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Upper East Side to get a tough new HS

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The Board of Education unanimously approved a plan to open a rigorous academic high school on Manhattan's upper East Side next fall.

In an effort to placate parents who argued that the proposed school did not meet their needs because it would be open to all students in District 2, Board of Ed officials and community leaders agreed to reserve 80% of the seats in the school for the highest-achieving students.

"This is not going to have any racial, ethnic or class distinctions," said Irving Hamer, the school board representative from Manhattan.

Students will be admitted based on a combination of standardized tests scores and attendance, among other factors.

The battle for the school began years ago when middle-class parents argued that the city's high schools were inferior and sought a neighborhood school that was a suitable alternative to the elite Stuyvesant High School and Bronx High School of Science.

Many of the original supporters of the school turned against the proposal last month after District 2 officials announced their intentions to open the school to students from the entire district, which snakes down the West Side to lower Manhattan.

"We wanted a neighborhood school," parent Jeanne Kassler told board members last night, urging them to vote against the plan.

Since then, accusations that white parents did not want minority students in their children's school flared. Even so, the board last month approved a lease for the building in a former Sotheby's warehouse at 411 E. 76th St.

The new school will open next fall with 125 ninth-grade students. It will add a grade each year until it enrollment reaches 500.

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