



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on August 12, 2014

## Attacking Achievement

New York's mayor, Bill de Blasio, like so many others who call themselves "progressive," is gung-ho to solve social problems. In fact, he is currently on a crusade to solve an educational problem that doesn't exist, even though there are plenty of other educational problems that definitely do exist.

The non-existent problem is the use of tests to determine who gets admitted to the city's three most outstanding public high schools — Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Tech. These admissions tests have been used for generations, and the students in these schools have had spectacular achievements for generations.

These achievements include many Westinghouse Science awards, Intel Science awards and — in later life — Pulitzer Prizes and multiple Nobel Prizes. Graduates of Bronx Science alone have gone on to win five Nobel Prizes in physics alone. There are Nobel Prize winners from Stuyvesant and Brooklyn Tech as well.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it" is a motto that Mayor de Blasio and many other activist politicians pay no attention to. He is also out to curtail charter schools, which include schools that have achieved outstanding education results for poor minority students, who cannot get even adequate results in all too many of the other public schools.

What is wrong with charter schools and with elite high schools like Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Tech? Despite their educational achievements, they have political problems.

The biggest political problem is that the teachers' unions don't like them — and the teachers' unions are the 800-pound gorilla among the special interests in Bill de Blasio's Democratic Party.

The next biggest political problem is that people who don't pass the tests for the elite public high schools don't want to have to pass tests to get in.

Their politicians have been denouncing these admissions tests for decades, and so have various other ethnic community "leaders." These include spokesmen for "civil rights" organizations, who think their civil rights include getting into these elite schools, whether they qualify or not.

Finally, there are the intelligentsia, who all too often equate achievement with privilege. In times past, such people called Stuyvesant "a free prep school for Jews" and "a privileged little ivory tower."

That was clever, but cleverness is not wisdom. Back in those days, Jewish youngsters were over-represented among the students at all three elite public high schools. Today it is Asian students who are a majority at those same schools — more than twice as many Asians as whites in all three schools.

Black and Hispanic students are rare at all three elite public high schools, and becoming rarer.





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Many among the intelligentsia and politicians express astonishment that the ethnic makeup of these schools is so different from the demographic makeup of the city.

But such differences between groups are common in countries around the world. But in each country there are people who say that it is strange — and demand a “solution” to this “problem.”

In Malaysia, for example, before group quotas were established at the country’s universities, students from the Chinese minority earned more than 400 engineering degrees in the 1960s, while students from the Malay majority earned just 4.

When a university was established in 19th century Romania, there were more German students than Romanian students, and most of the professors were German. The same was true for most of the 19th century when a university was established in Estonia.

In none of these cases did the group that was over-represented have any power to discriminate against groups that were under-represented.

If racism is the reason why there are so few blacks in Stuyvesant High School, why were blacks a far higher proportion in Stuyvesant in earlier times, as far back as 1938? Was there less racism in 1938? Was there less poverty among blacks in 1938?

We know that there were far fewer black children raised in single-parent homes back then and there was far less social degeneracy represented by things like gangsta rap. If Mayor de Blasio wants to solve real problems, let him take these on.

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