

Eliminate “Specialized Academic” Bonus to 13 Screened and Specialized High Schools

Savings: \$20 million annually

Every year, the New York City Department of Education allocates additional funding to 13 public high schools with “supplementary instruction and assessments, including higher course/credit loads and AP courses.” These 13 schools include the eight specialized high schools where students are admitted based on the results of the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT): The Bronx High School of Science, The Brooklyn Latin School, Brooklyn Technical High School, High School for Mathematics, Science and Engineering at City College of New York, High School of American Studies at Lehman College, Queens High School for the Sciences at York College, Staten Island Technical High School, and Stuyvesant High School. The remaining five high schools receiving this allocation use other academic screens to admit students selectively: Bard High School Early College, NYC iSchool, Millennium Brooklyn High School, Bard High School Early College Queens, and Townsend Harris High School.

This “Specialized Academic” allocation is a component of the Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula, which funds schools based on a weighted per-pupil basis designed to provide additional funding to students with greater need and is the largest source of discretionary dollars for schools. Through the FSF formula, the 13 schools listed above are set to receive an additional \$1,055 per student for the 2021-2022 school year (the amount is the same at all 13 schools). Typically, this allocation represents about 16 percent of the total FSF allocations received by the 13 schools.

Based on school enrollment from the 2020-2021 school year, the total amount these schools would receive for the current school year is just over \$20 million, ranging from \$6 million for Brooklyn Tech to \$400,000 for the High School of American Studies at Lehman College. The value of the academic bonus has been relatively stable over the years, with per-student allocations increasing slightly from \$1,021 in the 2017-2018 school year to \$1,055 in 2021-2022. Total enrollment at the 13 eligible high schools has grown by an average of 1.0 percent annually between 2016-2017 and 2020-2021, with 19,471 students enrolled in 2020-2021.

Proponents might argue that most of these schools are already well-resourced, having experienced teachers and well-connected parents and alumni. Some, like Brooklyn Tech, Bronx Science and Stuyvesant, boast significant endowments to help fund extracurricular activities. Given that these 13 high schools are not the only schools which educate/enroll academically well-prepared students with advanced curricula and/or AP courses, this is an inequitable use of funds. Proponents might also argue that this allocation is inequitable because of the disproportionately low number of Black students and Hispanic students enrolled in these 13 schools. Further, this funding is for supplemental enrichment rather than student need, although the latter is the primary focus of FSF.

Opponents might argue that these schools, admitting many of the most academically advanced students in the city, need these extra resources for supplementary instruction and assessments including higher course/credit loads and AP courses. Also, because the schools have historically received this money, removing this allocation from school budgets would be disruptive to these schools.