



The Neglect of NYC's English Language Learner and Special Needs Students

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Analysis of New York City's District School Enrollment Reveals a Shockingly Unbalanced Distribution of the City's Highest-Need Students

Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña made a series of unsubstantiated and politically motivated comments about charter schools last week. Among these was the accusation that charters, which operate primarily in the city's poorest neighborhoods, deliberately exclude disadvantaged children—especially English language learners and students with disabilities.

“I would like to see an equal number of English language learners and special-needs kids in all the schools, which represents whatever the ratio is in that district,” she said, according to Capital New York.

If so, the chancellor should be focusing her energies on the dozens of NYC district schools that enroll almost none of those children. In fact, there are more than 100 NYC schools with virtually no English language learner or special needs students. A look at the actual data shows:

English Language Learners

- There are **429 traditional public schools** that enroll English language learners at a rate **less than half** that of their districts.
- There are 29 district schools with **zero** English language learners and 88 schools where less than 1% of students are English language learners.
- Most district schools—929 of them, or 59% of all schools—enroll fewer ELLs than the average for their districts. English language learners all across the city are aggressively sorted into a relatively small number of schools.
- There are 136,000 ELL students in NYC district public schools. Of the schools with more ELL students than district averages, 24% are severely failing. Schools with more ELL students than average are nearly twice as likely to be severely failing than schools with fewer ELL students than district averages.

Students With Disabilities

- There are **101 traditional public schools** that enroll students with disabilities at a rate **less than half** that of their districts.
- There are 59 district schools where less than 5% of students receive support services for disabilities (even though the citywide average is 17%)

- There are 612 district schools that enroll a smaller proportion of students with disabilities than the average for their districts.
- There are 158,000 special needs students in the NYC district public schools. Of the schools that enroll more special needs students than district averages, 27% are chronically and severely failing—fewer than one in ten students are meeting academic and college readiness standards. A school with more special needs students than average is more than five times as likely to be failing as a school with fewer special needs students than average.

New York City Charter School Comparisons

- According to the New York City Charter School Center, 6% of NYC charter school students are English language learners (compared with 14% citywide) and 16% are children with special needs (compared with the DOE's 17%).
- Unlike the many selective middle and high schools, and gifted and talented programs, across the city, charter schools do not select their students. When there are more applicants than available seats, students are accepted by random lottery.

Many district schools **explicitly reject** kids who don't meet academic performance requirements—exactly what the chancellor wrongfully accuses charters of doing. For example, approximately one-third of all district middle school and high school seats are filled through selective admissions. These seats are effectively off limits to the low-income children of color who are failed by bad neighborhood elementary schools.