselves and others, and between the different parts of themselves are negotiated”, as the New Zealand Council for Educational Research reports.