"All of the different problems that have come up in my research all come back to education. If we were able to teach kids better, then there would be more opportunities for them as adults. More jobs and less inequality in their futures."

Nicole Mader
Senior Research Fellow
Center for New York City Affairs
Over a quarter of a million students are enrolled in the 400+ New York City (NYC) public high schools. Who decides what school a student can attend? What factors influence this decision? How does segregation in NYC public high schools happen in such a diverse city?

CUP collaborated with Teaching Artist Nupur Mathur and students from the Red Hook Community Justice Center to peel back the layers on school segregation. Students got out of the classroom and into the politics of education to speak with people invested in the future of NYC’s public high schools, from students and parents to educators and policy makers.

This booklet is a guide to school choice, the impact decisions make on a student’s future, plus the superheroes and villains of school segregation.

"The definition of poverty is a lack of options. The definition of education means opening the door for options. If you get an education, you’ve got options."

Dr. Douglas Ready
Associate Professor of Education and Public Policy
Columbia University
School zones limit who can enroll in NYC public elementary and middle schools based on your home address.

Find your school zone at http://schools.nyc.gov/SchoolSearch/

"With zoned schools, the area where a student lives determines where they can go to school. If you have a lot of residential segregation, residential segregation then becomes school segregation. We’ve done some research showing that some of the neighborhoods are more diverse than they are in the school, so zoning isn’t the only problem. Students are opting out of their public zoned schools and choosing other options like charter or private schools.”
Public high schools are not zoned and are open to any NYC student no matter where you live. Students fill out 1 application and select their top 12 schools out of over 400 that they want to attend. There is a separate application for Specialized High Schools that includes an additional entrance test or audition.

Even though it is the same application, each high school has a different admissions method to evaluate and select students.

View school ratings at https://insideschools.org/

Follow a step-by-step guide on how to apply at http://welcometocup.org/OldSchoolNewSchool/

Find info on Public High School admissions at http://schoolfinder.nyc.gov/

"A lot of inequality outcomes for kids are there before high school even starts . . . The elementary schools that you attend make a huge impact on the high schools that students can attend. Segregation starts at a young age."
WHAT INFLUENCES WHAT SCHOOL A STUDENT ATTEND?

From applications to school location, there are various factors that influence the school selection process.

“Students of color aren’t encouraged to take [Advanced Placement] classes and they’re not given the resources they need. In our school it was apparent that students of color had less resources than white students. White students had money for extra help like tutors but many students of color didn’t have that extra support.”

Aneth Naranjo
Director of Youth Engagement
IntegrateNYC4me

“Grades affect which school you can get into.”

Malik Boston
Student

“Most kids who want to go to school have greater motivation to be successful in their grades.”
“We are separated by policies that put some people in a position of privilege while oppressing other people. The most sought after high schools in the city have tests to get into them, which act as a barrier to both entrance and to equity. They maintain segregation.”

Nicole Mader
Senior Research Fellow
Center for New York City Affairs

“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT WHAT THE KIDS LOOK LIKE, IT’S ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TEACHERS, THE PRINCIPAL AND THE SCHOOL AS A WHOLE THAT IMPACT SCHOOL CHOICE. SOME STUDENTS MIGHT BE WILLING TO TRAVEL FARTHER OUT OF THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD BECAUSE THEY’RE WORRIED ABOUT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION THEY WILL RECEIVE FROM THEIR LOCAL SCHOOL THAT MAY HAVE LESS RESOURCES OR LOWER RATINGS.”

Lisa Donlan
Community Education Council District 1 President
Teachers Unite Board Member
Segregation impacts everybody. There’s a lot of research that shows that diverse learning environments have a very positive impact on students no matter their background. We live in a multicultural society, it’s becoming more diverse every year, yet our neighborhoods and schools are still segregated at multiple levels.

The majority of funding comes straight from property taxes. So neighborhoods with rich families get more money and more resources for their schools and get a chance to hire better teachers, create better programs, and more things to attract students to their schools. Then there’s private funds through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), so wealthier families can afford to donate more to their school. The formula is very different at every school.

Anya Kamenetz
Author and Lead Digital Education Reporter
National Public Radio (NPR)
"There is a segregation of resources. Some schools get a lot of resources while other schools don’t. That happens in different ways at both a city and state level, with our government not giving us the resources that we need."

"One of the biggest problems in my district is that the schools are over-populated. Some schools are 200% over crowded, which means that every classroom space is beyond capacity. That’s a huge impact."

Michael Williams
Student

Carlos Menchaca
New York City Council Member
District 38
The United States Supreme Court declared in the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas that segregation in schools was unlawful and that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” How have NYC public schools changed since this ruling in 1954?

“It has been many generations since the Brown vs. the Board of Education, and we see that schools are not the way that we want them to be. They don't reflect the ideal society that we want and we continue to produce inequality from generation to generation.”
“Different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, new English language learners, and students with disabilities should be served in all schools, not just some select schools. We are still segregating schools, whether it’s by zoning or by choice or by screening. What we’ve created in New York City are schools with limited resources that are serving mostly high need students, rather than all schools serving these students. This is the inequity that is unacceptable. This is born of our history, of our institutional racism, white supremacy, and privilege that the system propagates itself. It hurts everybody.”

Lisa Donlan
Community Education Council District 1 President
Teachers Unite Board Member
“People with money have better access to good schools than those who don’t. Parents with money have the time and the ability to figure out which the best schools are for their kids.”

“A lot of what influences racial segregation in New York City schools is housing. The city has very high concentrations of poverty that surround schools that make it very difficult for those neighborhoods to have successful schools. That’s a poverty issue in combination with a race issue. That is the most tenacious part of segregation.”
“Your chance to get into schools is put to only one test. The same test for every student from every school. But students learn differently and have different resources to get support for those tests. You can’t expect the same results from the same test when students are not given the same support and the same resources.”

INCLUSIVE PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS

“Students of color are often not represented by parents in their own PTA. Students of color often have parents that work multiple jobs or don’t speak English so it’s hard for them to participate. We need to find various ways to include ALL parents in the PTA.”
Our school funding depends on local tax dollars. In the United States there is a huge disparity between rich neighborhoods and poor neighborhoods in the amount of money that is spent on education, from the amount we can pay teachers to the quality of education overall. In other countries, the funding is mostly national and rich kids and poor kids get roughly the same quality of education. We could do that here.

I prefer equity of access instead of diversity. Even if something is diverse, it may not be that everyone has equal access to the same kinds of resources, facilities, and teachers with experience. How do we make schools better and fair? I would like to find schools that look like the city's they are in, that serve the whole spectrum of kids and families that they serve.
“There’s a lot of argument over how much money actually matters. Money in general doesn’t matter but it’s how you use the money. Sometimes that means having smaller classes with more teachers, which costs money. There’s evidence that smaller class sizes actually do help low-income kids learn. Teachers matter a lot to kids learning. Resources matter, but it’s not all about textbooks. It’s other things.”

“I think an easy policy change for high school would be to change the screens that are required to get into some high schools and make it more accessible for students of different academic abilities to get in. A lot of the reason why high schools are so segregated by race and socioeconomic status is that the academic records from middle school prevents a lot of kids from getting into better schools. We should make it easier for diverse academic abilities to get into a lot of the city’s high schools.”

“Pre-kindergarten that all 4 year olds are now getting in New York City is great. This is a step forward. The achievement gaps actually start way before school starts, so this early step can help in eventually getting into a great high school.”
How can you create change?

Join a Community Education Council!

Apply to be on your local Community Education Council at http://nycparentleaders.org/community-education-councils.html

Attend your local Community Board!

We want everyone to talk to policymakers and influence their decisions.

Submit an idea and vote in participatory budgeting!

Submit your idea for Participatory Budgeting at https://council.nyc.gov/pb/

Speak with policymakers!

Contact your local council member at https://council.nyc.gov/

Nicole Mader
Senior Research Fellow
Center for New York City Affairs
"As a young person, I wanted to have a voice and organize my people because my people need to get involved. So I think the most cool thing to do in this city is to be a council member. We are at the ground. We are at the forefront of what is happening in the city. My job is to advocate for my district, for the people of New York City, and to make things better."

"We bring 2 million dollars to every district in the city, and you as a community get a chance to decide how to spend that money on a capital project like improving schools. As young as 6th graders can vote in Participatory Budgeting, so even if you're not 18, you can still vote."

"If you are committed to ending segregation, which I believe you all are, then you need to show up. It's not going to happen by not doing anything. You need to show up, be heard, do your research because you are smart, and share your experiences because they matter. It's not just about data, it's about your experience. You can make an impact and create change."

Carlos Menchaca
New York City Council Member
District 38
ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE AT YOUR SCHOOL!

“Meet with your principal on the changes you want to see in your school. Advocate for a staff body that represents the student population. Ask for cultural sensitivity training for teachers. Ask for cultural clubs in your school. Ask for integration.”

Create an IntegrateNYC4Me chapter in your school at http://www.integratenyc4me.com/build/

Julisa Perez
Director of Local Outreach
IntegrateNYC4me
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The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities.

This project is one of CUP's Urban Investigations – project-based after-school programs in which high school students explore fundamental questions about how the city works. Students collaborate with CUP and Teaching Artists to create multimedia teaching tools that reach audiences in the fields of arts and social justice.

To learn more about CUP, visit welcometoCUP.org.

The Red Hook Community Justice Center (RHCJC) is the nation's first multi-jurisdictional community court and is part of The Center for Court Innovation that seeks to help create a more effective and humane justice system by designing and implementing operating programs, performing original research, and providing reformers around the world with the tools they need to launch new strategies.

To learn more about the RHCJC, visit courtinnovation.org.

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