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Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

Integration and Equity 2.0

New and Reinvigorated Approaches to School Integration

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

September 2023

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Preface

About AIR and the AIR Equity Initiative

About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health and human services, and the workforce. AIR's work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the United States and abroad. For more information, visit air.org.

About the AIR Equity Initiative

In 2021, AIR launched the AIR Equity Initiative, a 5-year, $100 million+ investment in behavioral and social science research and technical assistance to address the underlying causes of systemic inequities and to increase opportunities for people and communities. By funding inclusive and collaborative research and technical assistance efforts that engage partners from the beginning, the AIR Equity Initiative aims to foster bolder, strategic, and sustained ways to advance equity, especially in areas where investment is limited. Learn more at www.air.org/equity.

About the AIR Equity Initiative's Improving Educational Experiences Program Area

In an equitable educational system, a student's race and place of residence should not predict their access to the opportunities and resources that promote thriving and academic success. AIR Equity Initiative–funded projects in this program area aim to improve educational experiences and outcomes for students affected by the consequences of segregation. Specifically, these grants support projects that study and develop processes, interventions, and tools, in partnership with school districts and communities, to advance solutions that address the root causes of educational inequity. This work also aims to strengthen and learn from policy and technical assistance efforts to reduce racial segregation in housing and education across communities, districts, schools, and classrooms.

Call For Essays: Process and Perspectives

The AIR Equity Initiative issued a call for essays in August 2022 to inform and guide its work in educational equity and lift up evidence-based insights and ideas from the field. The authors of these essays are experts and practitioners in the field and their thoughts and viewpoints are based on deep knowledge and experience. However, it is important to note that the opinions and viewpoints in these essays are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or viewpoints of AIR, its staff, or its leadership.

Acknowledgments

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[*] The black-and-white cover image is from the records of the National Park Service. Youth march for integrated schools, October 25, 1958. National Archives at College Park, MD. https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/integration-youth-march. Photo licensed under a Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0 license.

Welcome Letter

A Call for Integration and Educational Equity

As we approach the 70th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, we should be celebrating this landmark ruling that found "separate but equal" in education was unconstitutional and required the desegregation of U.S. public schools. But instead of celebrating, there is a pervasive sense of concern.

The truth is that, after some initial progress, we are moving backwards. U.S. schools are more segregated today than they were 30 years ago. There are multiple reasons for this: Many policy-based efforts to better integrate our schools are being successfully challenged in court, and some communities—often ones that are predominantly white—are "seceding" from their public schools and creating their own school districts.

The reality is that the demographics of public schools often reflect the racial and class composition of the local neighborhood—and our neighborhoods are also becoming more segregated. In fact, 80% of our cities are more segregated today than they were decades ago.

In the largest U.S. metropolitan areas, more than half of the Black and white populations would have to move to another neighborhood to integrate those areas. In fact, in 2020, the average dissimilarity score was 53, meaning 53% of white and Black people would have to move for their city to be integrated. Cities such as Memphis; Baltimore; Washington, DC; and Birmingham have a much higher than average dissimilarity index, and other cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Miami, Jersey City, and Philadelphia, have dissimilarity indices over 70.

Many people believe that the mere passage of time will lead to a less racially segregated society. But racial progress takes work. The United States cannot get on an escalator to being less racist simply because the year is 2023 and not 1963. Segregation is a stain that affects housing prices, policing practices and incarceration, maternal and infant mortality, workforce opportunities, and education trajectories. The inverse of this, which is often less stated, is that integration improves outcomes for everyone. In school settings, integration is associated with improved test scores, college enrollment, critical thinking, access to highly qualified teachers, well-maintained facilities, advanced

placement courses, and school funding. Integrated classrooms help students with collaboration, creativity, and leadership principles. Altogether, integration is an asset.

This is why the essays presented by the AIR Equity Initiative are so significant—they discuss the importance of integration rather than desegregation. Integration is a more active process, driven by assets instead of deficits. Instead of focusing solely on the removal of inequality, the AIR Equity Initiative works to build structures and systems that forge integration and create educational equity. We requested these essays to help direct our investments in improving education.

Edited by Terris Ross, managing director of the AIR Equity Initiative, and Jaspal Bhatia, program officer with the AIR Equity Initiative, these essays surface ideas from the field that can help spark a renewed commitment from funders, policymakers, practitioners, and communities, and advance fresh approaches to school integration and equity. We need to revisit the original rationale to desegregate before, during, and after *Brown v. Board of Education*; examine current conditions and the reality of schools and segregation today; and chart a new path to achieve educational equity through an asset-driven approach to school integration.

We hope you will be inspired by the ideas presented in this collection and will join us in this important work.

Rashawn Ray, PhD
Vice President and Executive Director of the AIR Equity Initiative
American Institutes for Research

Prologue

Robert Kim, Education Law Center, and H. Richard Milner IV, Vanderbilt University

Introduction

This important volume brings together leading thinkers committed to advancing equity agendas through efforts of desegregation and integration. To understand the purpose behind this collection of essays, it helps to look to its title: *Integration and Equity 2.0*.

Consider first the choice of the word "integration," as opposed to "desegregation." Whereas the latter term is undeniably historical—referring to the court-ordered dismantling of Jim Crow and the separate-but-equal doctrine—the former suggests something deeper. That is, integration suggests more than simply forming a community of students of diverse backgrounds within the same schools; it advances the idea that students from different backgrounds have access to or benefit from supportive systems, practices, policies, resources, and overall conditions in those schools.

The inclusion of "and equity" in the title appears to challenge us to go further still—to explore a world in which racial or socioeconomic diversity in schools is pursued not merely for its own sake but in service of a more holistic and moral "apparatus" or ecosystem that fosters parity of opportunity and outcomes.[1] Equity also moves beyond the historical framing of desegregation efforts that focused on equality (sameness); *equity* (justice) has a community-responsive dimension based on the assets and challenges of those within a social context. That is, equity demands a concentrated effort on the codesign and codevelopment of mechanisms that are not necessarily equally distributed but are allocated based on what is necessary for communities to thrive. Thus, equity focuses on ensuring that marginalized and minoritized students do more than simply survive.[2]

And what are we to make of "2.0"? The numeral-plus-decimal seems to ground us not in some bygone era but in the here and now—the digital age, an age of constantly updating software programs and mobile phones. What's more, 2.0 presupposes the existence of a 1.0: a prior chapter, a past (perhaps outdated or ultimately unsuccessful) effort at school integration, equity, or, at least, desegregation. The very mention of 2.0

prods us, subtly but insistently, to reboot, to seek a new version, a fresh start, revising what we have come to learn from 1.0.

Why We Need a Fresh Start: Assessing the History and Current State of Integration Efforts

Do we need a version 2.0 strategy for pursuing and pressing toward integration and equity? The answer may be self-evident; with our own eyes, we can see who, by race or income level, attends what kind of public school today. A more definitive answer, however, is readily apparent from the briefest scan of relevant data, law, and studies on the impact of race and poverty on teaching, learning, and human development.

The most obvious data reveal a resounding lack of success at desegregation: Nearly 70 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, students in pre-K–12 schools remain highly segregated by race and economic status, which has contributed to deeply unequal, inequitable, and unjust opportunities and outcomes.[3,4] We know that schools attended by predominately white students receive $23 billion more than those attended by mostly students of color.[5,6] Today, two of five Black and Latinx students attend schools where more than 90% of their classmates are non-white (see Potter et al., Chapter 5.3). But we are not pushing for a resurrection of efforts at desegregation and integration solely for the sake of more resources or racially and socioeconomically diverse students in schools. Rather, we hope this volume sheds light on how integration can be a vehicle for a democracy that is just, humanizing, and liberating, as young people realize what Walker described as their highest potential.[7]

Racial segregation and economic segregation often overlap in pre-K–12 public schools. Black and Latinx students, on average, attend schools with a far higher share of students living in poverty. Twenty-eight percent of Black children and 19% of Latinx children are living in areas of concentrated poverty, compared to 6% of Asian American children and just 4% of white students.[8]

Moreover, racial and economic segregation in schools has worsened considerably since the 1980s. The share of schools enrolling at least 90% non-white students had more than tripled from 5.7% in 1988 to 18.2% in 2016.[9] All of the desegregation gains in the South achieved since 1967 in the years following *Brown v. Board* have been wiped out,[10] and segregation in the South may be accelerating due to district secessions.[11] Meanwhile, considerable achievement gaps in math and reading between white

students and Black and Latinx students have remained constant or have widened.[12,13] These trends demonstrate how the country's goal of desegregation and integration has failed dramatically and seems to be worsening over time. Indeed, as political polarization intensifies by race, we suggest that this volume become a tool for thinking about how integration can play a role in helping to mitigate what Milner has discussed as a race war within nation-states.[14]

Much like school segregation, residential segregation has remained entrenched in U.S. communities: Out of every metropolitan region in the United States with more than 200,000 residents, 81% were more segregated in 2019 than they were in 1990. It has been noted that,

> unlike school desegregation, the nation never embarked on a national project to integrate neighborhoods, let alone declared an unambiguous commitment to that goal. There has never been a *Brown v. Board of Education*–like decision for housing, mandating a deliberate, proactive effort to integrate neighborhoods.[15]

The ability of education leaders and policymakers to use the law to foster school desegregation and student diversity has been hampered over the last 50 years. The impact of this cannot be overstated. Consider that the highpoint of synergistic interplay between law and desegregation occurred somewhere between 1968 and 1971, when the U.S. Supreme Court stated that schools had an "affirmative duty" to eliminate the vestiges of segregation "root and branch" and gave federal courts wide latitude in fashioning remedies to eliminate racial segregation.[16] During that same time period, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare filed more than 600 administrative proceedings against segregated school districts and cut off funding to 200 schools for noncompliance, and the U.S. Department of Justice initiated more than 500 school desegregation lawsuits.[17]

Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, the Supreme Court issued a string of rulings narrowing the scope and duration of judicial and government oversight over schools' desegregation efforts; that oversight has dwindled to a bare whisper today. Then, in 2007, the Supreme Court declared that pre-K–12 student assignment plans designed to increase racial diversity were nothing short of unconstitutional "racial balancing," thereby ushering in an era in which it is no longer clear whether federal law serves as aid or impediment in the struggle to desegregate.[18] Most recently, the court outlawed

consideration of students' race in higher education admissions programs.[19] Although there is no immediate impact on pre-K–12 programs, the decision augurs the further narrowing of strategies available to integrate pre-K–12 schools.

Finally, we must confront how prior attempts at desegregation failed children themselves. Desegregation efforts almost always meant that Black students were bused outside their neighborhood to school. While this was beneficial in some ways, research is clear that it harmed the educational experiences of some Black children.[20,21,22,23] For instance, approximately 38,000 Black teachers and administrators lost their positions between 1954 and 1965.[24,25] Research shows that, even if Black educators were not in fact dismissed, they were demoted or forced to transfer. For Black students, access to Black teachers is not arbitrary or inconsequential. Research shows the enormous benefits of Black students having Black instructors, because, with Black students, these teachers can co-construct curricular, instructional, assessment, and relational practices that are highly advantageous.[26]

Mindful of such research, the authors in this volume address pressing and enduring issues that might help us reach a form of integration and equity that honors the humanity and brilliance of young people across difference and moves us beyond previous frameworks for desegregation that were highly problematic for too many in Black communities. Our aims must not focus on integration simply for the sake of racially and otherwise mixed students in schools. What this volume offers is a way of thinking about integration and educational equity as an imperative that *rights the wrongs* of failed desegregation efforts that had disrupted structural and systemic assets benefiting Black children.

Themes and Ideas Represented in *Integration and Equity 2.0*

The authors in this volume do not represent the complete spectrum of ideas or voices, including those from many of the diverse communities most impacted by school segregation and racial isolation. Perhaps no publication could achieve this. But they do represent some of those voices—and a range of approaches to school integration that can jumpstart community conversations. They consider research, advocacy, policy, and practice. They elevate both new and under-explored strategies. They address interrelated and intersecting challenges concerning housing and transportation, law, politics and policy, school funding, and student- and community-related dynamics and

needs. And they showcase collaborative possibilities across diverse sectors, both governmental and nongovernmental.

In **Part 1**, contributors explore the federal role in promoting school integration. The modest scale of federal coordination and support for integration in states and districts, particularly considering the developments highlighted above, is noteworthy.

In "Adapting to Adaptive Discrimination in Educational Policy," the authors highlight the need for more robust federal involvement by demonstrating how "race-evasive legislation" is a direct reaction to growing progress and diversity in the United States. The authors call for the federal government to work with civil rights organizations, researchers, professional associations, philanthropies, and youth organizations to address historical inequities and persistent structures that have perpetuated harm over time—and to engage in antidiscrimination, equity-oriented, and race-conscious efforts designed to create learning environments where all students thrive. In "Deliberate Speed: Creating the Conditions for Voluntary School Integration," the author proposes a new federal program that would incentivize schools to foster greater diversity by increasing their funding as their enrollment demographics more closely resemble those of the surrounding region. In "Prioritizing School Integration in the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Process" and "Supporting School Integration Through the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program," the authors highlight the potential of the federal government, at long last, to breathe new life into the goal of aligning education, housing, and transportation policy to address the intertwined realities of school and neighborhood segregation. Whether through regulatory reform, sophisticated "data mapping," or expansion of "housing mobility" programs, the authors show how the federal government is uniquely positioned to remedy generations of pernicious redlining, discrimination, and hostility toward community diversity.

In **Part 2**, contributors focus on state-based advocacy efforts. State and local governments, after all, provide about 92% of funding to schools and are responsible for nearly all the decisions around curriculum, supports, and initiatives related to fostering diversity and inclusion, and student assignments to particular districts or schools.

In "Fulfilling Brown's Promise: Integrated, Well-Resourced Schools That Prepare All Students to Succeed," the authors call for a new wave of state-specific advocacy campaigns in research, communications, litigation, and advocacy that bridge the chasm

between school finance and integration. The authors of "A Multidimensional Approach to School Diversity in New Jersey and Beyond" continue this theme, lifting up New Jersey as a laboratory for legal and policy steps that would address the state's twin obligations to provide well-resourced and racially diverse schools. The authors recommend pursuing actions such as revamping the state's voluntary interdistrict school choice program, enforcing laws intended to foster both school and housing integration, and advancing "integration-informed" school funding policies.

In **Part 3**, contributors focus on community approaches and perspectives, including those left out of research-, legal-, and policy-oriented briefs, papers, and discussions related to integration and equity. Researchers have opined for years how research and policy must center and be codeveloped with the subjects and systems most affected by the focus of that research or policy.[27] If there is a topic more in need of community participatory involvement in research or policy than school integration, we can't think of one. Moreover, contributors to this part caution against efforts to move beyond consideration of race or racism in research, legal, and policy efforts to integrate schools—in and of itself a remarkable goal, considering the origin story behind (and continuing headwinds against) these efforts.

In the essay "School Integration Approaches Beyond the White Gaze: Centering Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous Youth," the authors describe how Minnesota's school integration initiatives tend to be designed and juxtaposed with their proximity to whiteness and overlook how "Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, and Indigenous youth already integrate their spaces." Disrupting the "white gaze," a term popularized by Toni Morrison, the authors outline their plan to study how young people in Minneapolis define and co-create policies and practices of integration. In "Racially Just School Integration: A 21st Century, Student-Led Strategy," the author underscores the importance of community and youth engagement to foster "racially just" school integration policies and strategies—including a student-led strategy focused on the "5 R's of Real Integration": **r**ace, class, and enrollment; **r**esources; **r**elationships; **r**epresentation; and **r**estorative justice. In "School Rezoning: Essential Practices to Promote Integration and Equity," the authors point out how school board members are too often unprepared to engage in deep discourse regarding race, racism, and equitable community inputs. They stress how "growth in the use of rezoning as a lever to reduce segregation will take partnership, support and a commitment to continuous improvement." And perhaps more than any other contribution in this

volume, "Fostering More Integrated Schools Through Community-Driven, Machine-Informed Rezoning" demonstrates the potential for new, 21st century strategies to address centuries-old problems. The authors explore how researchers and school districts can harness artificial intelligence to develop and evaluate new community-driven, machine-guided programs to redraw school attendance boundaries in ways that could reduce segregation while also reducing travel times for students.

In **Part 4**, contributors explore the design and evaluation of learning pathways to promote integration. As scholar Rucker Johnson has explained, research "points incontrovertibly to three powerful cures to unequal educational opportunity: (1) integration, (2) equitable school funding, and (3) *high-quality preschool investments*.[28]

Taking Johnson's third cure to heart, "Integration at the Start: Designing Pre-K Choice and Enrollment Systems to Promote Equity and Excellence" highlights strategies involving the use of data systems, research, and collaboration to promote integration in pre-K programs and provide parents with better information on and access to high-quality, integrated programs. And "How Expanding Transitional Kindergarten in California Can Promote Integration" identifies a unique opportunity to help guide the expansion of California's transitional prekindergarten program in ways that could influence the racial and economic make-up of both these programs and surrounding schools.

Another learning pathway explored in this part involves programs that foster learning and development among students and families whose first language is not English. As districts and schools meet the needs of young people who represent nearly 400 different languages in U.S. schools, programs deliberately designed to focus on equitable practices are necessary. In "Integration and Immersion: The Potential of Two-Way Dual Language Programs to Foster Integration," the authors offer dual language immersion programs as a strategy to address not only the historical racial and socioeconomic segregation between white and Black students, but also the segregation between multilingual learners and native-English-speaking students within schools.

In **Part 5**, contributors offer collaborative, cross-sector approaches to achieving educational equity. Too often, experts across disparate sectors—including legal/civil rights, research, government, advocacy, and school governance—have worked on their

own, instead of collaboratively or in tandem, to address school integration. There has also been limited collaboration among experts across sectors (including education, housing and urban development, transportation, and commerce) to address segregation in communities and regions. Forums to address this problem have been infrequent, a closed loop within narrow academic or policy circles, and have failed to generate sustained dialogue or momentum. Yet research evidence suggests that successful policymaking—from policy formation to implementation and practice—requires varied and sustained coalitions.[29]

To counter these dynamics, the authors of "Community Development for Integrated Schools: The Detroit Choice Neighborhoods Initiative" highlight community development as an under-explored pathway to integrated neighborhoods, social networks, and schools. They propose to study a Detroit-centered, place-based school integration "intervention" that combines education and housing strategies with a greater neighborhood investment plan, which could foster greater racial and socioeconomic diversity in pre-K–12 centers and schools in and around Detroit's Corktown neighborhood. In "Stories of School Travel: Using a Mobility Justice Framework for Desegregation Research and Policy," the authors' aim is to reconnect not only transportation but also issues of "neighborhood change, housing and land use, commercial development, policing, arts and culture" to the school desegregation discourse. In emphasizing the need to understand and capture in real time how young people get to and from school, the authors stress the potential of a complex and multidimensional picture of "mobility justice." And in "Strength in Collaboration: How the Bridges Collaborative is Catalyzing School Integration Efforts," the authors describe an innovative, intentional, and welcome mashup of people and sectors: the Bridges Collaborative, a hub for education and housing practitioners to collaborate and build the "solidarity needed to tackle the vexing problem of segregation and chart a more integrated, inclusive future for students and families."

Conclusion

This volume presents a complex, nuanced, multilayered account of how integration might be pursued for equity and justice for all—especially those who are placed on the margins of opportunity structures in the United States, such as Black and Brown students, students who live below the poverty line, students whose first language is not English, students who are Muslim, immigrant students, and so forth.

There are those who point out that desegregation efforts did not well serve Black and other students of color. Researchers, policymakers, and advocates must heed their warning and ensure that integration agendas go beyond moving bodies between schools and districts to address the psychological, social, relational, and other factors associated with integration that affect students and families.

We are hopeful that this collection generates not only new research questions and possibilities, but new strategies for policymakers and practitioners who, drawing on the research, must work to improve the condition of schools in real time in their respective areas.

Taken together, as we press toward an integration and equity agenda that has sustainable, wide-reaching, and transformative effects, the authors in this volume recommend more research, practice, and policy efforts that address:

- Race-, poverty-, and language-conscious research, policies, and practices.

- Prekindergarten access and diversity.

- Housing mobility imperatives.

- School zoning and attendance boundary setting.

- School board composition and expertise.

- Integration-informed school funding policies.

- Student assignment policies and practices.

- Youth, community, and social networks and engagement.

- Transportation mechanisms and infrastructure.

- Use of technology to drive integration.

It does not escape us that we live in an era when threats to justice are at their peak—not only for individual students and educators, but for the entire public education sector and our democracy.[30] If we have a fighting chance at helping the communities most vulnerable to inequity and injustice, then we must carefully consider the ideas offered in this volume (and additional ones not considered here) and make concerted efforts to support them. We invite and urge readers to take the initiative to work within and across communities to design structures, systems, and institutions that cultivate integration, equity, and justice in our public schools.

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The Federal Role in Promoting School Integration

Federal policymaking is vital to school integration.

Federal mandates from courts, agencies, and Congress were among the primary mechanisms used to promote school integration after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and subsequent Civil Rights Acts. Over the last four decades, the relaxation of these standards—such as lifting court-mandated desegregation orders—by these same federal institutions has contributed significantly to the resegregation of schools and communities across the United States.

In the same way that discrimination has evolved—seen now in debates on curriculum, DEI standards, and school privatization movements—our efforts for educational equity must also adapt to meet today's challenges. These essays explore how federal policymakers and administrators can leverage regulatory, funding, and implementation choices to contribute to school integration efforts.

Adapting to Adaptive Discrimination in Educational Policy

Janelle Scott, UC Berkeley, Elizabeth DeBray, University of Georgia,
Erica Frankenberg, Pennsylvania State University,
Kathryn McDermott, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and
Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, Virginia Commonwealth University

This is a fraught time for racial equality in public education, and relatedly, for American democracy. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice uprisings of the last several years laid bare the deep and systemic nature of racial inequality, efforts to ban teaching about race, to limit the freedoms of LGBTQIA+ students, and to restrict the use of race to repair the harms of state-sponsored segregation abound. Public education is a cornerstone of United States democracy, but its democratic promise is constrained by deep and persistent inequity and segregation. The attacks on racial equity in public education reveal the deeper attacks on the ideal of a multiracial and equitable democracy.

Despite growing racial/ethnic diversity in K–12 education, schools remain racially segregated and unequal.[1,2,3] According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2021, minoritized[4] and multiracial students accounted for 55% of the nation's school enrollment.[5] In many under-resourced school districts, Black and Latinx students comprise the majority populations where they are often subject to teacher shortages and disproportionate discipline, and less access to mental health supports, extracurricular activities, and high-quality learning opportunities.[6,7,8]

Historically, federal, state, and local efforts to redress the harms caused by school segregation have been effective when coordinated; explicitly yoked to a commitment to civil rights policies more broadly; and grounded in the desires and expertise of advocates, youth organizers, and research evidence. Race-conscious and civil rights policies have been essential for broadening educational opportunities and outcomes for Black students and minoritized populations, and for remedying discrimination, including segregation, and encompassing other critical policies like school funding and racialized curricular tracking.[9] Yet it is also true that white resistance and virulent racist backlash

often follow the expansion of racial justice.[10,11] As such, the federal government must not only redress injustice but also sustain efforts toward educational justice amid such backlash, using all available regulatory and incentive mechanisms.

While the federal role in public education is smaller than state and local roles, federal law shapes incentives for state and local actions regarding school desegregation and educational equity through race-conscious policies. Therefore, in this essay we argue that the federal government has a critical role to play in supporting state and local efforts to address racial inequality through educational policies, and that civil rights organizations, researchers, professional associations, philanthropies, and youth organizations are critical to moving and sustaining federal policy in this direction. The need for the federal government is acute as policymakers are adopting laws and regulations that will harm students, teachers, and public education.

These developments show the ability of law and policy to adapt new forms and mechanisms for discrimination. Boddie[12] argues that racial discrimination is mutable, adapting to antidiscrimination laws and policies in new forms, mechanisms, and processes. She argues "adaptive discrimination" by government, private organizations, and individuals "persists through ostensibly race-neutral institutional rules, laws, and behaviors that converge around norms of white privilege, racialized class ideologies, and pervasive implicit racial bias" (p. 3). Adaptive discrimination manifests as policies like curriculum and book bans, decentralization, some school choice forms, and deregulation, which together have sustained segregation and inequality since the end of mandated school segregation.[13,14]

Racial Reckoning and Adaptive Discrimination

In the aftermath of the 2020 police murder of George Floyd, foundations and donors pledged hundreds of millions of dollars to eradicate racial injustice, universities announced faculty hiring initiatives, books about antiracism became instant best sellers,[15] public opinion shifted rapidly toward believing racism was a problem,[16] and corporations issued statements of support and plans for action.[17] Backlash to racial justice awareness and actions abounds. For example, a Black principal in Texas made a public statement in support of Black Lives Matter in 2020 that was praised by community members, only to be faced with termination in 2021 after parents complained that his stance reflected critical race theory (CRT).[18]

Indeed, the current backlash to racial justice awareness and actions was in response to global actions against racial injustice. One of President Trump's final Executive Orders banned "divisive concepts" related to race and diversity in federal contracting or grantmaking. President Biden rescinded the Trump order, but by early 2022, 37 state legislatures had enacted bans on teaching divisive concepts or what advocates labeled "critical race theory,"[19] and school boards are being attacked. Adaptive discrimination manifests through race-evasive legal frameworks that allow a proliferation of segregative school district boundary or attendance zone lines in diversifying communities,[20,21] or in attempts to privatize public education through vouchers and charter schools that construct dual systems of education that lack democratic governance.[22,23,24,25] We use the term "race-evasive" in place of race-neutral or colorblind to reject ableism and to recognize that, while racism may be at times less overt than in the past, it is not neutral nor is it "blind" to race.[26,27]

Race-evasive legislation and jurisprudence seeking to end policies like Affirmative Action and desegregation are, in part, reactions to the growing diversity of the United States. Analyses show that backlash against educational equity efforts that opponents mistakenly frame as CRT is most intense in districts experiencing the sharpest declines in white student enrollment.[28] Districts experiencing a white enrollment drop of more than 18% were three times more likely to report local conflicts around CRT than districts with more stable white enrollment.[29] Relatedly, fears of white "replacement," which have long fueled white nationalist movements in the U.S., increasingly surface in mainstream conservative political discourse.[30,31] The history on racially regressive policies shows that they are damaging to racial justice. Yet history also shows how multiracial coalitions can push the federal government to address past harm and current inequality.

Learning From Civil Rights History

Advocates for race-conscious and equitable K–12 policies have worked toward securing justice through legislation and the courts. Pressured by grassroots organizing and legal victories, Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Together, these laws created the federal oversight and enforcement machinery around educational civil rights that still existed—however truncated—in 2022. Civil rights laws of the 20th century were enacted in a different

political context from today's, during a time with more incentives for bipartisanship and less ideological polarization.[32]

The current judicial and policy context is far less favorable for federal antidiscrimination legislation, but possibilities remain. Congressional parties are polarized, with less issue overlap than at any point since 1980.[33] Political polarization is occurring amidst racial division. The Republican Party is almost entirely white, while most minoritized voters are Democrats. Inter- and intra-racial politics are such that minoritized people disagree on race-conscious policies.[34] Fear of white displacement, shifting ideas about who counts as "white," and race-based animosity toward those perceived to be "the other" drives much of the resistance to inclusion.[35,36,37,38] Under President Obama, racist backlash fostered divides on policies associated with him, even if the policies themselves lacked relationships to racial justice.[39,40]

In education legislative policy, the definition of civil rights became narrower because of these constraints. The 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act*, the only comprehensive Pre-K–12 legislation that Congress has passed in the last 20 years, sustained a definition of "civil rights" as holding schools accountable for test scores and reduced the federal government's ability to use education spending as leverage for racial equity.[41] Yet even amidst these limitations, the Obama administration's Department of Education, through its Office for Civil Rights (OCR), became the "civil rights law firm" for students, reinvigorating civil rights data collection, holding hearings, and convening stakeholders on matters of racial justice and education[42] even as the judiciary has, over time, become less friendly to race-conscious education policies.

Many advocates rightly cite decisions from the federal courts that helped expand race-conscious education policy during the middle of the 20th century, but federal courts have taken a race-evasive turn over the last several decades. In the 1990s, the U.S. Supreme Court limited what court-ordered desegregation required; in 2001, it limited a private right of action to enforce Title VI; and in 2007, it limited even *voluntary* race-conscious integration efforts, with other potential limitations currently pending in lower courts. This term, the Supreme Court drastically limited race-conscious policies in college admissions. As a result, the judicial pathway for race-conscious and civil rights educational policies is significantly narrowed. Reversal of race-conscious, justice-focused policies requires racial-justice advocates to develop new strategies and form new collaborations and learning from earlier resistance to white supremacy before the Civil

War, during and after Reconstruction, and in the intricate, decades-long organizational effort to overturn the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) doctrine of "separate but equal," which culminated in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Black organizers, researchers, teachers, lawyers, and allies were essential to this fight.[43,44,45,46]

Race-conscious educational policy advocates, therefore, must adapt their strategies beyond lobbying lawmakers, even as federal policymaking remains important for equity across states and localities. Racial-justice advocates have operated in hostile political environments before. In the South, a massive campaign to achieve popular schooling for Black students developed from 1830 to 1860 and established a basis for political and legal freedoms for the formerly enslaved. To fully understand this history, one must recognize the Black resistance, agency, and community educational resources that have pushed for educational justice. Even though much of this agency has been erased from the historical record and is not well documented in the research literature,[47] we know that a powerful and well-organized network of Black educators was operating covertly during the Jim Crow era. Members of this network helped run Black schools and laid a foundation for the NAACP's legal campaign against separate and unequal schools.[48] Segregated Black schools were also sites of resistance, because Black teachers taught Black students to understand their role as equal citizens in a broader society intent on communicating subordination.[49,50]

Lessons From Research on the Trump and Obama Administrations

We have much to learn from what the federal government was able to adopt and implement, even in the face of entrenched opposition to race-conscious and civil rights policies in K–12 and higher education. Our study (2018–2022) on race-conscious federal education policies in the Obama and Trump administrations revealed that antidiscrimination efforts also adapt when institutional contexts become less supportive. Obama reinvigorated federal civil rights oversight and enforcement in education but was constrained by decades-long legal and policy race-conscious retrenchment. By contrast, Trump's privatization push accompanied intensifying race-evasiveness and hostility toward race-conscious policies. In addition to the attack on so-called CRT discussed earlier, the administration attempted to reduce the tracking of civil rights data, prohibit diversity training, and eradicate the use of racial/ethnic categories in federal data collection. The Trump education agenda emphasized school privatization and deregulation while insisting on race-evasive policy and law.[51] What's more, some of the

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Trump administration's efforts were thwarted even amid our highly polarized federal system, such as an effort to reduce OCR's budget and the number of field offices to investigate complaints that Congress refused to approve.

With allies in the Senate, Trump appointed hundreds of judges, including three Supreme Court justices. Despite Biden's election and current Democratic control of the Senate, the politics shaping race-conscious policies for social justice remain contentious and complex. As a result, the judicial pathway for race-conscious and civil rights educational policies is significantly narrowed, and the federal government must use its other tools to address racial inequality in public education, in collaboration with researchers, advocates, professional organizations, and practitioners. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision on higher education, these stakeholders must also watch for efforts to broaden the interpretation of existing case law.

Realizing Equitable Integration by Revitalizing the Intersections Between Research, Politics, and Advocacy

There are several avenues for pursuing race-conscious and equitable K–12 policies led by the federal government in collaboration with state and local stakeholders. We know that the determinants of educational inequity exist beyond the individual schools or districts, and as such, effective policy requires coordination across stakeholders, recognizing the complex social policy ecologies in which schools are situated. School integration is a key policy to address, and it must be yoked to broader issues of housing, transportation, health, and justice policies for it to be effective. First, we provide specific actions federal policymakers might immediately take. Next, we call for renewed research on the politics of research use as it relates to school integration, housing and zoning policies, and the role of intermediary organizations in advancing or opposing race-conscious policies.

First, the federal government can use guidance letters and grant programs to support voluntary efforts to reduce racial isolation through strengthened guidance and funding programs that incentivize districts to adopt effective and equitable integration policies. Such actions are even more essential with the Supreme Court's recent Affirmative Action decision. The Biden administration announced the Fostering Diverse Schools demonstration program in 2023, but it is limited to socioeconomic diversity. Much of the oversight and investigation undertaken by the Obama administration on racial

disparity in school discipline was in response to advocacy efforts in states and districts, and even after the Trump administration rescinded the guidance, much of the work to address discipline disparities continued in states and districts.[52] The use of cross-sector policies (e.g., with housing) can also help to sustain educational policies.

Secondly, the federal government should substantially enhance its capacity to enforce existing antidiscrimination laws, especially Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, through expanding the scope of investigations, educating communities and educators about students' civil rights, and collecting data to monitor attendance-zone boundary changes more closely for racial inequality. A priority should be the reinvigoration of past and existing enforcement tools to address racial inequality and discrimination in the 21st century, especially those that assess impact rather than intent. In the longer term, federal legislation could restore individuals' right to file disparate impact lawsuits, require federal civil rights preclearance before new districts form, and increase funding for federal enforcement. Legislation has been introduced regarding some aspects of this legislative agenda but has not gotten much traction to date.

A third avenue for race-conscious policies could occur through executive branch staff, including at multisector gatherings and symposia in which knowledge is shared across advocates, practitioners, policymakers, and scholars. Drawing from these activities, researchers can produce public issue briefs and op-eds to help inform the public about the challenges, opportunities, and effects of race-conscious and equitable policies. This public engagement is especially needed as we begin to see districts voluntarily moving away from integration strategies for fear of legal scrutiny or challenge. Researchers of state policy can lend their expertise to our emergent understandings of the connections between state attorney generals, for example, and federal policy making, civil rights data collection, and technical assistance.

More specifically, executive branch staff, including at the Department of Education (especially OCR) and Department of Justice (particularly the Civil Rights Division and its Educational Opportunities Section), can advance civil rights policies that can result in integration. These divisions are well positioned to provide technical assistance to localities, and with stronger resources and an expansion of staff, there would be greater ability to investigate discrimination and enforce remedies. Particularly in the Department of Education, leadership should ensure that all department programs are reviewed and adjusted to further civil rights impact; this may require department-wide coordination

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and initiatives, and for staff to be informed by history and evidence. Regional equity assistance centers funded by the Civil Rights Act are another mechanism to support localities. More resources for the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division could ensure the approximately 200 desegregation cases that still exist are appropriately staffed to provide remedies to advance desegregation and best transition to equitable policies after court oversight ends. Longer term change would likely require action from White House Domestic Policy staff and Congressional action through legislation, as well as through budget appropriations. Better informed and coordinated efforts from intermediary organizations,[53] researchers, and interest groups could also help to create better public understanding of the importance of these technical processes.

Next, the politics of research evidence is an important area from which to learn and on which further study is needed, as is deeper investment in studies on the effects of civil rights and race-conscious policies. Research and evidence hold a particularly challenging place in an era of disinformation and decentralized news and social media outlets, and where many ideological think tanks disseminate non-peer-reviewed research that aligns with their values but lacks rigor.[54]

Philanthropies and funding agencies have important roles to play to ensure that there is ample support to build a multimethod, interdisciplinary research base on how the next generation of advocates, policymakers, youth organizers, and community organizations adapt their antidiscrimination and integration strategies and on the effects of their efforts. Many philanthropies are also changing their priorities to focus on social and economic justice,[55] although advocates' concerns about movement capture persist when philanthropies neglect inclusive giving strategies.[56] Over the past decade, philanthropies have demonstrated their effectiveness in reframing public ideas to influence federal policy.[57,58] In addition to tracking federal, state, and local policies and policymakers, we call for research on how intermediary organizations and local and national civil-rights and youth-led movements work to push racial justice issues onto the policymaking agenda.[59]

There is much to learn about how adaptive antidiscrimination strategies will unfold, and how these strategies might manifest in policies and practices that interrupt systemic and institutional racism in public education. With support from the Spencer Foundation, our research team is engaged in a 3-year study to understand these advocacy efforts and manifestations. Similarly, the recent National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and

Medicine report on the Institute of Education Sciences called for greater federal funding for research on civil rights policies.[60] Thus, in addition to greater funding for federal agencies that could provide needed technical assistance and enforcement to support local, regional, and cross-sector civil rights efforts, we echo the need for greater support for research and for supporting efforts to ensure that this research base is used.

Conclusion

At a time of political polarization and white supremacist violence; attacks on the accurate teaching of history; and deepening racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic segregation and inequality; we need policies and practices that can support equitable, integrated, and robust systems of schooling, where students can learn across difference and strengthen our multiracial democracy. We have offered some tangible actions for federal policymakers, but we also realize they have not acted alone in the past, and our current reality requires an interconnected response. We urge a multisector, comprehensive approach to meet the challenges of this moment for racially diverse, equitable schools and our multiracial democracy. As researchers, we see a critical role for building an evidence base on responses to the backlash against race-conscious and civil rights policies.

The reality of racial discrimination in the 21st century is that it has adapted in ways that we must carefully document and measure as a precursor to crafting appropriate responses in both the short term and as part of a longer-term strategy to support legislative action, legal remedies, and a changed understanding about racial discrimination more broadly. We must also understand where and how efforts to sustain or expand race-conscious education policies exist amid the ongoing backlash and efforts to constrain racial justice in education. Understanding not only how discrimination has adapted to restrict learning and deepen social and educational divides, but also how antiracist and adaptive antidiscrimination efforts unfold in education toward more just opportunities to learn is essential for this moment of deepening inequality, growing diversity, and attacks on the ideal of an equitable, multiracial democracy, and for the future of public education more broadly.

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Deliberate Speed: Creating the Conditions for Voluntary School Integration

William Packer, Great, Big, Beautiful Story & Strategy[1]

In its famous 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision, the Supreme Court declared that separate was not equal and ordered states to desegregate schools "with all deliberate speed." Yet, nearly 70 years later, students from different racial backgrounds learn separately from each other in highly unequal environments.

> Federal Neighborhoods Learn Together grants awarded to schools that actually resemble their neighborhoods could help state and local governments overcome barriers to integrating our schools.

More than half of America's children attend hyper-segregated schools,[2] in which three-quarters of their peers identify as the same race. And districts primarily serving white students received $23 billion more than those serving primarily students of color in 2016; on average, non-white districts received $2,200 less per student.[3] Furthermore, schools with larger proportions of poor students and students of color "are more likely to implement criminalized disciplinary policies, including suspensions and expulsion or police referrals or arrests."[4]

Since *Brown*, many obstacles have stood in the way of integration, among them, white and middle-class opposition, discriminatory housing policies, and a more conservative and cautious court that has released most districts from desegregation orders. But our continuing collective failure to provide equal access to opportunity through education has disadvantaged millions of Black, Indigenous, and people of color, and that has hurt all of us.

The truth is that we know integration works for all types of students, and creative federal policy can do much more to promote meaningful voluntary efforts across the country, not just in liberal bastions, without reliving the busing backlash or inviting legal challenges.

Integration Works

Americans tend to think of school integration as something that was tried and failed. Or worse—they think that schools were successfully integrated. President Biden called desegregation busing a "liberal train wreck."[5] But, a generation later, we know that *where and when we have tried, even half-heartedly, to integrate schools, it has improved academic, economic, and social outcomes for students from all racial and economic categories.*

Students from all backgrounds—white and non-white, economically disadvantaged and wealthier—who attended racially or socioeconomically integrated schools have better academic performance than similar students who did not. They have higher average test scores,[6] are more likely to enroll in college,[7] and are less likely to drop out. Achievement gaps between racial groups narrowed more rapidly[8] during the height of desegregation than any other time period.

The economic outcomes are pronounced for Black children. Those who attended integrated schools had higher earnings as adults than those who did not, and—critically—their children had higher earnings than those of adults who did not attend integrated schools.[9] *This is how we reverse the cycle of intergenerational concentrated poverty.*

Perhaps most importantly, white and minority students who attended integrated schools became more comfortable with people of different races and less discriminatory in their attitudes.[10, 11,12] Stefan Lallinger of The Century Foundation, in asking the question "Would Derek Chauvin have murdered George Floyd if they had gone to elementary school together?"[13] found that Chauvin attended a racially segregated white school. How might police behave differently if most officers grew up attending integrated schools?

Some argue, despite integration's benefits, that if we divorce school funding from local property taxes, that will be enough. Places like New Jersey deserve credit for implementing progressive funding formulas (though not for integration[14]), and other states should follow their example. But even with more equitable funding, separate schools will never mean equal opportunities for students because the advantages conferred by schools go beyond what is paid for by government funding.

Schools where white and wealthier families send their children tend to have more experienced teachers and important resource advantages.[15] Only if we distribute family advantage across schools more evenly will they come close to being equally resourced. This seems to work in practice. On Long Island, in New York, as schools got more integrated, resource inequities were reduced.[16]

In a new study[17] of a massive Facebook data set, Raj Chetty and his colleagues found "children who grow up in communities with more economic connectedness (cross-class interaction) are much more likely to rise up out of poverty." And that cross-class friendships are "the single strongest predictor of upward mobility identified to date"[18]— more predictive than the median household income of the family a child is raised in, the degree of racial segregation in a neighborhood, and the share of single-parent households there.

So if the case for integrating schools racially and economically is so strong, why hasn't it happened?

The Obstacles

There are reasons most districts and states have not rushed to integrate their schools on their own.

The Courts

Perhaps the highest barrier to integration is the very entity that took the first bold steps in *Brown v. Board* (1954) and then in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971) toward federal intervention to desegregate schools. Since the '90s, federal courts have shied away from mandating desegregation. According to The Century Foundation in 2020,[19] "Most of the open court orders are decades old, and while still on the books, many are only superficially enforced or aren't enforced at all."

The contemporary Supreme Court's attitude toward integration is exemplified by the 2007 case, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, in which a majority held that there was still a compelling interest in combating racial isolation and promoting diversity but that the ways the integration policies in Seattle and Louisville considered individual racial classifications were not narrowly enough tied to the goal of achieving diversity.

Basically, this ruling and a few others have discouraged districts from pursuing bold integration policies, especially those that consider race explicitly. In practice, policymakers are limited to addressing racial segregation through proxies like economic segregation.

The good news is that, while it is not as good as the real thing, integrating schools economically tends to promote racial integration as well. The Chetty study shows that cross-class connections have the same outsized positive effect on students of color as they do on white students. And in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 73% of elementary schools were still balanced by race[20] a decade after they made the switch to considering economic status instead of race in admissions.

White and Middle-Class Opposition

Opposition can look like the march across the Brooklyn Bridge in 1964, in which 15,000 people carried signs like "Teach 'Em, Don't Bus 'Em." Or it can look like the more violent riots in response to court-mandated busing in Boston in 1974. These clashes and the emotions and internalized narratives that underlie them create a strong disincentive for officials to move forward with integration policy of any kind.

And an even more common form of protest is white families exiting an integrating school district, either by paying for independent schooling or by moving outside its jurisdiction. Integration efforts have been found to directly cause white families to leave public schools[21]. And children in public schools tend to be less white and poorer than the neighborhoods the schools are in,[22] suggesting that white and wealthier families are already sending their children to other schools.

Another variety of white opposition is the "breakaway district." Basically, these are newly gerrymandered districts created by groups of parents who want to create an enclave school district separate from the one they are assigned to. Since 2000, even as integration efforts have waned, at least 128 communities have tried to secede (73 successfully) from their geographic school districts.[23] This practice is, as of now, legal in at least 30 states, and only six require a study of the impact on racial or socioeconomic segregation.

Interdistrict Residential Segregation

White and middle-class flight outside of city limits—no doubt in part due to busing, but also to the hollowing out of many cities facing deindustrialization, preferential treatment

in the purchase of homes, and other factors—has created a situation where most school segregation is between school districts rather than within them.[24]

This residential segregation means that many districts, even if they had the political will to overcome the electoral disincentives created by white and middle class opposition and the legal maze created by the courts, *lack the jurisdiction to integrate.*

Further, the Supreme Court's decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) ruled that district lines need not be redrawn to combat segregation unless the segregation was the product of discrimination *by* those districts. This had the effect of ruling out the legal strategy of expanding school districts to unify entire metropolitan areas, within which there would be enough diversity to integrate schools. However, the ruling does not—crucially, for the policy proposed below—prevent states from taking voluntary action to redraw their districts as they see fit. In fact, it respects a state's authority to arbitrarily draw its district lines even if they are discriminatory in effect.

Overcoming These Obstacles

It might seem as if the legal, political, and geographical barriers are prohibitive, but despite the odds, some schools and districts are finding ways around them.

First, there are districts with sufficient diversity to pursue integration within their boundaries. According to The Century Foundation, in 1996, only two schools explicitly used socioeconomic factors to integrate their populations.[25] As of the 2016 school year, more than 100 districts and charter school networks educating more than 4 million students had socioeconomic diversity plans. This is a significant improvement over 20 years, but it is still less than 10% of the entire student population of a country in which segregation has actually been increasing.[26]

Innovative districts including San Antonio,[27] Cambridge,[28] and Berkeley,[29] have found effective and constitutional ways to integrate voluntarily. Cambridge has used "controlled choice" (in which parents rank their school choices and are assigned so that schools are economically diverse) since 1981 and has some of the best academic outcomes for poor and minority students in the nation.

Perhaps the best example of a district in which integration is demographically possible is New York City—both the largest and, by some measures, the most segregated school

district in the United States.[30] Yet despite a growing student grassroots movement, a liberal voter base, and public statements by the last mayor and schools chancellor in favor of integration,[31] committees have met,[32] but no centralized action has occurred.[33]

For integration efforts to gain momentum in New York and nationally, we need a national policy to create incentives at the local and state levels to voluntarily change enrollment policies and district lines.

The Neighborhoods Learn Together Program

A direct-to-schools federal incentive for schools to represent their neighborhoods more closely could tip the scales.

Under the Neighborhoods Learn Together program, schools would receive more money as their socioeconomic demographics came to resemble more closely those of the actual surrounding commuting region, regardless of the school's official "catchment zone" (the area in which you must live to send your child to a school) or admissions policy. This way, schools (and the parents, students, teachers, and staff that make up their communities) would have a financial incentive, in addition to the academic and prosocial ones outlined above, to pressure their districts and states to change enrollment practices so they can better represent their neighborhoods.

The technology to be able to do this already exists. Researchers at MIT and Northeastern University, led by Nabeel Gilani, created an algorithm[34] that allows you to type in a school district and see how its elementary school catchment zones would need to change to increase racial diversity, while balancing student commute times and the number of students who would need to switch schools. (Spending just 15 minutes using Gilani's tool is enough to understand how, in most cases, changing school catchment zones within current gerrymandered district lines can help around the margins but does little to improve school diversity by more than a few percentage points here and there—emphasizing the importance of changing district lines as well.)

A similar tool could be created to show each individual school's potential commuting radius, regardless of district lines—for example, every address within 25 minutes of the school building—and the demographics of the population within that radius.

(Of course not every neighborhood has the same expectation of commute times—think of rural regions where students have to bus more than a half hour to school—but the

appropriate commute time could be calibrated to take regional differences and density into account.)

In many cases, a school's commuting radius would have a different demographic composition than that of its existing catchment zone, and most importantly, from its enrollment.

The size of this differential—between the demographics of the school's existing enrollment and that of its true neighborhood—would determine how much funding it could get. Funding would be awarded each time a school reduces its "resemblance gap" and becomes more representative of its neighborhood. It is important that the funding be provided for *changes* to enrollment, not just for *already* resembling the neighborhood (which could lead to schools in very segregated commuting zones receiving additional money for resembling their segregated neighborhoods).

What Demographics Should Be Considered? Ideally, the program would consider both racial and economic categories in determining whether a school is representative. But it could go further with additional funding streams related to how well a school represents its neighborhood when it comes to language, special education status, disability status, and other categories, like parental countries of origin.

The bill's language regarding racial categories would need to be carefully constructed to avoid viable legal challenges (frivolous ones will be launched regardless), emphasizing that the program is intended to support *voluntary efforts to increase diversity and reduce racial isolation,*[35] in line with Justice Kennedy's concurrence[36] in the *Parents Involved* decision, and that the extra funding would be to support programming to enable effective integration on top of existing school funding formulas, which, in theory, are enough to run a school.

Although the program could still address racial segregation if racial categories were not explicitly considered, as long as it is considered part of a set of demographic categories, it would be preferable to consider race as well, in particular to avoid rewarding edge cases in which some schools and districts could integrate schools economically but keep them racially segregated.

How Big Should It Be? Big. It should be sufficiently large that schools know what they are missing—so that people in these neighborhoods demand changes in admissions

policies of their district leaders or boards, mayors, state legislators, and governors. It would be hard to imagine schools and families not demanding changes if the funding amounted to something like 10% of per-pupil funding in each state (creating an additional incentive for states to increase their overall education funding). The average spending per pupil across all 50 states and the District of Columbia was $12,201 in 2017.[37] So $1,200 per student could be a decent benchmark.

There is another crucial benefit of this approach. Currently, schools with populations that are over 40% low-income (about seven out of 10 schools) receive federal funding under Title I, and the higher the low-income population, the more funding they get. That means that majority minority schools face a disincentive to integrate by family income (and by correlation, race). The most recent analysis[38] by the National Center for Education Statistics found that the average per-pupil federal spending under Title I was $1,227 (it ranged from $984 in Idaho to $2,590 in Vermont). There is no doubt Title I needs updating, but even without that, a large enough incentive would help address this problem.

How Would This Work in Practice? Leaving it up to states and districts to decide when and how to integrate their schools in order to receive the funds according to their own political, economic, and cultural realities would help protect the program from the backlash that past efforts have faced and enable local communities to own their chosen solutions.

That does not mean we can't predict some of the ways districts and states might respond.

First, let's look at denser areas where a district already has multiple schools with distinct catchment zones whose borders (and thus school enrollment) divide people racially and economically, such as New York City (a single district with community school districts within it) or Miami Dade County. These areas have the most options.

One is to simply redraw the catchment zone borders to make each school more representative of the commuting zone around it. Depending on how large the agreed-upon commuting zone is, this could be tricky in a city like New York, because there are some schools that nearly everyone could get to in 30 minutes, and some that, practically, could serve only certain neighborhoods. How the new lines are drawn would

be the result of a political process in which local representatives would need to balance the desire for access to more funding with parents' concerns about changes to their assigned school (more ideas for addressing this later).

Another option for denser districts is to consolidate catchment zones and offer controlled choice—in which families rank their top few choices of schools within some geographic range and are assigned one of them so that schools could meet demographic targets. This element of choice helps to dampen the perception that the changes are being mandated, or that children are being forced to move around.

There are also, of course, the many urban and suburban areas where the lines between districts divide students racially and economically. Where this is the case, some sort of state-level action to consolidate districts or allow for cross-district attendance would be required.

The Neighborhoods Learn Together program would incentivize schools within each district to want to cooperate, but working in the other direction are the individual district-level staff who might perceive their jobs to be threatened and the parents who decided or were forced by Jim Crow housing policies or financial realities to live on the side they live on. In particular, the parents who live closest to the edge of a wealthy district's border with a poorer one could—as you might expect—put up the biggest fight. No matter what the policy approach is, this is going to be an issue, but at least this approach has the potential to be more amenable to states and districts since (a) it can, if states chose to, incorporate parental choice; (b) the neighborhood representativeness score could provide political "cover" for districts that want to diversify but face resistance from wealthier families; and (c) help districts avoid leaving considerable amounts of money "on the table" by not integrating schools.

Some states might propose consolidating districts and redrawing school catchment zones to make each school within them more representative. Others might consolidate districts and then implement a controlled choice model within the new larger districts. Still other states might not consolidate districts, but allow parents within commuting zones of a school to send their children to a neighboring district. Or there could be new models that are inspired by the challenge of earning the funding.

Finally, there are very rural areas where students might already travel quite a distance to get to school. Although there are certainly many cases in which a school on the edge of a county could become more representative by accepting students from the neighboring county, rural schools in these areas are not likely to comprise the bulk of recipients of funds from this program.

Minimizing Backlash. No matter where integration is attempted, there are other steps that districts and states could take to help minimize backlash. For example, they could choose to change admissions policies only for new students, reducing the loss-aversion parents might feel if their school options change (although they may still worry about their property values). Furthermore, they could adjust their own funding formulas to make sure parents perceive the schools as being equitably supported. Another consideration is which age group to start with. In many cases, it could be wise to start with elementary schools and then expand to middle and high schools as that cohort of students advances to minimize disruption and a perceived feeling of loss.

The program should apply to charter schools just as it does to other public schools, and although it would be wasteful to use federal funds to incentivize private schools, there is reason to consider giving neighborhood representativeness scores, without an associated financial incentive, to private schools as well, because parents choosing them over public schools contributes to racial and economic educational segregation. The guilt and embarrassment that some private schools and their parents would experience from receiving a low Neighborhoods Learn Together representativeness score might be enough to influence some of their enrollment and financial aid practices.

Would It Be Enough to Solve the Problem? The Neighborhoods Learn Together program is designed to help shift the incentive structure so that states and municipalities are empowered to make the actual changes we need.

To support their efforts, the federal government should also award one-time planning grants, like the Strength in Diversity grant program originally proposed by Senator Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Representative Marcia L. Fudge (OH-11),[39] to help schools ensure that their schools are adequately prepared to educate a more diverse group of students in a culturally competent and equitable way.

This last part is crucial. To go beyond desegregation to true integration, schools will need resources to support integrative curriculum—educational experiences for both staff and students that are deliberately antiracist and designed to promote empathy across lines of difference. Without this, the burden of integration in many places will rest where it usually does: on the people of color who find themselves outnumbered within white/wealthy-dominant school cultures.

Additional planning grants, from the government or philanthropy, could help states and districts with the complex process of evaluating, communicating, and implementing new admissions policies.

Finally, for large homogenous geographic areas, this program alone cannot solve the problem of segregation. True integration in many areas will require policy changes beyond the education sphere that change where people choose to live in the first place (or rather, change where they are blocked from living in the first place).

The good news is the ideas are already out there. The growing "Yes In My Backyard," or YIMBY movement,[40] and the experiments of The Moving to Opportunity Grant program[41] have largely been successful and should be expanded and invested in.

Some might worry that, in a nightmare scenario, in order to pursue funding, a geographic area could try to make itself less diverse so that segregated schools could earn the funding by then becoming more "representative" of their neighborhoods. Although this is certainly something to watch out for, if any government entity tried to use housing policy or other levers to do this, it would certainly be illegal.

It is also important to remember that people are not solely rational actors responding to economic incentives. Although the incentive will help change the calculus, there needs to be a persistent communications effort to change and challenge people's hearts and minds on the issue of school integration. There is a movement growing, thanks in large part to The Bridges Collaborative[42] at The Century Foundation and student activists like those from Teens Take Charge (https://www.teenstakecharge.com/) in New York (full disclosure: two of my former seventh grade students were founding members) and across the country. Places like Hartford, Connecticut,[43] have done both the market research and the grassroots canvassing to be effective at changing people's minds

about integration in their communities. The federal government should explicitly fund communications plans as part of any supplemental planning and implementation grants.

Is It Politically Feasible? While the whole point of this proposal is to smooth the path for integration efforts at the local and state levels, it would still need to be passed by Congress. And right now, for a number of reasons, including the effective 60-vote cloture requirement in the Senate for any meaningful legislation and the politicization of schools and how to address race in the classroom, its prospects do not look promising.

However, a Harvard survey[44] showed strong majorities of support for racially integrated schools among both Democrats (85%) and Republicans (76%). Although the intensity of that support is not high, and parents prioritize safety and quality above diversity, this is not a bad place to start when it comes to building a national narrative.

There are clear next steps to take to improve the political environment.

A sustained national advocacy campaign could increase public support across the political spectrum for integration. An effective one would promote integration's proven benefits for all students (in education, health, and safety), alignment with American values, and role in a hopeful story of progress in American history that ends with a positive future for all.

Second is public accountability. There is no reason the federal government has to be the one to create and publish neighborhood representativeness data. Philanthropy could support the creation of a report card for each school, showing how representative it is of its neighborhood in various categories without the grants attached. These neighborhood representativeness scores, especially if incorporated into the national campaign in Step 1, could help change hearts and minds among parents, teachers, and school leaders;

SCHOOL DIVERSITY REPRESENTATIVENESS GRADE

This school is less diverse than its neighborhood.

Card Number _____
Establishment Name _____
Date Issued _____

NYC Schools

For additional information or a copy of an inspection report, call **311**.

inspire new, previously unconsidered solutions; pressure state and local governments even without the federal financial incentive; and create a more favorable environment for federal legislation. Imagine if schools were required to display their scores on their front facades just as restaurants do in places like New York City.

Conclusion

Politicians often complain that they can't do big things because people aren't demanding them. Integration works, and we know it is the right thing to do. For the millions of children to come, it is not too late. Enthusiastically and thoughtfully sending our children to learn together could be our best hope at healing the gaping wounds of slavery and Jim Crow. So let's demand it.

If implemented, this plan will not redress past wrongs, nor will it even lead to our schools being as diverse as possible. It only makes integration possible to the extent that people live near each other. But what it does do is start to create a virtuous cycle to counter a vicious one. And as efforts to integrate neighborhoods through housing[45] improve access to transportation and to end police brutality make progress, schools can reinforce those efforts, rather than hold them back.

Too often, governments use blunt policy remedies that ignore cultural realities like those that led to the busing backlash in the '60s and '70s. Yet smart policy can actually help create the conditions required to generate the grassroots political support needed to do big things, like ending segregation, with all deliberate speed.

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Prioritizing School Integration in the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) Process

Natalie Spievack, Housing California, and Philip Tegeler, Poverty & Race Research Action Council

The ambitious Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule launched by the Obama administration in 2015 had great potential to bring housing agencies and school districts together to promote more integrated neighborhoods and schools. However, the Trump administration suspended the rule before its potential could be fully realized, and only a few of the jurisdictions that participated in the initial rollout made significant connections between housing and education policy.[1] Now that the AFFH rule is soon to be reinstated and expanded in practice to both public housing authorities and state governments,[2] it is important to ensure that the potential of the AFFH rule can be fully realized.

Building on the AFFH provision of the Fair Housing Act of 1968,[3] the 2015 AFFH rule set out a fair housing framework for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grantees to take meaningful actions to overcome historic patterns of segregation, promote fair housing choice, and foster inclusive communities that are free from discrimination.[4] To give the mandate teeth, the AFFH rule created obligations for HUD grantees to analyze local fair housing conditions and determine goals and actions through an Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH) (called an "Equity Plan" under the new proposed AFFH rule).

Recognizing robust evidence that demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between housing and school segregation,[5,6] the 2015 AFFH rule required the AFH to analyze access to quality schools. To help jurisdictions examine this intersection, HUD developed an AFFH mapping tool that supplied index scores for school proficiency[7] by geographic area, with the ability to overlay neighborhood demographics and the location of subsidized housing. The AFFH process also included requirements for intergovernmental consultation and community participation.[8] To reinforce the importance of using the AFH process to address segregation in neighborhoods and schools, the Secretaries of HUD,

the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Transportation issued a joint letter in 2016 urging local education, housing, and transportation leaders to work together to develop "thoughtful goals and strategies to promote equal opportunity."[9]

Ideally, the AFFH rule ensures that local jurisdictions, public housing authorities, and states assess whether members of protected classes have equal access to high-performing schools, and, if they do not, to identify the factors contributing to this disparity and propose solutions.[10] However, a review of the AFHs submitted by jurisdictions that participated in the first year of the AFFH process found that, with a few exceptions, access to high-performing schools was not meaningfully addressed in AFH analyses or goals, and consultation with school districts did not occur.[11] The January 2018 suspension of the rule (followed by the official termination of the AFFH rule in July 2020)[12] meant that there was no opportunity to improve this process, although a number of jurisdictions continued to implement the requirement voluntarily (see below).

A reinstated and expanded AFFH rule is uniquely positioned to promote school integration. First, as a housing intervention, the rule presents an opportunity to address the underlying patterns of neighborhood segregation that create school segregation in the first place.[13] Second, the affirmative mandate of the AFFH rule requires that HUD grantees do more than simply not discriminate; they must proactively address segregation and other systemic issues driving housing inequities.[14] School districts are not bound by such an explicit affirmative mandate to address segregation, although they are under an obligation to avoid policies that discriminate or increase segregation.[15] Third, the Equity Plan process gives the federal government leverage to support interagency collaboration, the absence of which has historically been a major barrier to coordinated housing and school integration strategies.[16] Finally, an expanded AFFH rule that includes state governments would create unprecedented opportunities to promote integration, given that states—more than agencies at the local or federal level—control the key drivers of modern school and housing segregation, including local land use and zoning, local education policy, local tax structures, school district boundaries, regional transportation policy, regional planning structures, and infrastructure investment.[17]

What Types of Policies Could the AFFH Rule Help Produce?

A handful of jurisdictions that have fulfilled federal or state mandates to analyze local fair housing conditions, both before and after the suspension of the 2015 rule,[18] demonstrate the promise of the Equity Plan process to help jurisdictions diagnose factors that contribute to housing and school segregation and promote coordinated integration strategies. Examples include the following:

- **Washington, DC (2019):** Identified eight housing- and school-related factors that contribute to segregation and disparities in access to opportunity, including the location of publicly assisted housing, gentrification, school assignment boundaries, and districtwide school choice policies. The draft plan also set goals to improve access to high-performing schools, explore revisions to school assignment boundaries and feeder patterns, protect students from school displacement, address the lack of student transportation services, and improve school ranking systems to avoid reinforcing segregation.[19]

- **Contra Costa County, California (2017):** Conducted custom data analysis of access to proficient schools according to the percentage of each race, ethnicity, and nationality in a given census tract, and racial enrollment trends over time. Also examined factors that contribute to disparities in access to proficient schools, including concentrated poverty, between-district school segregation, and school assignment zones.[20]

- **New Orleans, Louisiana (2016):** Identified eight factors that create racial disparities in access to high-quality schools, including the geographic concentration of those schools in white neighborhoods, the disparate impact of the school application system giving preference to families to choose schools closer to home, and the disproportionate effects of minority suspensions and expulsions.[21]

- **Seattle, Washington (2017):** Coordinated with Seattle Public Schools and the City of Seattle during the AFH process and set a goal to "address inequities to access to proficient schools in areas where there is likely a negative impact on people in protected classes; and to provide resources for low-income families in public housing to improve educational outcomes."[22]

- **San Francisco, California (2022):** Set a goal to "Collaborate with the San Francisco Unified School District to evaluate the feasibility of providing a priority in the school

assignment process for low-income families and those living in permanently affordable housing."[23]

- **Richmond, California (2022):** Discussed four factors that contribute to disparities in access to high-performing schools and commits to restarting the city's collaboration with West Contra Costa County Unified School District to develop a first-time homebuyer's program for teachers to support teacher stability and student success.[24]

Other housing policies that promote school diversity that could result from the AFFH process include affordable housing siting policies for the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and other programs that take into account school composition and performance; housing voucher policies that target high-performing, low-poverty schools; the acquisition of existing multifamily housing or land near high-performing schools; anti-displacement policies that help students in integrating schools stay in place; mortgage assistance programs that promote school integration; state zoning laws that prioritize school integration; the elimination of tax incentives that reward purchasing homes in high-income districts; and real estate marketing practices that emphasize the value of school integration.[25]

A small number of states and localities have already put together parts of this agenda.[26] For example, Massachusetts and Indiana include significant additional points for siting affordable housing near high-performing schools in their state Qualified Allocation Plan, which is the process that determines how LIHTC funding is allocated to potential housing projects.[27] Public housing authorities in Baltimore and Dallas have used their Housing Choice Vouchers to help children transition from high-poverty, low-performing schools to high-performing and low-poverty schools.[28] And Richmond, Virginia, has engaged in regional cross-agency collaboration with regard to school and housing integration.[29] These efforts can serve as examples for other state and local jurisdictions when setting goals in their Equity Plans.

Strengthening Guidance to Assist State and Local Jurisdictions With Implementation

Although the AFFH guidebook published by HUD under the 2015 rule prompted grantees to analyze disparities in access to proficient schools for protected classes, little additional guidance was provided to help grantees more deeply examine the

relationships between housing and school segregation and determine solutions. In 2016, the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC) drafted a short guidebook section for HUD on including an analysis of school data in the AFH, but it was shelved by the Trump administration and never published.[30] Under a reinstated AFFH rule, a similar, extended guidebook could help grantees diagnose factors contributing to school segregation; identify key data on local school demographics, school boundary lines, assignment policies, and achievement; and consider a menu of goals and actions at the housing–schools nexus that could promote integration.[31]

Creating Data Tools to Help Jurisdictions Analyze Housing and School Segregation

The AFFH mapping tool provides information about school proficiency scores. But to more deeply explore the relationship between education and housing policy and determine which policies are best suited to promote integration, jurisdictions completing an Equity Plan should examine publicly available data and local knowledge available through school districts and education nonprofits. Navigating these various data sources can be difficult, especially for smaller governmental agencies with limited capacity.

Many publicly available data sources could assist the AFFH process. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data provides information on student demographics, school district and school attendance boundaries, and the degree of racial and economic segregation across both school district and school assignment zones. The U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection provides data on topics related to equity and access at the school and school district levels by race and ethnicity, English learning proficiency, and disability status.[32] Making these data resources available inside the HUD AFFH assessment tool would enhance HUD grantees' ability to analyze the educational effects of their policies. In addition, a tool kit could be created to help agencies that are completing an Equity Plan systematically collect local knowledge about relevant educational issues.

Supporting Interagency Collaboration in the AFFH Process

Providing support for interagency conversations would promote meaningful collaboration between housing and education agencies. Coordination across policy areas has

historically been challenging given the multitude of governing bodies, jurisdictions, goals, and local politics that obstruct policy change.[33] Additional resources could enable organizations that have experience in facilitating these interagency conversations to provide tools and examples for housing agencies, school districts, and transportation agencies throughout the process of creating and implementing an Equity Plan.

Advocates have recently called on the Secretaries of Housing, Transportation, and Education to reissue an expanded version of the 2016 interagency letter to state and local agencies, and they have detailed the ways that state and local agencies can collaborate more intentionally to promote racial and economic integration in communities and schools.[34] For state and local education agencies, this could include:

- Considering areas of minority concentration and the location of existing subsidized housing units when redrawing school assignment zones, selecting sites for new schools, and designing open enrollment policies (including charter and magnet schools) to increase the diversity of students served by high-performing schools.

- Increasing coordination between school districts and regional housing mobility programs to maximize success for children moving from high-poverty to low-poverty neighborhoods.

- Sharing important information on school achievement, graduation rates, and the demographic composition of schools with transportation and housing agencies to create housing and schools that best address the needs of students, families, and communities.

For regional transportation agencies, this could include:

- Improving public transit access to schools, especially from new affordable housing developments, and ensuring that bus service routes extend to all middle and high schools in a metro area.

- Gathering additional school-related data by developing school-specific transportation surveys, using existing household travel surveys, and collecting qualitative experiential data on the daily opportunities and challenges of navigating transportation systems and infrastructure for school access.

- Directing metropolitan planning organizations to conduct fair-share housing studies as part of their regional housing coordination plan to determine an equitable plan for sharing affordable housing responsibilities regionally.

States and localities could also participate in forming regional planning committees that coordinate school, housing, and transportation systems in support of racial and economic integration. Reissued interagency guidance will provide a platform for monitoring, advocacy, and technical assistance to support these collaborations, especially for the first state governments that undertake the AFFH process in 2024–2025.

Conducting Further Research

Additional research on the AFFH planning process could help produce better guidance and more effective support for state and local jurisdictions. Although exploratory research analyzed the extent to which the housing–schools nexus was discussed in AFHs submitted in 2016, there has been no analysis of which actors were involved in crafting the document, how decisions were made, whether some topics were discussed but not included, the relationships that exist between agencies, and challenges to coordination.[35] Accordingly, future research should include interviews with policy actors during the implementation phase of the Equity Plan process.[36] Study during the upcoming implementation phase would also have the benefit of encouraging interagency collaboration. A broader study could also focus on California, where every local jurisdiction will soon have completed an AFH under the state AFFH law passed in 2018[37] (which closely mirrors the federal 2015 rule).

Conclusion: Next Steps to Leverage the AFFH Rule to Promote School Integration

When the AFFH rule is reinstated, it will represent a significant opportunity to simultaneously promote more integrated neighborhoods and schools. By conditioning the receipt of federal funds on compliance with AFFH goals, the rule is uniquely positioned to incentivize meaningful goal setting and foster long-absent collaboration between housing and education agencies.

The recently released proposed AFFH rule is a promising policy tool to address the structural and geographic dimensions of inequity, but serious investment is needed to

ensure that school segregation is meaningfully addressed in this process. Given the increasing physical and psychological divisions in our country, the integration of our communities and schools is needed now more than ever.

Notes

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2. The original 2015 AFFH rule applied to all U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grantees, including public housing authorities and state governments, but HUD had not yet completed the assessment forms for state governments by the time the rule was suspended, and the data tool for public housing authorities had also not yet been finalized—although a number of public housing authorities (PHAs) joined their local jurisdictions in joint Assessments of Fair Housing in 2016–2017. The proposed new AFFH rule includes both PHAs and state governments but eschews the use of the official assessment forms that delayed implementation of the 2015 rule. *See* Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, 88 F. R. 8516 (proposed February 9, 2023).

3. 42 U.S.C. 3608. The AFFH obligation has also been reinforced by subsequent legislation. As described by HUD, "Congress has repeatedly reinforced the AFFH mandate for funding recipients, embedding within the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act of 1990, and the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act of 1998, the obligation that certain HUD program participants certify, as a condition of receiving Federal funds, that they will AFFH. *See* 42 U.S.C. 5304(b)(2), 5306(d)(7)(B), 12705(b)(15), 1437C-1(d)(16)." Restoring Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Definitions and Certifications, 86 F. R. 30779, 30780 (June 10, 2021).

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6. Tegeler, P., & Hilton, M. (2017). *Disrupting the reciprocal relationship between housing and school segregation*. PRRAC. https://www.prrac.org/disrupting-the-reciprocal-relationship-between-housing-and-school-segregation/

7. School proficiency, which is measured by HUD based on test scores, can also serve as a proxy for the racial and economic composition of schools because of the close association between family income, race, and test scores.

8. HUD. (2015). *Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule guidebook*. https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/HUD-AFFH-Rule-Guidebook-Dec.-2015.pdf

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10. PRRAC. (2021). *Meaningful collaboration between housing and education agencies in the implementation of AFFH*. [Letter to HUD and the Department of Education]. https://www.prrac.org/schools-affh-rule-letter-09-13-21/

11. Finnigan et al. (2021).

12. The initial suspension, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing: Extension of Deadline for Submission of Assessment of Fair Housing for Consolidated Plan Participants, 83 F. R. 683 (Jan. 5, 2018), was followed by a withdrawal of the assessment tool jurisdictions needed to complete the AFFH process, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing: Withdrawal of the Assessment Tool for Local Governments, 83 F. R. 23922 (May 23, 2018), and eventually the publication of a new rule eliminating the AFFH rule and its obligations, Preserving Community and Neighborhood Choice, 85 F. R. 47899 (Sept. 8, 2020).

13. Monarrez, T. (in press). School attendance boundaries and the segregation of public schools in the U.S., *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*.

14. Finnigan et al. (2021).

15. See Tegeler, P. (2016). Predicting school diversity impacts of state and local education policy: The role of Title VI. In E. Frankenberg, L. M. Garces, & M. Hopkins (Eds.), *School integration matters: Research-based strategies to advance equity* (pp. 145–154).Teachers College Press.

16. Holme, J. J., & Finnigan, K. S. (2018). *Striving in common: A regional equity framework for urban schools*. Harvard Education Press.

17. Haberle, M., & Tegeler, P. (2019). Coordinated action on school and housing integration: The role of state government. *University of Richmond Law Review, 53*(3), 949–978. https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3250&context=lawreview

18. These plans were completed under various processes. Contra Costa County and Washington, DC, completed an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing, which is the process that predated the 2015 federal AFFH rule. New Orleans and Seattle completed an Assessment of Fair Housing under the 2015 federal AFFH rule. San Francisco and Richmond, California, completed an Assessment of Fair Housing under the State of California's AFFH law, which was passed in 2018. PRRAC participated in the development of the plans for Contra Costa County and Washington, DC, and Natalie Spievack assisted in the Richmond, California, plan.

19. Excerpt from DC Department of Housing and Community Development, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, & PRRAC. (2019). *Draft for public comment analysis of impediments to fair housing choice Washington, D.C.* http://www.prrac.org/pdf/washington-dc-draft-analysis-impediments-fair-housing-access-proficient-schools-section.pdf

20. Excerpt from Contra Costa County. (2017). *Analysis of impediments to fair housing*. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/contra-costa-county-educational-opportunities.pdf

21. Housing Authority of New Orleans. (2016). *Assessment of fair housing tool*. https://www.hano.org/plans/2016DraftAssessmentAFHPlan.pdf

22. Seattle Department of Human Services. (2017). *2017 City of Seattle and Seattle Housing Authority joint assessment of fair housing*. https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/HumanServices/CDBG/2017%20AFH%20Final.4.25.17V2.pdf

23. San Francisco Planning Department. (2022). *DRAFT 4 of goals, objectives, policies, and actions*. https://sfhousingelement.org/draft-4-goals-objectives-policies-and-actions

24. City of Richmond. (2022). *Appendix F: Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH)*. https://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/63304/LWC_Richmond_HEU_AppF_AFFH_PRD_102122?bidId=

25. For an overview of these policy options, see Tegeler and Hilton (2017). For an example of how they could apply in the local AFFH context, see Spievack, N. (2021). *Prioritizing educational equity and school integration in San Francisco's affordable housing strategies*. PRRAC. https://www.prrac.org/prioritizing-educational-equity-and-school-integration-in-san-franciscos-affordable-housing-strategies-by-natalie-spievack-oct-dec-2021-pr-issue/. For strategies geared toward public housing authorities, see Kye, P., Haberle, M., & Tegeler, P. (2021). *Public housing authorities and the new California AFFH law: How to spot key fair housing issues and set goals*. https://prrac.org/pdf/affh-for-ca-phas.pdf. For LIHTC strategies, see Oppenheimer, S. (2015). *Building Opportunity II: Civil rights best practices in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program* (2015 update). https://www.prrac.org/pdf/BuildingOpportunityII.pdf

26. Tegeler, P., & Herskind, M. (2018). *Coordination of community systems and institutions to promote housing and school segregation*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED593881.pdf

27. Oppenheimer (2015).

28. Tegeler & Herskind (2018).

29. Siegel-Hawley, G., Koziol, B., Moeser, J. V., Holden, T., & Shields, T. J. (2017). *Confronting school and housing segregation in the Richmond region: Can we learn and live together?* https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1074&context=spcs-faculty-publications

30. PRRAC. (2016). *Location of proficient schools and school assignment policies*. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/cf-location-of-proficient-schools-12-9-6.pdf

31. Compare with HUD. (2015). *Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule guidebook*. https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/HUD-AFFH-Rule-Guidebook-Dec.-2015.pdf

32. HUD. (2016). Breaking down barriers.

33. Holme & Finnigan (2018).

34. See February 21, 2023, letter to Transportation Secretary Buttigieg and February 21, 2023, letter to Education Secretary Cardona.

35. Finnigan et al. (2021).

36. See Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing 88 F. R. 8516 (February 9, 2023). 2023-07369.pdf (govinfo.gov)

37. AB-686 Housing discrimination: Affirmatively further fair housing, Gov. Code, § 8899.50 (2017–2018). Bill Text - AB-686 Housing discrimination: affirmatively further fair housing. (ca.gov)

Supporting School Integration Through the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program

Philip Tegeler, Poverty & Race Research Action Council[1]

Our largest low-income housing program, the Housing Choice Voucher program, was originally conceived as an experiment to give families the ability to move to a privately owned apartment in a community of their choice in contrast to traditional public housing and other place-based federal subsidized housing, where acceptance of federal housing assistance was generally conditioned on acceptance of a specific, usually segregated, neighborhood and its local zoned school. However, for most of the voucher program's 50-year history, the promise of community choice has not been fulfilled. The housing voucher program has often steered families into higher poverty neighborhoods,[2] and further research has shown that the program exposes children to low-performing, higher poverty elementary schools at a rate similar to what we have seen with other major (place-based) low-income housing programs.[3]

Although these outcomes are largely influenced by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rules and public housing authority (PHA) administrative policies,[4] they are not inevitable. "Housing mobility programs," developed originally as part of remedial orders in public housing desegregation cases,[5] have shown great potential to assist families who want to move to safer, lower poverty neighborhoods through a combination of intensive counseling, housing search assistance, landlord outreach and incentives, and voucher policy adjustments. The continuing emergence of research showing significant health, educational, and economic benefits for children who move to low-poverty neighborhoods[6] has led to increased funding for housing mobility by federal, state, and local governments. Housing mobility programs have now expanded to at least 20 metropolitan areas,[7] and in the past 5 years, Congress has allocated $75 million to support housing mobility services,[8] and several states fund their own mobility programs.[9] Most of the federal funds have gone to build the Community Choice Demonstration in eight cities,[10] and an additional $25 million is being disbursed

in 2023 through a competitive grants program to fund up to 30 additional programs.[11] These programs have been bolstered by broader reforms to the Housing Choice Voucher program that support greater choice and mobility, including a 2016 Small Area Fair Market Rent (SAFMR) rule that has given families the potential to access higher cost rentals in previously inaccessible neighborhoods and communities.[12]

Housing mobility programs have a significant, but underutilized, potential to support school integration by providing access to high-performing, low-poverty schools for low-income children of color. In this sense, housing mobility programs are like interdistrict (city-to-suburb) school integration programs, except that the entire family moves to the suburban school district and the children become resident students in the town. With continuing restrictions on race-based methods for achieving voluntary school integration,[13] and growing uncertainty about the effects of the 2023 affirmative action cases on K–12 education,[14] housing mobility programs may become an increasingly important part of the solution to interdistrict school segregation.

Although many housing mobility programs incorporate measures of school performance in the definition of targeted low-poverty "opportunity areas," and low-income children in mobility programs often move to lower poverty schools,[15] school integration per se has not been an explicit goal of most programs. The goal of this paper is to explore how to incorporate school integration more explicitly into the design of housing mobility programs, both at the front end, in the selection of schools and school districts and in the pre-move counseling process, and then after the move, in the post-move counseling process to help families and children successfully transition to their new communities and schools. This exploration is based, in part, on prior and ongoing work with mobility programs in Texas, Ohio, Maryland, New York, and California, with the goal of developing a practice model for housing mobility programs across the country.

Assessing School Quality and Inclusion in Selecting Target Opportunity Areas

As noted above, many mobility programs incorporate school performance data as part of a broader geographic analysis of opportunity that includes data on neighborhood poverty, access to employment, transit access, and health-related factors. These "opportunity maps" generally define targeted areas eligible for landlord incentives and

individualized housing search assistance. The Child Opportunity Index,[16] which is one nationally available mapping tool, weights school performance heavily. On Long Island, the state housing department uses its own two-factor index of "well-resourced areas" originally developed for siting Low Income Housing Tax Credit developments, where the eligible areas are low-poverty census tracts zoned to an elementary local school exceeding the 50th percentile of school performance on state tests.[17] In assisting the launch of the Long Island program, we also modeled a more detailed "High Opportunity Index" for school districts with six indicators identified as determinants of education outcomes in education literature.[18]

School performance data have sometimes been criticized as the primary metric to evaluate school quality, largely because it reflects student demographics, and also because of its tendency to promote self-segregation of more affluent families in "higher performing" districts.[19] However, because school performance is so closely tied to family income, high-performing schools are a useful initial screening tool for housing mobility programs seeking to help families with children move to areas with lower poverty schools.[20] Once these lower poverty schools are identified, additional performance indicators—like year-to-year growth and performance of subgroups—can be assessed.[21]

Beyond these important contributors to academic achievement, it is also crucial to assess school climate in the school districts that receive children in housing mobility programs. Will children and their parents feel welcome in their new schools, and will they reap the benefits of interacting with children from different backgrounds? This question is closely related to growing concerns about school climate and student mental health,[22] and it also comes out of Professor Raj Chetty et al.'s new research on social capital and the importance of cross-class friendships for long-term economic mobility for low-income children.[23]

To get at this question in the context of interdistrict school integration programs, the National Coalition on School Diversity recently developed a prototype "interdistrict integration assessment tool," which includes nine focus areas that are crucial for successful integration programs, including enrollment, diverse staff, curriculum and instruction, behavior support, family engagement, belonging, access, closing gaps, and student supports.[24] This tool could be adapted for use in housing mobility programs to help families with vouchers make informed choices about which school districts will best meet their children's needs.

Another approach to assessing inclusivity in receiving school districts uses Professor Chetty's social capital study directly. In an impressive display of "big data" research, Chetty and his team have mapped the prevalence of cross-class friendships down to the county, town, and even high school level.[25] Although these data are retrospective (based on who young adults were "friends with" in high school), community and school culture are presumed to be somewhat stable over time. We have looked at these data in the context of the Making Moves program on Long Island, where 127 separate school districts are spread over a two-county area.[26]

In addition to using these more nuanced approaches to identify target areas for mobility programs, each of these analyses can also be built into the initial orientation program for families entering the housing mobility program and then incorporated into the individualized pre-move counseling process that helps families define their goals before embarking on the housing search process. Focus groups and peer-to-peer engagement with families with housing vouchers who have already moved into new school districts can also be helpful in supporting both knowledge and successful transitions into new schools.

The Importance of Post-Move Counseling and Support

Moving to a lower poverty community and school system is obviously only the first step, and high-performing housing mobility programs pay a great deal of attention to ensuring that each family has a successful transition and can sustain its move over time. This "post-move counseling" process generally involves maintaining contact with the family at regular intervals and troubleshooting any issues that come up with the landlord or in the school or community. Long-running programs in Texas and Maryland have paid particular attention to children's experiences in their new schools. For example, at the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP) in Dallas, staff have sometimes helped families register their children in the new district and accompanied families to meetings at the school where concerns have arisen. ICP also has a number of questions relating to school experiences in its regular post-move survey, which helps to identify schools and school districts that are particularly positive for their clients' children (or districts that need intervention). The Baltimore housing mobility program, in addition to routine post-move check-ins and annual client surveys, has in the past experimented with separate focus groups of parents and teens (led by educators) to assess their experiences in their new communities and schools. The Baltimore program also tries to

assist families with costs associated with school sports or extracurricular activities, and it sponsors some students in integrated summer camp programs.[27] These models are highly replicable and should be studied further, refined with input from educators, and disseminated widely as housing mobility programs expand.

Linking Interdistrict School Integration Programs With Regional Housing Mobility Programs

Many thousands of children have participated in the interdistrict school integration programs in Boston, Hartford, St. Louis, and other cities—and many of those children are in families with housing choice vouchers, or families who are eligible for the program. But little has been done to connect these programs until recently. After years of effort, the Connecticut legislature finally passed a small pilot program in 2021, allocating 20 state-funded housing vouchers to families participating in the city-to-suburb Open Choice school integration program.[28] The basic concept of this pilot is to identify income-eligible families in the Open Choice program and offer them the opportunity to move to the town where their children are attending school, thus making them resident children of the suburban school district and opening up an additional seat for another Hartford student in the Open Choice program. The Hartford-based Open Communities Alliance, which advocated for the new program and is working to implement it, used a similar theory in a 2017 lawsuit to restore an important housing voucher rule suspended by the Trump administration.[29] The Open Communities Alliance also hopes to canvass families in the Open Choice program to determine who is already participating in the federal voucher program and to refer those families to targeted housing mobility services if they are interested in making a residential move to the school district their children attend. If successful, this concept could be brought to other regions operating interdistrict school integration programs.

Conclusion: The Future of Housing Mobility and School Integration

The current expansion of housing mobility programs in more cities and metropolitan areas represents a significant opening to increase school integration through housing policy and to incorporate school integration considerations directly into housing mobility practice. As noted above, eight new programs are currently launching under HUD's Community Choice Demonstration, and an additional Notice of Funding Availability for $25 million in competitive grants for housing mobility services was

announced in June 2023.[30] In addition, HUD is in the process of reinstating the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule, which will force many PHAs to confront the high levels of concentration in their Housing Choice Voucher programs and develop proposed solutions.[31] Housing mobility is expected to be at the top of the agenda for many of these agencies in their AFFH plans.[32]

There are a number of ways to build on the potential synergy between housing mobility and school integration over the next few years—both in terms of further research and the development and dissemination of best practice models. A survey of existing housing mobility programs, building on past surveys,[33] will help determine the extent to which school metrics and school district engagement are part of mobility program structure, and a set of model pre- and post-move counseling tools focused on improving children's integration into their new school communities will help program staff prioritize school integration as an intrinsic goal of mobility practice. Improved assessment of school climate—including further development of the interdistrict integration assessment tool—will help ensure that children are entering schools with inclusive environments and supportive leadership. For the upcoming renewal of the AFFH planning process, training and guidance will be needed for local jurisdictions and PHAs to effectively engage school districts and school district leaders.[34] The Connecticut housing voucher school integration pilot program is also worthy of further expansion, study, and replication as a potential model for other states. Finally, it will be essential to actively include the voices and experiences of families and children who have overcome challenges to move successfully from high-poverty neighborhoods and schools to more diverse and lower poverty environments.[35]

APPENDIX 1.4: Examples of Mapping School Districts for Mobility Programs in Cleveland and Long Island

Figure 1.4.A-1. Initial Map of Well-Resourced Areas in Cleveland Region Overlaid With School District Boundaries

Figure 1.4.A-2. Excerpt From Long Island Maps of Well-Resourced Areas, Housing Authority Jurisdiction, and School District Boundaries

Figure 1-4.A-3. Racial/Ethnic Student Concentrations in 27 Long Island School Districts

Percent Black or Hispanic Students by Unified School District

Percent Black or Hispanic students
- 4 - 9%
- 9 - 19%
- 19 - 28%
- 28 - 56%
- 56 - 100%

1 in = 6 miles
0   3.25   6.5   13 Miles

National Center for Education Statistics 2016-17 data
Map classes are quintiles
Created by PRRAC 2019
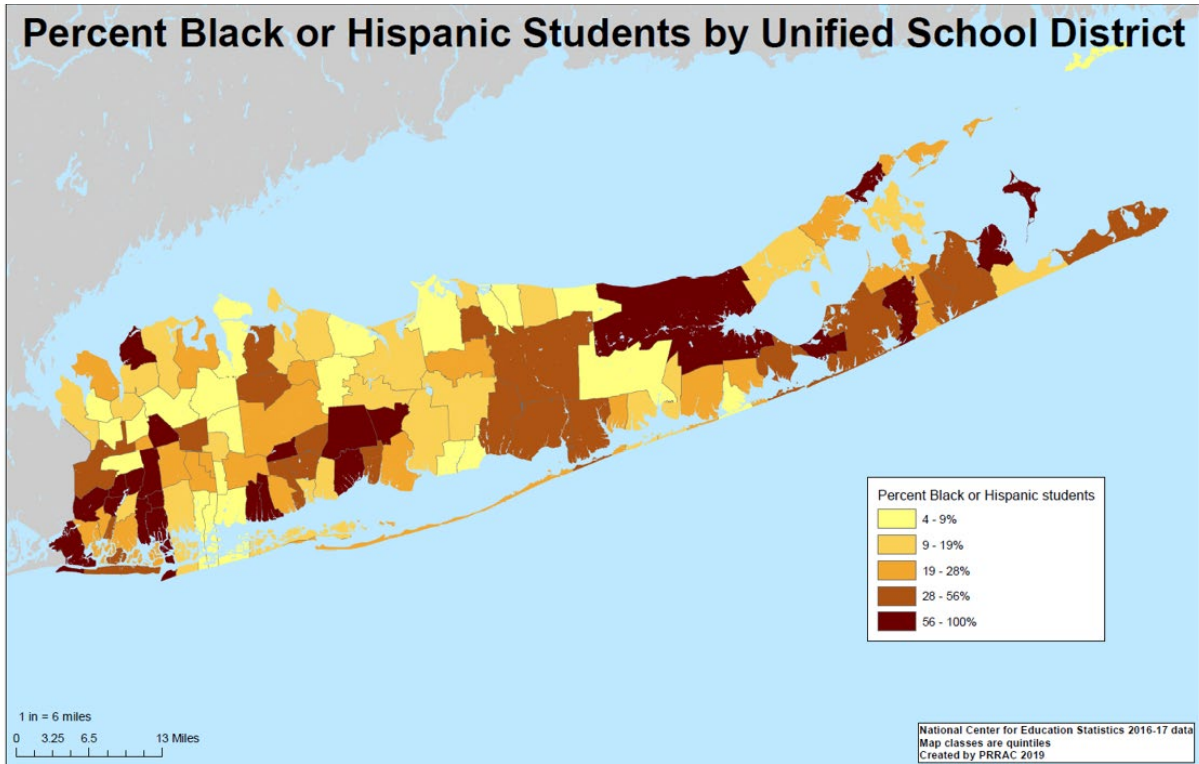
Notes

1. The author would like to acknowledge a number of important partners in this work who have helped develop the insights in this paper, and who will be instrumental in developing these ideas for more widespread use in practice: Shamira Lawrence of the Inclusive Communities Project in Dallas; Jeanmarie Buffet with the Community Development Corporation of Long Island; Erin Boggs and staff at the Open Communities Alliance in Connecticut; Brian Knudsen, senior research associate at PRRAC; and the staff and board members of Mobility Works, a technical assistance collaborative that includes PRRAC, the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership, Housing Choice Partners (Chicago), and the Inclusive Communities Project. Thanks also to Nina Todd, PRRAC policy fellow, for her helpful research assistance.

2. Mazzara, A., & Knudsen, B. (2019). *Where families with children use housing vouchers: A comparative look at the 50 largest metropolitan areas*. PRRAC. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/where_families_use_vouchers_2019.pdf

3. Gould Ellen, I., & Horn, K. (2018). *Housing and educational opportunity: Characteristics of local schools near families with federal housing assistance*. PRRAC. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/HousingLocationSchools2018.pdf

4. Tegeler, P. (2020). *Housing choice voucher reform: A primer for 2021 and beyond*. PRRAC. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/housing-choice-voucher-reform-agenda.pdf

5. For example, Gautreaux v. HUD (Chicago), Walker v. HUD (Dallas), and Thompson v. HUD (Baltimore).

6. For an excellent short summary of the research, see Fedorowicz, M., & Brennan, M. (2020). *As HUD prepares a new demonstration, what do we know about housing mobility and kids' outcomes*? Urban Institute. https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/hud-prepares-new-demonstration-what-do-we-know-about-housing-mobility-and-kids-outcomes

7. PRRAC & Mobility Works. (2022). *Housing mobility programs in the U.S. 2022*. https://www.prrac.org/pdf/prracHousingMobilitySurvey2022.pdf

8. This total includes $25 million in the 2019 and 2020 federal budgets, respectively, for the Community Choice Demonstration (formerly called the Housing Mobility Demonstration), currently funding programs in eight regions, and an additional $25 million in the 2022 budget for Housing Mobility Services, to be allocated through a competitive grants program in 2023.

9. States supporting housing mobility programs include Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey.

10. HUD. (n.d.). *Housing Choice Voucher mobility demonstration*. https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/communitychoicedemo

11. PRRAC. (2022). *Mobility Works praises inclusion of $25 million for housing mobility services in bipartisan FY 2022 omnibus spending bill*. https://www.prrac.org/mobility-works-praises-inclusion-of-25-million-for-housing-mobility-services-in-bipartisan-fy-2022-omnibus-spending-bill/

12. The SAFMR rule, Establishing a More Effective Fair Market Rent System, 81 F.R. 80567 (November 16, 2016), replaced regionwide rent caps based on the 40th percentile of metropolitan rents with ZIP code–based rents at the 40th percentile in 24 metropolitan areas. In other parts of the country, adoption of SAFMRs was voluntary, and many public housing agencies (PHAs) have adopted these higher rent caps in more expensive, higher opportunity neighborhoods and communities. Other potential program reforms to expand families' ability to access high-performing, less-segregated schools may include changes to the way that HUD evaluates PHA performance, and streamlining movement of vouchers across PHA jurisdictional lines. See generally Tegeler, P. (2020). *Housing choice voucher reform: A primer for 2021 and beyond*. PRRAC. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/housing-choice-voucher-reform-agenda.pdf

13. See Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District 1, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).

14. See, for example, Starr, S. B. (in press). The magnet-school wars and the future of colorblindness. *Stanford Law Review*, *76*(1).

15. DeLuca, S., Rhodes, A., & Garboden, P. M. E. (2016). *The power of place: How housing policy can boost educational opportunity*. Abell Foundation. https://abell.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ed-power-place31516.pdf

16. Developed by researchers at Brandeis University, the Child Opportunity Index uses multiple indicators associated with child well-being and economic mobility to construct a national geographic database. The index has been used by several housing mobility programs in the United States. Child Opportunity Index (COI) | diversitydatakids.org

17. New York State Homes and Community Renewal. (n.d.). *Map*. https://nyshcr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=b0ca4a8432104bb4ac71fb576ee51175

18. The indicators, in a paper prepared for us by Olivia Ildefonso (PhD, CUNY 2021), include per-pupil spending, graduation rate, dropout rate, percentage of economically disadvantaged (poverty rate), percentage receiving an advanced Regent's diploma, and mean classroom size. This index was not used to select areas of opportunity, but it was shared with counseling staff.

19. See Hasan, S., & Kumar, A. (2019, December 5). *Digitization and divergence: Online school ratings and segregation in America*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3265316

20. There is a strong body of evidence that low-income children benefit from attending lower poverty schools. See Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2017). *The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools*. National Coalition on School Diversity. https://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf

21. The GreatSchools app now helpfully tracks year-to-year growth and the performance of racial and ethnic subgroups. See Barnum, M. (2020, September 24*). GreatSchools overhauls ratings in bid to reduce link with race and poverty.* https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/9/24/21453357/greatschools-overhauls-ratings-reduce-link-race-poverty

22. See American Civil Liberties Union. (2021, July 29). *ACLU comment on school climate and discipline* (in response to DOE Request for Information ED-2021-OCR-0068). https://www.aclu.org/letter/aclu-comment-school-climate-and-discipline. See also Aspen Institute. (n.d.). *From a nation at risk to a nation at hope.* https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606337.pdf; and Pennsylvania State University. (2018). *School climate and social and emotional learning: The integration of two approaches.* https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/School-Climate-and-Social-and-Emotional-Learning-Integrative-Approach-January-2018.pdf

23. Chetty, R., Jackson, M. O., Kuchler, T., Stroebel, J., Hiller, A., Oppenheimer, S., & The Opportunity Insights Team. (2022, August). Social capital and economic mobility. *Opportunity Insights.* https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/socialcapital_nontech.pdf

24. A prototype of the tool is available at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18Nk5me7CJmbTTzOvOHpZ2ywOUPV4UTkZwP_2cN8YjuE/edit#gid=0

25. See Opportunity Insights. (n.d.). *Social capital atlas.* [designed and developed by Darkhorse Analytics]. https://socialcapital.org/?dimension=EconomicConnectednessIndividual&dim1=EconomicConnectednessIndividual&dim2=CohesivenessClustering&dim3=CivicEngagementVolunteeringRates&geoLevel=hs&selectedId=362706005839

26. Community Development Corporation of Long Island (CDCLI). (2023). *Making Moves program.* https://www.cdcli.org/programs/making-moves/. See Enterprise. (2022). *A review of the New York State Housing Mobility pilot: Lessons from Buffalo, Long Island, and New York City.* https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/prrac-review-of-ny-state-housing-mobility-pilot.pdf

27. The Baltimore mobility program was recently described as a "de facto" school integration program in a profile published by The Century Foundation. (2021). *Bridges Collaborative member spotlight: A new model for combating housing segregation post-pandemic.* https://tcf.org/content/commentary/bridges-spotlight-new-model-combating-housing-segregation-post-pandemic/

28. State of Connecticut House Special Act No. 21-26, *An Act Establishing the Open Choice Vouchers Pilot Program* (approved July 12, 2021). https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/act/Sa/pdf/2021SA-00026-R00HB-06436-SA.PDF

29. See Open Communities Alliance v. Carson, https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/Filed-OCA-v.-Carson-complaint.pdf. In that case, one of the plaintiffs, Crystal Carter, lived in Hartford but had several children attending school in the suburban town of Simsbury. The new HUD rule had raised voucher rent caps high enough to enable the family to move to the town, but then the rule was suspended. After Open Communities Alliance won the case, Crystal and her family were able to move to a home in Simsbury (the author was a co-counsel in the case).

30. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2023, June 1). HUD makes $25 million in funding available to public housing authorities to help families get access to better housing; schools. [Press release HUD No. 23-108]. https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/hud_no_23_108

31. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (proposed rule), 88 F.R. 8516 (February 9, 2023). The reinstated AFFH rule—like the original 2015 rule—is also expected to encourage PHAs and jurisdictions to confer and collaborate with their local school districts.

32. See Kye, P., Haberle, M., & Tegeler, P. (with Williams, R., Thrope, D., Simmons, B., Walz, K., & Milwit, L.). (2021). *Public housing authorities and the New California AFFH law: How to spot key fair housing issues and set goals.* PRRAC & NHLP. https://prrac.org/pdf/affh-for-ca-phas.pdf (discussing strategies for PHAs to comply with the AFFH requirement, which was adopted as a state law in California after the Trump administration suspended the federal version).

33. See PRRAC & Mobility Works. (2022, December). *Housing mobility programs in the U.S. 2022.* Housing Mobility Programs in the U.S. 2022 (PRRAC and Mobility Works, Dec 2022) - HousingMobility.org

34. See, for example, Tegeler, P., Knudsen, B., Kye, P., Mouton, M., Lawson, Jr., H., Orfield, M., Stancil, W., Gross, E., Owen, C., Kahlenberg, R., Potter, H., Burris, M., Lallinger, S., Bierbaum, A. H., & Jellison Holme, J. (2021, October 27). *Meaningful collaboration between housing and education agencies in the implementation of AFFH (PRRAC et al., September 2021).* [letter of housing–schools working group to HUD and the Department of Education]. https://www.prrac.org/schools-affh-rule-letter-09-13-21/

35. See Mumphery, D. (2021, July). *Genuine engagement with housing choice voucher families.* Mobility Works & PRRAC. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/genuine-engagement-with-hcv-families.pdf

PART 2:

State-Based Advocacy

Although federal policy is an important driver of school integration, state-level action has the power to create change locally. State and local governments play among the most significant roles in determining education policy and outcomes. However, due to unique histories, politics, and legal frameworks, some states offer more fertile ground for change than others.

The authors in this part champion the importance of collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches that unite the goals of school integration, broader community integration, and school resource equity. Each essay includes case studies of state-based approaches to cultivating and leveraging powerful alliances to make new inroads in school integration and equity.

Fulfilling Brown's Promise: Integrated, Well-Resourced Schools That Prepare All Students to Succeed

Ary Amerikaner and Saba Bireda, Brown's Promise

Introduction: Integration to Achieve Resource Equity

School integration is a proven tool to advance access to opportunity and improve outcomes for historically marginalized and underserved communities, including students of color and students living in poverty. School integration works because it improves resource equity. The additional school resources that came along with court-ordered desegregation explain a significant amount of the beneficial effects for Black students; greater exposure to white peers without appreciable change in resources and funding did **not** lead to improved outcomes.[1] History has shown that, although there may be individual exceptions, at scale, so long as students of color and students living in poverty attend racially and socioeconomically isolated schools, they will be systematically denied the resources and opportunities—both tangible and intangible—offered to their white and wealthier peers.

Brown v. Board of Education was a groundbreaking Supreme Court case that overturned the legal concept of "separate but equal" public schools and demanded an end to segregation of students by race in schools.[2] Court-ordered desegregation in the post-*Brown* era was rife with challenges; generations of former students can attest to this. Many of the concerns about seriously revisiting school integration stem from communities of color—specifically Black families who have lived experiences of long bus rides, unsafe or unwelcoming schools, and within-school segregation/tracking that they do not want their children to experience. But we cannot afford to abandon the strategy entirely because of these challenges. Integration is one of the few reform strategies in recent history that substantially and meaningfully improved the life trajectories of millions of students of color. We can, and must, co-create and advance a vision of "integration 2.0" that seeks to achieve the same benefits articulated in *Brown*—

unlocking the resources and opportunities, the social and political capital, the networks of higher education opportunities—for students of color and students living in poverty, while intentionally avoiding the problems of "integration 1.0."

Defining the Problem: Collective Abandonment of One of the Most Successful Education Reforms in American History

Research is clear on the fundamentals: Money matters in providing a quality education,[3] and racial and socioeconomic integration is good for student outcomes.[4] More school funding and diverse schools are good for all students, and they are especially good for historically underserved communities—students of color and those from low-income families.

For example, Black students who experienced court-ordered school desegregation for all 12 years of public schooling:[5]

- Completed more than a full year of additional education ("including greater college attendance and completion rates, not to mention attendance at more selective colleges"), enough to "eliminate the black-white educational attainment gap" (p. 60).

- Saw roughly a 30-percentage-point increase in likelihood of graduation, a 30% increase in adult wages, a 22-percentage-point decrease in likelihood of incarceration, and a 22-percentage-point decrease in likelihood of poverty.

These outcomes are not unique to Black students; Hispanic students who experienced court-ordered school desegregation in California for all 12 years of public schooling completed roughly 1 to 2 additional years of education,[6] in line with the preceding finding for Black students.

The two strategies—well-funded and integrated schools from preschool through graduation—are inextricably connected.[7] School segregation is one of the biggest impediments to achieving resource equity. Even relatively progressive school funding policies frequently cannot overcome the school district borders that segregate and isolate by race and socioeconomic class. Achieving resource equity is nearly impossible without an explicit focus on breaking down district borders and revising school assignment policies. For example:

- Segregation increases overall cost. The more socioeconomically segregated[8] the schools, the more money is needed overall, because it is more expensive to serve students well in schools with concentrated poverty.

- Segregation increases the need for redistribution. The more segregated the schools are and the more concentrated wealth is in individual school districts, the greater the potential for inequity and the more redistribution of money is needed to fund schools fairly across a state, because wealth must shift from wealthy areas to less wealthy areas.

- Segregation means that, even if achieved, funding equity does not translate to resource equity or a meaningful change in student experience. Teacher churn, inequitable access to advanced coursework, and overreliance on exclusionary discipline often remain in schools that serve high concentrations of students of color and students from low-income families.

Yet, although many education advocates and policymakers are focused on achieving resource equity more broadly or school funding equity more narrowly, very few of those thought leaders are focused on actively addressing the borders that divide students from each other and from access to resources, and on breaking down those boundaries as a means to achieve their goal. *With few exceptions, we in the resource equity field focus on increasing funding in schools or districts with concentrations of poverty and ignore the borders and policies that create the concentration of poverty. We too often avoid talking about school integration, despite its critical role in achieving resource equity and its proven record of achievement.*

Fulfilling *Brown's* Promise: A New Wave of State-Specific Advocacy Campaigns Centered on State Court Litigation

To reignite the movement for integrated, well-resourced schools in the 21st century, we need a new wave of state-specific advocacy campaigns centered on state court litigation that makes explicit states' constitutional duty[9] to provide all students with an opportunity to attend a racially and socioeconomically integrated school that is well resourced, safe, affirming, and prepares all students for success. These campaigns will explicitly bridge the gap between (a) the school funding and resource equity field and (b) the school integration and diversity field, which are too often siloed, and will consistently bring a third lens: (c) a focus on the student experience.

Why Litigation?

Meaningfully tackling the borders that divide students from one another and from resources is one of the hardest, most politically controversial components of education reform. Proposing school integration initiatives can mean political suicide for elected or appointed leaders, because these initiatives may affect property values and evoke fear and anxiety in families about changing students' school assignments and daily experiences. Litigation can provide political cover for leaders who want to pursue school integration but fear the backlash of initiating such efforts.[10] It also provides a multitude of opportunities for advocates to advance policy goals: every court filing is a media opportunity; discovery informs smarter, more nuanced policy proposals; and settlement sets the table for meaningful process and policy solutions negotiated by those in power and those most impacted. Finally, litigation provides a reframing of the story for advocates talking to legislators: a veiled threat, "make these policy changes now, before the court takes over." We know from years of experience and by comparing notes with other advocates and litigators that this strategic interplay between litigation and policy advocacy is a more effective strategy than either alone.

If litigation must be central to the work, one might ask what legal theories are left to pursue after decades of court-ordered desegregation efforts in federal courts directed at school districts' decisions about how students are assigned to individual schools. These efforts have, in recent years, ground to a near halt as federal court interpretations of the U.S. Constitution have all but shut off this pathway.

But there are promising legal theories that have only begun to be explored.

One such theory is rooted in state constitutions and the intersection between school desegregation and resource equity. Decades of state court litigation has tackled the question of whether states are meeting the duty prescribed to them in their state constitutions to provide an "adequate" and/or "equitable" public education for all students. These cases have very rarely included any element of racial and socioeconomic desegregation, but they could. Under this theory, plaintiffs would assert that the state's responsibility to provide an adequate education includes providing that education in a desegregated setting, in addition to appropriately funding and resourcing those schools. Today, in fact, New Jersey and Minnesota have active litigation advancing this theory. These efforts can be the seeds of new litigation and policy campaigns in multiple

states. It is plain to our eyes that any minimally adequate education in an ever more diverse America in the 21st century must include access to critical educational resources and a diverse, integrated, and inclusive school that prepares all students to work with, live with, and learn with others. Encouragingly, it appears that the Minnesota Supreme Court may agree. In a 2018 opinion, it said, albeit in a footnote, "It is self-evident that a segregated system of public schools is not 'general, 'uniform,' 'thorough,' or 'efficient,'" citing the requirements of the Minnesota Constitution's education clause (Minn. Const. Art. XIII § 1).[11]

The case in Minnesota is still being litigated, and it is, of course, possible that the outcome will not be what we hope. In a holistic policy and advocacy campaign, winning the lawsuit, though exciting and important when it happens, is not the only goal. At its best, this type of impact litigation is about bringing serious claims that provide a credible threat and a legitimate chance of success. But this litigation can also serve as a central tool in a broader advocacy and communications campaign; achieving a meaningful settlement or providing cover for a legislative or policy change are equally meaningful ways to progress.

Actively bringing new cases such as these, and strategically pairing them with advocacy and communications campaigns, requires bridging the long-standing siloes between (a) the school funding litigators and experts who have historically been the backbone of state education cases, and (b) civil rights litigators and desegregation experts who have historically worked in federal court to bring federal equal protection claims.

What Are the Concrete Steps?

Months of exploratory conversations with more than 50 thought partners (including researchers, litigators, advocates, former and current policymakers, national thought leaders, and philanthropic partners) have convinced us there is a real appetite for this effort, and that it will take four strands of work:

1. Research.

2. Communications support.

3. Learning labs/communities of practice.

4. In-state advocacy and litigation support.

Research. Although there is a strong research base supporting this theory of change (see above for a description), we must also be honest about the gaps in current research and ensure that we have answers to the questions policymakers and advocates will be asked as they work to advance a new vision of intentionally integrated, well-resourced schools that prepare all students for success. For example:

- **Integration/Segregation's Impact on Student Outcomes.** How does racial and socioeconomic integration/segregation affect long-term educational, employment, health, and other outcomes for different students? How do these answers differ today from when they were studied in the decades immediately following *Brown v. Board of Education*? How does the level of funding and other resources available at the pre-K–12 schools affect the answer? How do these answers differ in the context of different integration strategies (e.g., magnet schools, intentional school siting, charters, redrawing school assignment lines, cross-district transfer programs)? How do the answers differ if the student pursues higher education in a predominantly white institution compared to, say, a historically Black college or university, or in another minority-serving institution?

- **Integration/Segregation's Impact on Funding Reform.** Does the degree of integration or segregation in public schools cause differences in school funding? After a state or district reforms its funding formula, how do the daily experiences of students of color, for example, change in places with different degrees of integration or segregation? In places with deeply segregated schools, does an increase in funding affect the rate of teacher churn, access to advanced coursework opportunities, or school climate? Graduation rates, college-going rates, and employment outcomes? Are the answers different in schools that are less segregated, especially those without intense within-school segregation?

- **How feasible is meaningful school integration in today's housing and transit contexts?** What data tools, mapping systems, and analytic capacity can be brought to bear on the challenge of transportation to support intentionally integrated schools while maintaining reasonable commute times? Which types of school districts or geographic regions can advance integration goals within their current housing and transit realities?

The Brown's Promise research agenda must be **co-created by litigators, state-based advocates, and rigorous, diverse researchers**. This collaborative process will ensure

that the research questions are both high-value (e.g., policymakers, advocates, practitioners, and litigators think they would help advance their work) and answerable (e.g., researchers have identified data sources and clear methodological approaches to answering the questions).

Communications Support. As Nikole Hannah-Jones writes in *The New York Times*, "that Americans of all stripes believe that the brief period in which we actually tried to desegregate our schools was a failure, speaks to one of the most successful propaganda campaigns of the last half century."[12] We need strategic communications tools to respond to the negative connotations that inevitably arise in discussions about integration.

Those communications tools must be informed by **message testing** focused on understanding how Black and Hispanic families, teachers, thought leaders, and policymakers understand school integration efforts, and which messages do or do not resonate in pursuing intentional, equity-focused integration. The communications tools must also provide **positive stories** of what school integration has to offer for all students and highlight existing well-resourced, integrated schools. This could include identifying and supporting a cohort of "champions" who can talk about their own lived experiences, and the strategic use of site visits and multimedia to counter the negative images often associated with integration.

Learning Labs/Communities of Practice. Our interest in this work stems from midcareer realizations that the authors' two fields—one in civil rights law with a school diversity focus and the other in school funding and resource equity policymaking and advocacy—have been missing opportunities because of long-standing professional silos. Building relationships and trust between those who historically work on school funding/resource equity and those focused on desegregation/integration requires an ongoing space to work together on building a shared vision and learning from one another's strategies, successes, and mistakes. The best way to begin this effort is to **host a series of "learning labs"** with a group of national and state-based experts in each field and with equity leaders from individual states in which we can learn from one another and innovate together. In these working sessions, participants can build the shared research agenda described above; build, test, and refine legal theories; and identify, strengthen, and create new policy solutions and legal remedies that work for

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students and families, are feasible for school systems, and will survive legal threats from the Right.

In-State Advocacy and Litigation Support. From our years of direct litigation and advocacy experience, we know the following:

- Examples of success—proof points that this can be done and, in fact, has been done somewhere else—are absolutely critical to change.

- No legal theory, policy solution, or advocacy strategy that works in one place will work exactly the same way in multiple places.

To create proof points, we should start by focusing on a few states. Asking in-state leaders to add this very large item to their agenda will require investment in capacity and support; these advocates are overwhelmed and under resourced, fighting on countless fronts (e.g., "critical race theory" in pre-K–12 schools, book bans, and the school-to-prison pipeline). These early states should be chosen based on a combination of at least four factors:

1. **State constitutional language and jurisprudence**: places with language and court interpretations more likely to support our understanding of constitutional requirements.

2. **Individual, influential state leaders who support integration:** policymakers who will actually use the political cover that litigation and advocacy create.

3. **Committed equity advocates:** effective in-state equity advocates who fundamentally believe in this work but need staffing capacity and supports to engage meaningfully.

4. **Divisive district borders**: states with multiple geographic regions in which district borders themselves clearly divide diverse cities, towns, or neighborhoods, creating districts in very close proximity to one another serving very different student populations.

An Invitation (Rather Than a Conclusion)

School integration will not solve all our challenges as a society, or even all of the challenges plaguing our public schools. We might soon learn that we should not even call it "integration" anymore. But given the results it boasts for historically marginalized

and underserved students long into their adult lives, and given the ways that school segregation today undermines our efforts to adequately and equitably fund and resource schools, we cannot afford not to try. Our democracy and our children are more than ready for integrated, well-resourced schools that are safe and affirming, and that prepare all students for success. This is why we are working to create Brown's Promise,[13] devoted to the ideas and action steps outlined in this essay. We welcome collaboration with others who are interested in joining us in the effort.

Notes

1. Johnson, R., & Nazaryan, A. (2019). *Children of the dream: Why school integration works*. Basic Books and Russell Sage Foundation. https://gspp.berkeley.edu/static/default_site/static/research-and-impact/publications/children-of-the-dream-why-school-integration-works/index.php

2. Brown v. Board of Educ., 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

3. See Baker, B. (2016). *Does money matter in education?* (2nd ed.). Albert Shanker Institute; Kirabo Jackson, C. (2018). *Does school spending matter? The new literature on an old question*. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w25368/w25368.pdf; Kirabo Jackson, C., Johnson, R., & Persico, C. (2016). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *131*(1), 157–218. https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/131/1/157/2461148?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false; and Kirabo Jackson, C., & Mackevicius, C. (2021). *The distribution of school spending impacts*. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/papers/w28517

4. See Johnson, R., & Nazaryan, A. (2019). *Children of the dream: Why school integration works*. Basic Books and Russell Sage Foundation. https://gspp.berkeley.edu/static/default_site/static/research-and-impact/publications/children-of-the-dream-why-school-integration-works/index.php; Anstreicher, G., Fletcher, J., & Thompson, O. (2022). *The long run impacts of court-ordered desegregation*. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w29926/w29926.pdf; Antman, F., & Cortes, K. (2022). *The long-run impacts of Mexican-American school desegregation*. IZA Institute of Labor Economics and forthcoming in the *Journal of Economic Literature*. https://docs.iza.org/dp15019.pdf; and The Century Foundation. (2019). *The benefits of socioeconomically and racially integrated schools and classrooms.*

5. Johnson, R., & Nazaryan, A. (2019). *Children of the dream: Why school integration works*. Basic Books and Russell Sage Foundation.

6. Antman, F., & Cortez, K. (2022). *The long run impacts of Mexican-American school desegregation*. [Discussion paper]. IZA Institute of Labor Economics. (Forthcoming in *Journal of Economic Literature*).

7. This is the thesis of *Children of The Dream: Why School Integration Works*.

8. Race is still meaningfully correlated with poverty in America, although the correlation has been reduced over the last 60 years. This pattern is also true for children; Black, American Indian, and Latinx children are more than twice as likely to grow up in poverty as their non-Hispanic white, Asian, and Pacific Islander peers.

9.   See, for example, Sciarra, D. (2023.). *Equity and diversity: Defining the right to education for the 21st century*. The Education Law Center. https://edlawcenter.org/assets/files/pdfs/ELC%2050th%20Anniversary%20Report.pdf

10. See, for example, the opposition that former NYC School Chancellor Richard Carranza faced when he attempted to desegregate the city's schools by redrawing attendance zones: https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/07/richard-carranza-segregation-new-york-city-schools/564299/

11. The seminal case in this line of litigation was in Connecticut in the 1980s and '90s, in which the Supreme Court held that "the existence of extreme racial and ethnic isolation in the public school system deprives schoolchildren of a substantially equal educational opportunity and requires the state to take further remedial measures." Sheff v. O'Neill, 238 Conn. 1, 25–26, 678 A.2d 1267, 1281 (1996). However, the active litigation in Minnesota is more widely applicable because the Connecticut, New Jersey, and Hawaii state constitutions all share explicit prohibitions on segregation in public schools, unlike the vast majority of other state constitutions.

12. Hannah-Jones, N. (2019.). It was never about busing: Court ordered desegregation worked. But white racism made it hard to accept. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/opinion/sunday/it-was-never-about-busing.html

13. https://www.brownspromise.org/

A Multidimensional Approach to School Diversity in New Jersey and Beyond

Danielle Farrie and Robert Kim, Education Law Center, and David Sciarra, Learning Policy Institute

The prospect of real momentum in school desegregation at a statewide level, not witnessed in decades, is on the horizon. A New Jersey trial court is poised to issue a ruling in a lawsuit, *Latino Action Network v. New Jersey*, which could compel the state to dismantle school segregation in not just one or two districts, but statewide.[1] This case presents both a formidable challenge and a unique opportunity for New Jersey, whose schools are among the most segregated in the nation. It could also ignite a renewed commitment to desegregating schools in other states.

Whatever its outcome, the litigation has cast a spotlight on the shameful degree of racial segregation in New Jersey schools and the need for an innovative, multidisciplinary, cross-sector approach to remedy it. Members of the research and advocacy communities and the education and housing sectors must pursue racial diversity in schools in a manner that heeds the principles articulated in *Brown v. Board of Education* while recognizing the sociocultural, political, and legal realities of the 21st century.

Background

In recent decades, New Jersey has made great strides in meeting its obligation to provide equitable funding and resources for low-income students and students of color, most notably through the *Abbott v. Burke* litigation.[2] Despite these gains in school funding equity, New Jersey students continue to be educated in schools that are among the most segregated in the nation. New Jersey has the fifth-highest level of intense segregation among Black students and the fourth-highest level among Latinx students.[3] The connection between inadequate funding and racial segregation is readily apparent: Our research reveals that New Jersey districts with predominantly Black and Latinx student populations are spending more than $3,200 below state funding adequacy targets, whereas districts that are predominantly non-Black or -Latinx are spending more than $2,200 above what is needed to achieve funding adequacy.[4]

The primary drivers of entrenched school segregation in New Jersey are the residential segregation and lack of affordable housing that permeate the state. In New Jersey, like many other northeastern states, the historical ramifications of property-tax-funded schools, white flight, redlining, and other racist housing policies have resulted in highly segregated school district boundaries that mirror highly segregated municipalities.[5]

Even with these conditions, several legal factors in New Jersey provide reason for hope. New Jersey is the only state where the constitutional right to a public education has been interpreted to encompass both equity *and* diversity.[6] The New Jersey Supreme Court has previously held that the state must provide all students with equitable funding to achieve rigorous academic standards *and* integrate its schools (although the state has not made progress on the latter).[7] In addition, the court, in the *Mount Laurel* case, has also established a constitutional right to affordable housing, which provides a legal foundation for reducing the residential segregation that is the greatest barrier to achieving diverse schools in the state.[8]

A Three-Part Plan

Given the enormity of the task and impact on all communities—suburban, urban, and rural—an effective plan to integrate and diversify New Jersey's public schools must bridge education and housing policy, address school funding and resources, include short- and long-term strategies, and not only tap existing programs but also create new ones. And it will have to navigate the unsettled legal landscape resulting from United States Supreme Court decisions narrowing the range of permissible action on voluntary school desegregation under the U.S. Constitution.[9]

The plan should involve three core goals:

1. Study and Revamp Voluntary Interdistrict Public School Choice Programs

Interdistrict public school choice programs enable students to attend schools in districts outside the ones to which they are assigned. Research has shown that interdistrict public school choice models improve academic outcomes for participating students, contribute to positive changes in racial attitudes, and have long-lasting effects on social mobility.[10] New Jersey's educational landscape has multiple options, including charter and magnet schools, a county-level vocational school system, and a limited interdistrict public school choice program.

The potential for these programs to increase racial and socioeconomic diversity is clear, but New Jersey must remodel them to advance that goal. In fact, none of these programs currently operates with any directives to promote student diversity; some even contribute to the segregation of students by race and income.[11] Further research is needed to redesign interdistrict programs and to explore new, innovative models:

First, *map the pre-K–12 public school choice program enrollment landscape* in New Jersey. A full, statewide accounting of enrollment in charter, magnet, vocational, and interdistrict choice schools or programs, including participation by race and income level, is long overdue.

Second, establish collaborative and innovative *research–practice partnerships*[12] with the school communities that are (or have the potential to be) most impacted by public school choice programs. This would involve partnering with researchers *and* practitioners (including those listed below) to improve the existing public school choice landscape. This research would center the experiences of students, families, and school personnel. Initial research goals could include the following:

- Capturing the *motivations and experiences* among public school choice program participants of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

- Understanding the *benefits and obstacles* perceived by educational leadership in sending and receiving districts of students in public school choice programs.

- Identifying *patterns and outcomes of interdistrict public school choice participation*, including the demographic characteristics and academic or other outcomes of those who participate in these programs, and the characteristics of schools that students choose (and leave).

- Exploring *new initiatives or measures* that could complement or go well beyond existing public school choice programs.

The legal and political challenges of fostering school integration through school district choice programs are not unique to New Jersey. This research could identify challenges or promising strategies or measures transferable to other states seeking to evaluate or improve integration through voluntary interdistrict choice programs. Although 28 states permit voluntary interdistrict open enrollment, only 11 of these states include desegregation provisions in their interdistrict enrollment programs, and even fewer are

charged with improving, rather than simply maintaining, the existing racial balance.[13] This demonstrates a clear opportunity in (and need for) many states to redesign choice programs to promote integration.

2. Link School Integration and School Finance Reform

Recent research confirms that desegregation programs improve student outcomes, and that desegregation coupled with school finance reforms and increased spending lead to even better outcomes.[14] New Jersey's long-standing commitment to school funding equity creates a strong foundation for desegregation efforts. Although New Jersey is close to providing the state aid required by the school funding formula, many districts, especially high-poverty districts serving predominantly students of color, still struggle to provide enough local funding to meet state-defined adequacy targets.[15]

As part of an effort to link desegregation efforts with reforms designed to update and modernize the state's school funding formula, a research plan could include:

- Examining the ways in which New Jersey's finance formula disproportionately burdens taxpayers in *communities of color affected by historic racism and neglect*.

- Exploring ways to adjust New Jersey's funding formula to *encourage districts to actively pursue racial diversity or desegregation* through district consolidation, redrawing attendance zones, targeted school siting and construction, or other means.

- Pursuing formula changes that ensure that districts have *extra resources to increase racial diversity* in the teaching force, adopt *a multicultural curriculum,* and foster a *positive school climate* for students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

- Engaging stakeholders and policymakers on whether the formula should include *reparations or compensation* for historically inadequate funding that has disproportionately harmed low-income students of color in urban and inner-ring suburban districts.[16]

These "integration-informed" improvements to New Jersey's school funding formula would not only further the state's commitment to an equitably funded education system; they could also dramatically increase racial integration in New Jersey schools and provide a model for other states pursuing desegregation policies, school finance

reform, or both. Although some state and federal money is now available to fund desegregation efforts in individual districts, incentivizing integration through a state school funding formula is a novel approach that would signal a long-term and systemic commitment to remedying school segregation, and one that could be adopted by other states.

3. Connect School Policy and Housing Policy

New Jersey will not move the needle on school integration without also focusing intensely on residential integration. New Jersey has a unique legal obligation to expand low-income housing options because of the 1975 *Mount Laurel* decision, referenced above. Implementation and enforcement of *Mount Laurel*'s "fair share" requirement has waxed and waned over the years, but expansion of affordable housing in New Jersey's suburbs could lead to greater residential diversity (and therefore school diversity) by creating opportunities for Black and Latinx families often priced out of New Jersey's segregated suburbs and, by extension, suburban schools.

Research shows that landmark inclusionary housing policies enacted in Montgomery County, Maryland, provided extremely poor families with access to affluent neighborhoods and schools and that students in those families far outperformed their peers in less advantaged school settings.[17] Through partnerships with several of the researchers and organizations listed below, similar research in New Jersey could answer questions such as:

- How uneven implementation of legal requirements under *Mount Laurel* has affected racial and socioeconomic residential housing integration in the state.

- Whether an increase in the number of affordable units has led or would lead to greater racial diversity and better student outcomes in particular school districts.

- The extent to which expanded affordable housing may contribute to residential or school segregation ("white flight"), and what factors might reduce this behavior.

We know that housing affordability is not the only noneducation factor that influences school diversity and enrollment patterns. Employment, health, and transportation systems, along with community demographic and cultural factors, also play a large role in where families live and where children go to school. Nevertheless, we believe that a cross-sector inquiry focused on the education and housing relationship is indispensable if sustainable school desegregation is to occur within a reasonable timeframe. The need

to expand housing opportunities as a tool of school desegregation is especially relevant in many Northeastern and Midwestern states, where more than two-thirds of school segregation is due to segregation between, rather than within, public school districts.[18] Research on the relationship between state-level housing policy and education outcomes in New Jersey will complement ongoing efforts to foster collaboration between school and housing partners, such as those currently supported by The Century Foundation's Bridges Collaborative.[19]

The Research Partners

The research and policy work outlined above would be conducted and disseminated most effectively through a collaborative approach with a range of partners. This research could be used to develop actionable policy solutions, including legislation, that advance school integration in New Jersey. These groups should first convene to develop a coherent research plan with clear goals and priorities and then commit to meeting regularly to advance the agreed-upon agenda. Initial work could include literature reviews of existing research and policies; and communicating with organizations and stakeholders, including the community partners listed in the next section. *The research partners listed below have expressed interest and have made a preliminary commitment to exploring a common agenda focused on school desegregation.*

Education Law Center

For nearly 50 years, Education Law Center (ELC) has not only worked to effectuate students' constitutional rights through the courts, but also to deploy innovative, research-based advocacy and coalition-building to support and bolster those legal victories. ELC's representation of urban students in the *Abbott* litigation places it at the center of New Jersey's success in advancing equity. ELC staff includes two full-time researchers, Dr. Danielle Farrie and Dr. Mary McKillip.

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

The following professors and research centers across Rutgers University have expressed interest in working with ELC on desegregation-focused research projects: Dr. Benjamin Justice, professor of education and director of the PhD program at the Graduate School of Education; Dr. Julia Sass Rubin, professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and director of the public policy program; and Dr. Charles Payne of the Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies. Partnership with Rutgers will

capitalize on related work already in progress. For example, ELC has already begun an analysis of the County Vocational school sector with masters' students in the Bloustein School; Dr. Rubin is engaging in ongoing research on (and ELC is engaging in litigation to counter[20]) the impact of charter schools on segregation in New Jersey; and the Cornwall Center is developing a portfolio of research on the distribution of educational opportunities by race, ethnicity, and class.[21]

Wildwood School District and Other Member Districts of Great Schools New Jersey

Wildwood City Public Schools, a majority Latinx district on New Jersey's southern shore, has seen benefits and challenges from student participation in the Interdistrict Choice and County Vocational school programs and has affirmed its interest in participating in a research–practice partnership to explore school desegregation. In addition, ELC has identified other potential district partners by facilitating Great Schools New Jersey, an association of superintendents of high-need districts.

Fair Share Housing Center

Fair Share Housing Center is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to dismantle racial and economic discrimination in New Jersey by expanding opportunities for safe, healthy, and affordable housing. The organization spearheaded the litigation establishing the Mount Laurel Doctrine and works to enforce the law through legal, policy, research, and community-building strategies. The organization is interested in exploring the connection between affordable housing and school integration.

New Jersey Future

New Jersey Future is a nonprofit organization promoting sensible and equitable growth, redevelopment, and infrastructure investments with a broad agenda that bridges housing, environment, transportation, and economic development. New Jersey Future is interested in continuing its research on the implications of housing affordability, exclusionary zoning, and land use for school diversity and school funding.[22]

New Jersey Policy Perspective

New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP) is a nonpartisan think tank that drives policy change to advance economic, social, and racial justice. NJPP has a strong commitment to education equity and brings expertise in the areas of budget, tax and economic

development, and education finance. NJPP has expressed interest in working with ELC on funding policies that advance racial justice and school desegregation.

Community Partners

The research partners listed above work within coalitions that connect research and policy to grassroots advocates, organizers, policymakers, and local groups that comprise diverse members. These include representatives of communities of color and faith-based, immigrant, school leadership, economic development, and urban planning communities. These existing connections can be leveraged to develop the community engagement necessary to turn this research into actual policy solutions. We expect that some community partners will inform our research agenda or even become research partners. In the appendix, we have provided a list of community organizations that we have identified as potentially interested in collaborating or partnering with ELC and its research partners.

Conclusion: A New, Collaborative Approach to Desegregation

Over 50 years ago, the New Jersey Supreme Court stated that "[s]tudents attending racially imbalanced schools are denied the benefits that come from learning and associating with students from different backgrounds, races and cultures."[23] Today, New Jersey faces an unprecedented challenge: undoing state policies' consignment of generations of children to segregated schools and a legally and morally unacceptable education. Transforming New Jersey's segregated school system will not be a quick fix. This historical endeavor will require a cross-sector, multidisciplinary, and collaborative approach that uses research as a starting (but not an ending) point to critically analyze existing school choice programs while exploring new ones, tackle the legacy of residential segregation while also identifying education-based reforms, and align school desegregation and funding policies. This is the approach we must take in New Jersey. If we succeed, we may offer a blueprint for other states to follow or modify according to their own circumstances.

Appendix 2.2: Potential Community Organizing Partnerships

Education Law Center (ELC) has strong connections with many of the following organizations and expects to engage closely with them in the early stages of our effort:

- Our Children/Our Schools, a statewide coalition of dozens of education, children's rights, and civil rights advocates working to advance equity, convened by ELC.

- Great Schools New Jersey, a nonprofit, voluntary association of superintendents of high-need school districts, convened by ELC.

- Statewide Education Equity Coalition, an emerging coalition of researchers, practitioners, and advocates convened by the Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies at Rutgers University.

- Salvation and Social Justice, a Black-led, faith-rooted organization that seeks to liberate public policy theologically by modeling the hope and resiliency of Black faith.

- Latino Action Network, a grassroots organization engaged in collective action at the local, state, and national levels to advance the equitable inclusion of Latino communities in American society (lead plaintiffs in New Jersey's school desegregation case).

- Save Our Schools New Jersey, a grassroots, all-volunteer organization of parents and other public education supporters who believe that every child in New Jersey should have access to a high-quality public education.

- For the Many NJ, a statewide coalition working to promote a fairer tax code and renewed investments in public services.

- Building ONE New Jersey, a faith-based, grassroots coalition of groups from throughout New Jersey devoted to the idea that everyone who lives here has a stake in the economic and social well-being of the region.

- Together North Jersey, a consortium of partners working to make the region more competitive, efficient, livable, and resilient through collaboration, technical assistance, and peer-exchange opportunities.

- National Coalition on School Diversity, a national network supporting a diverse group of constituents to advocate for and create experiences, practices, models, and policies that promote school diversity/integration and reduce racial and economic isolation in K–12 education.

Notes

1. See Latino Action Network et al. v. New Jersey, N.J. Sup. Ct., Docket No. MER-L-001076-18 (Amended Complaint dated Aug. 2, 2019). The plaintiffs—which also include the state or local chapters of the NAACP, Latino Coalition, Urban League, and United Methodist Church—allege that the state's perpetuation of residential segregation, design of school district boundaries contiguous with residential municipality boundaries, and assignment of students to schools by residency violates state law. These violations include the constitutional rights to provide students a "thorough and efficient education" and to attend schools that are not segregated by race, color, ancestry, or national origin. N.J. Const. Arts. I, ¶5 and VIII, ¶4.

2. See Abbott v. Burke, 199 N.J. 140 (2009), which includes a summary of two decades of prior rulings in the *Abbott* case. The disparity of resources caused by New Jersey's racially and economically segregated school system gave rise to the *Abbott* litigation, first filed by Education Law Center in 1981. In 23 successive opinions through 2020, the New Jersey Supreme Court has played a major role in the state's progress in reducing the educational disparities between poor urban and wealthy suburban districts.

3. Frankenberg, E., Ee, J., Ayscue, J., & Orfield, G. (2019). *Harming our common future: America's segregated schools 65 years after* Brown. UCLA Civil Rights Project.

4. See Farrie, D. (2022). *The color of opportunity*. Education Law Center.

5. Rothstein, R. (2017). *The color of law*. Liveright Publishing Corporation.

6. Sciarra, D. (2023). *Equity and diversity: Defining the right to education for the 21st century*. Education Law Center.

7. See Abbott litigation, Note 2; see also In re Petition (North Haledon), 181 N.J. 161 (2004) (in which the N.J. Supreme Court provides an excellent summary of New Jersey desegregation cases, some of which predate Brown v. Board of Education, and states: "We [in New Jersey] have paid lip service to the idea of diversity in our schools, but in the real world we have not succeeded.").

8. See Southern Burlington Cty. NAACP v. Twp. of Mt. Laurel, 67 N.J. 151 (1975). In this case, plaintiffs challenged the system of land use regulation by a municipality on the ground that low- and moderate-income families were unlawfully excluded. The court established what has become known as the "Mount Laurel Doctrine," under which municipalities have a constitutional obligation to provide a "fair share" of their region's affordable housing units.

9. See Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, 551 U.S. 701 (2007).

10. Wells, A. (2009). *Boundary crossing for diversity, equity and achievement: Inter-district school desegregation and educational opportunity*. Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice.

11. Tractenberg, P., Orfield, G., & Flaxman, G. (2013). *New Jersey's apartheid and intensely segregated urban schools: Powerful evidence of an inefficient and unconstitutional state education system*. Institute on Education Law and Policy, Rutgers University.

12. See Coburn, C., Penuel, W., & Geil, K. (2013). *Research-practice partnerships: A strategy for leveraging research for educational improvement in school districts*.

13. Erwin, B., Kelly, B., & Silva-Padron, G. (2022). *50-state comparison: Open enrollment policies.* Education Commission of the States.

14. Johnson, R. (2019). *Children of the dream*. Basic Books.

15. Farrie, D. (2022). *The color of opportunity*. Education Law Center.

16. Green, P. C., Baker, B. D., & Oluwole, J. O. (2021). *School finance, race, and reparations*. *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice*, *27*(2), 482–558. https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1519&context=crsj

17. Schwartz, H. (2010). *Housing policy is school policy*. The Century Foundation.

18. Potter, H. (2022). *School segregation in U.S. metro areas.* The Century Foundation.

19. Lowe, B. (2020). *New effort pairs educators and housing advocates to tackle school segregation.* The 74.

20. See In re Application of TEAM Academy Charter School, 247 N.J. 46 (2021).

21. Campbell, V., & Payne, C. (2023). *Segregated schooling in New Jersey*. Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies, Rutgers University.

22. See Evans, T. (2020). *School district fragmentation and residential segregation*. New Jersey Future; Evans, T. (2022). *The state of New Jersey's housing market: We need more*. New Jersey Future; and Evans, T. (2020). *The Black-White homeownership gap in New Jersey*. New Jersey Future.

23. Booker v. Plainfield Bd. of Educ., 45 N.J. 61 (1965).

PART 3:

Community Approaches and Perspectives

Historically, communities have been at the heart of integration discourse, both in advocacy for integrated schools and pushback against them.

For today's integration efforts to be successful, responsive community engagement that grapples with the root causes of segregation is essential.

Although integration and educational equity will ultimately require contextualized approaches, these approaches should center the experiences of the communities most impacted by the harms of segregation, incorporating principles of equity and racial justice. The essays in this part highlight strategies to foster buy-in for community-responsive school integration approaches that are racially just, equitable, and sustainable.

School Integration Approaches Beyond the White Gaze: Centering Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous Youth

Nathaniel D. Stewart, University of Minnesota,
Jewell Reichenberger, Minneapolis Public Schools, and
Qiana Sorrell, Minneapolis Public Schools

Introduction

Our coauthored essay imagines a bold school integration project that shifts definitions; measures relational integration outcomes; centers Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous youth; and describes the historical and sociopolitical context catapulting the project to fruition. Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that desegregation efforts must commence "with all deliberate speed," state and federally mandated desegregation/integration initiatives have varied in oversight, resource allocation, strategy, equity, and effectiveness.[1] However, the reality is that schools remain highly segregated by race and socioeconomic status.[2] This necessitates new approaches, definitions, and strategies for a new generation of equitable integration advocates.[3] Our coalition seeks to answer the call in innovative and collaborative ways within the promising political and historical context of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS).

We are a coalition of community members, public school advocates, and scholarly freedom dreamers who understand the importance of reciprocal and pluralistic cultural exchanges in teaching and learning.[4] The following written words are a product of our essay-prep conversations, discussions with community members, and authentic school integration imaginaries we are committed to materializing. Our conversations identified persistent obstacles in school integration approaches specific to the Minneapolis, Minnesota, community. Minnesota's school integration initiatives tend to be designed and measured juxtaposed to their proximity to whiteness; this overlooks how Black,

Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth already integrate their spaces. Our approach seeks to imagine beyond white gazes by bolstering MPS youth's existing knowledge co-creation activities.

Historical Context and the White Gaze

School integration policy has historically centered and continues to center on whiteness in several ways. In 1998, Toni Morrison introduced the term "white gaze" to name how Black lives' value tends to be venerated juxtaposed to its proximity to whiteness. Morrison famously exposed the logic of whiteness proximity upon being critiqued about how her books decenter white perspectives, viewpoints, and characters.[5] The white gaze covers societal systems, structures, and policies while steeping institutions in white supremacist-created racialized hierarchies. Morrison's description of the white gaze connects to school integration because the *Brown* arguments and aftermath neglected crucial implementation considerations illuminated by Black communities. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks[6] shared a childhood desegregation memory after she was forced out of her all-Black school:

> We were certainly on the margin, no longer at the center, and it hurt. It was such an unhappy time. I still remember my rage that we had to awaken an hour early so that we could be bussed to school before the white students arrived. We were made to sit in the gymnasium and wait. It was believed that this practice would prevent outbreaks of conflict and hostility since it removed the possibility of social contact before classes began. Yet, once again, the burden of this transition was placed on us. The white school was desegregated, but in the classroom, in the cafeteria, and in most social spaces racial apartheid prevailed (p. 24).

hooks describes how the burdens of desegregating schools were often placed on Black students and families for the comfort of white students and families. hooks' desegregation memories emulate Black students' and families' experiences across the United States. Black students were bused to white schools, forced to leave their all-Black schools, and made to wait.[7] Moreover, Black educators were dismissed or demoted because white school leaders were uncomfortable with the idea of Black school leaders having authority over white educators.[8] Any new school integration approaches must illuminate the connections between these historical contexts and modern contexts because school integration approaches must be intentionally designed to reject the

white gaze.[9] Our coalition will center Black, Brown, and Indigenous students by examining the desegregation/integration history of MPS in its potential to reject policies designed and measured through proximity-to-whiteness frames.

Minneapolis Public Schools and School Integration

MPS community-led coalitions have a well-known history of organizing school integration initiatives beyond the white gaze. In 1971, a coalition of white, Black, and Jewish families organized an initiative called the Hale-Field pairing. The coalition sought to integrate students in Hale Elementary School, which was 98% white, and Field Elementary School, which was 57% Black. At the time, more than 70% of Hale parents opposed integration.[10] Despite pushback from white parents, the coalition worked through Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and at the neighborhood level to authentically integrate schools.

There were several examples of the Hale-Field school integration coalition resisting the white gaze. First, students from both schools would be bused to and from their new schools. This meant that the transportation burden would not be placed solely on Black families. Second, the coalition facilitated coffee parties that took place at the schools and in community members' homes. Parents and students could extend integrated learning beyond the school walls to address biases and learn in genuinely cross-cultural exchanges. Finally, the coalition advocated for a 10% Hale teacher-of-color policy to ensure that Black students had adult advocates at their new school.[11] Each of these school integration initiatives strategically and innovatively engaged in school integration approaches that resisted the white gaze.

The outcomes of the Hale-Field pairing reverberate into modern MPS school integration policies. In reflecting on Hale-Field's modern impact and its 50th anniversary, Heidi Adelsman, a former Hale-Field pairing fifth grader, points out how Hale and Fields have resegregated to a 75% white student population. The resegregation of schools is a phenomenon undergirded by courts releasing districts from oversight, attacks on busing, and court rulings against race-conscious integration initiatives.[12] Adelsman, an advocate of school integration, questions the extent to which MPS youth would describe their modern experiences with school integration practices.[13] Our coalition takes up this youth-centered question and extends the contributions of past, bold-thinking integration coalitions.

Youth-Led School Integration

Returning to hooks,[14] she provided a launching point for our coalition's thoughts on ambitious school integration initiatives in describing a "transgressive" group of her classmates:

> Black and white students who considered ourselves progressive rebelled against the unspoken racial taboos meant to sustain white supremacy and racial apartheid even in the face of desegregation. The white folks never seemed to understand that our parents were no more eager for us to socialize with them than they were to socialize with us. Those of us who wanted to make racial equality a reality in every area of our life were threats to the social order. We were proud of ourselves, proud of our willingness to transgress the rules, proud to be courageous (p. 24).

hooks and her classmates transgressed the era's segregationist social norms through youth-led acts of integration. Youth circumvented the white gaze even when adults counseled otherwise. These transgressive acts led hooks and her classmates to feelings of pride, connection, and courage.

Contemporarily, there are youth-led school integration advocacy spaces that have demonstrated promise in connecting the past and present, and bolstering critical consciousness. Moreover, these youth-involved investigations and community organizing efforts evidence that our approach may hold profound impact. For instance, IntegrateNYC is a youth-led organization that has organized campaigns around challenging the use of standardized tests in admissions decisions. In 2021, IntegrateNYC youth co-created a policy tool to advocate for the communities and neighborhoods hit hardest by systemic racism.[15] Debs et al.[16] found that IntegrateNYC's self-defined school integration policy language improved the citywide capacity to address racialized inequity. In a Midwest context, the organizers of the Michigan Youth Policy Fellows (MYPF) program co-designed space for students to "critically investigate" and act to redress racial segregation.[17] The MYPF youth fellows indicated that their participation led to a firm commitment to equity beyond their participation in the youth-involved education and into their time as college students. The IntegrateNYC and MYPF examples demonstrate crucial outcomes related to mobilizing knowledge co-creation toward educational equity. Still missing is a focus on the cross-racialized, peer-to-peer

relationships youth build while pursuing policy change. Our innovative approach borrows from youth-involved investigation scholarship and narrows the scope to the already-present, authentic, peer-to-peer school integration activities in MPS.

Innovative and bold action on school integration means heeding historical and contemporary lessons from and bolstering MPS's Black, Latin*, APIDA, Indigenous youth's, and their allies' responses to transgressions. Given MPS's diverse student population, many Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth are already engaging in, trailblazing, and imagining new school integration approaches.[18] Now, system-wide coalitions must direct resources to bolster their perspectives and knowledge in decision-making spaces.

Minnesota's Modern School Integration Policy

Understandably, school segregation has been analyzed as a Black-focused issue because of Black Americans' subjugation stemming from white elites' crimes of chattel enslavement. However, modern school integration approaches cannot rely on stringent racialized identification. MPS educates Black students (African American, Ethiopian, Liberian, Nigerian, Somali), Asian/Asian American students (Asian Indian, Burmese, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Karen, Korean, Lao, Vietnamese), American Indian or Alaskan Native students (Dakota/Lakota, Anishinaabe/Ojibwe), and Hispanic or Latin* students (Colombian, Ecuadoran, Guatemalan, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran), and students whose ethnic identities do not fit within the previous list. Thus, we need an innovative school integration approach that reflects the diversity of MPS's student population.

At the state level, school integration is being discussed and encouraged as a central component in the pursuit of educational equity.[19] However, school integration's impact is tightly coupled with standardized assessments. The problem is that standardized tests are viewed as objective measures, and this conceals the white gaze. When the white gaze is not illuminated, policy actors risk perpetuating the harms they seek to redress.[20] The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)'s implementation of the Achievement and Integration (A&I) program demonstrates Minnesota's receptiveness to school integration approaches. Simultaneously, A&I shows how the white gaze may be present in school integration policies via the measurement of outcomes via standardized tests.

Chapter 3.1: School Integration Approaches Beyond the White Gaze: Centering Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous Youth

The A&I program aims to mobilize school integration to attain educational equity by increasing student achievement and reducing academic disparities "based on students' diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools."[21] The emphasis on student achievement is clear in the Achievement and Integration Legislative Report.[22] The legislative report was prepared to show whether districts met federally aligned goals to decrease "achievement gaps" or increase "student proficiency by 50 percent" (p. 5). Achievement gap rhetoric and student proficiency has been critiqued as a form of proximity to whiteness logic, and this questions whether school integration approaches should be differently measured.

Test-measured student achievement has serious flaws when used to assess educational equity via school integration. First, tests have been shown to be racially biased and heavily correlated with wealth.[23] This means that standardized tests may measure fluency more effectively in white-dominated monoculturalism as opposed to culturally pluralistic school integration. Second, acknowledging that there are gaps in academic achievement assumes that certain groups are more intelligent/gifted/talented than others.[24] There is no gap in achievement between Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and their similarly situated white peers. There are only differences in what forms of achievement are valued in the education system. Finally, school integration's equitable outcomes may reside in students' lived experiences that tests cannot capture. Relationship building, empathy, communal caretaking, real-world problem solving, bilingualism, critical self-reflection, and many other school integration outcomes are too complex to be measured by standardized tests.

New school integration approaches must move beyond stringent racial demographic analysis and explore the relational considerations that tests cannot measure. For these reasons, we seek to co-create space to support youth in shifting school integration away from evaluation based solely on traditional measures of achievement and ensure that those who continue to be excluded are at the center.

A Collective Definition of School Integration

Educational equity advocates cannot evaluate school integration practices until there is a collective definition steeped in historical context that is Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous-focused. Our cross-sector coalition, made up of MPS team members and a University of Minnesota faculty member, co-created a school integration definition to

start imagining new, bold, and ambitious solutions. Three pillars define our model of school integration: Culturally Pluralistic; Reciprocal Cultural Exchanges; and Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous student–imagined, –created, and –led.

Culturally Pluralistic

Cultural pluralism is rooted in multicultural perspectives. Specifically, this means that instead of forcing assimilation into one culture, "differences are appreciated, respected and cultivated" (p. 355).[25] Modern school integration practices, including MDE's A&I, may lack a firm commitment to cultural pluralism because of a focus on traditionally defined achievement. Too often assimilation-based or monocultural student achievement evaluative mechanisms treat communal knowledge as deficient. The ways Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and families define achievement are just as valid as, if not more valuable than, state-defined student achievement. Therefore, a culturally pluralistic approach to school integration acknowledges the assets, talents, and gifts of students beyond monocultural evaluation.

Reciprocal Cultural Exchanges

Reciprocal cultural exchanges mean that integration approaches are mindful of mutually beneficial activities. In some high schools, "diversity" experiences tend to be framed as a desirable skill to enter the workforce or access college. Students may engage in community service experiences that are designed to support disadvantaged communities with little critique regarding what their presence means on a structural level.[26] Some of these programs reinforce students' beliefs that disadvantaged communities are broken or damaged and in need of fixing. Although there is a cultural exchange, there is no reciprocity. Reciprocity considers who should, and should not, be leading integration efforts, what has already been imagined, and how disadvantaged communities envision relationship building.

Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous Student–Imagined, –Created, and –Led

Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth must lead in knowledge co-creation to imagine, design, and implement school integration strategies. This may mean protecting and creating spaces beyond the white gaze. Therefore, this definition is fluid and will change based on youth perspectives and investigations. The youth-centered component is the most important; yet it is incomplete. Thus, our proposed school integration approach seeks to be bold and ambitious in bolstering youth-led integration acts and co-investigations.

Our Bold, Ambitious, and Innovative Approach

Our approach plans to examine how MPS youth manifest integration acts in youth-led research projects while youth define what integration means to them,[27] critically analyze educational inequity,[28] and move knowledge co-creation to action.[29] Aldana and Richards-Schuster found that youth-led research can "enable the collective social analysis of the colonial, racist, capitalist structures that shape developmental context and processes to produce liberatory knowledge" (p. 676).[30] Their term "collective social analysis" guides our coalition because of our commitment to youth-led research partnerships.

There are two essential components of our coalition's multifaceted approach. First, our approach will bolster youth voice and knowledge co-creation in preparation for decision-making spaces. Second, adult facilitators will engage in a co-investigation that explores authentic school integration within students' peer-to-peer interactions and theories of transforming inequity. The coalition may ask how Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth in school integration evaluation projects describe cross-racialized, peer relationships throughout the examination process, or explore how youth describe their theories of change juxtaposed with their relationships to each other. The youth's projects and the coalition's co-investigations will co-create knowledge that may be better positioned for transformation, given our coresearcher-practitioner-youth partnership.

This work is not new to MPS. School district–facilitated and youth-led research activities have been used continuously to inform district and school policy. Our project hopes to extend and bolster the youth-led work already happening around the district. MPS has several youth-led/-involved programs that have engaged in investigations intended to inform district and school policy. These programs include Youth Participatory Evaluations (YPE), Dare 2 Be Real, and CityWide Student Leadership Board. The coalition will invite students to select research questions, design studies, collect data, organize findings, and disseminate co-created knowledge. This already-established MPS infrastructure and proposed co-planning ensures that knowledge produced through collective research activities will be sustained and adds unique, localized knowledge specific to undertheorized forms of school integration.

Students may choose to explore student lunchroom interactions, trace local school integration educational policy, illuminate what school integration already looks like for them, explore transgressive acts to resist state integration definitions, capture their classmates' hopes and dreams, or examine underlying structures and systems that create and reinforce existing inequities. Concurrently, the project coalition will co-design an investigation exploring how school integration experiences manifest within youth-led evaluation projects. While youth investigate policy and practical solutions for school segregation and educational inequity, we examine school integration knowledge co-creation in its capacity to be culturally pluralistic, reciprocal, and youth focused. This approach enables us to explore how authentic school integration may necessitate (a) youth-led knowledge creation activities and (b) co-created knowledge production activities among all educational equity advocates.

Conclusion

Our youth-led, authentic school integration approach embeds an important strategy in pursuit of educational equity. We assert that Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth may already be engaging in integration activities that yield solutions to the root causes of educational inequity. Our approach redirects resources to co-create space for youth to mobilize their cross-cultural knowledge to decision-making spaces. Our approach takes a first step in ensuring that youth are supported in their attempts to inform educational policy and practice. Unequivocally, our imagined coresearcher-practitioner-youth coalition is situated to co-strategize how the illumination of existing, youth-studied, authentic school integration activities can be bolstered across the United States, which, in turn, moves us beyond white gazes and informs systems-level transformation.

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Racially Just School Integration: A 21st Century, Student-Led Strategy

Matt Gonzales, Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative at the NYU Metro Center[1]

Living With Segregation

They canceled Ruby Bridges.

> *"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."*
>
> *–Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

As I reflect on Dr. King's wisdom, I can't help but feel that the arc of justice is bending in the wrong direction. MLK said this in 1968, nearly 15 years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. My father, born in 1954 in Los Angeles, attended segregated schools for his entire childhood; 40 years later, I also went through a similar educational system in Los Angeles while living in equally segregated communities, both as a student and eventually as a public school teacher. Segregation has been part of my life and the lives of many Americans, often without our even being aware of it.

Today, American public schools continue to be plagued by the rotten fruits of segregation.[2] For the most part, we as a country have decided to shrug our collective shoulders and just live with it. Our political leaders have abandoned the mission of Dr. King and his movement; our educational leaders have done their best to adapt or work around the intersecting harms of segregation; and the general public has become so deeply polarized that we cannot even see the threads of our democracy untangling before our eyes.

Our schools have unfortunately also become a political battleground for a persistent and well-funded right-wing assault[3] on public education. This has come in the forms of legislative attacks targeting trans and LGBTQ students, and so-called "divisive concepts" legislation targeting diversity, equity, and social emotional learning–all part of the

backlash to so-called "wokeness" and critical race theory. Books have been banned. Books by Black, Brown, and LGBTQ authors. Books and a movie[4] about Ruby Bridges. These attacks are not coming out of nowhere. They have occurred in rapidly diversifying districts across the country[5] and are part of a long history of segregation and white backlash[6] to racial progress.

We Are All Harmed by Segregation

As we approach 70 years since the Brown decision, and in light of concurrent threats to public education, trans and LGBTQ students, the free speech of educators, and broader attacks on democracy, it is crucial that we renew and reinvigorate our national commitment to truly integrated public schools. Decades of research have proven the compounding and generational harms of educational segregation, and political and racial divides boil over across our country. The current polarization in our country, the racial wealth gap, disproportionate incarceration rates, and disparities in health access and outcomes are all the rotten fruits of segregation.

We know money matters.[7] We also know that, due to government-engineered residential segregation, Supreme Court cases like *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973),[8] and the use of local property taxes to determine school funding, American public schools continue to be funded through a Jim Crow model. Schools and districts serving wealthier white children and families receive a higher percentage of the public tax dollars to educate their children.[9] So well entrenched is this reality that real estate websites often include information about school "performance" (often a proxy for whiteness or assimilation) and student demographics alongside real estate listings.

We can also look beyond the material resource harms of school segregation to the school cultural and curricular practices that have devalued or dehumanized and excluded students of color from their education. Students of color, Black girls in particular, face harsher and more persistent disciplinary policies,[10] feel less connected to curricular choices that reinforce and glorify a Eurocentric view of education,[11] and rarely if ever experience the exponential benefits of having teachers who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of their neighborhood or country.[12] We know that public school student populations are reaching a majority of students of color in many places[13] and that school culture and climate practices must cultivate a sense of belonging for all students

for schools to achieve their goals. Segregation harms our ability to create the truly integrated, culturally responsive, and restorative schools our children deserve.

Why Integration?

As Professor Rucker Johnson chronicles in his 2019 book, *Children of the Dream*, despite an overall abandonment of school integration by the American government, the efforts in the 1970s and '80s led to significant social mobility, life, and health outcomes for students of all races who participated.[14] In a 2016 report, Professor Amy Stuart-Wells, Dr. Diana Cordova-Cabo, and Dr. Lauren Fox found that integrated schools led to increased academic achievement for students of all races, stronger relationships across differences, and decreased bias.[15] Coupled with this is the body of research on the importance of implementing culturally responsive and sustaining educational (CRSE) practices for students of all racial backgrounds.[16] Public schools can be centers of educational justice.

In this essay, I offer strategies for public engagement, a framework and root cause tool for schools and districts, and a proposal to build a national 21st Century Integration Resource Center at the NYU Metro Center.

Talking About Segregation, Desegregation, and Integration

Often used interchangeably, for the purposes of policy and research, the terms "desegregation" and "integration" should be seen as two separate but interrelated functions. It can be beneficial for advocates, policymakers, and researchers to define these terms because they can help form an affirmative public narrative around integration as well as the policy framework that will be used to respond to the problem of segregation.

Desegregation: Uprooting the tools of segregation that facilitate separation. This is done by breaking down structural barriers to access such as exclusionary admissions policies, racist zoning and district lines, and/or contending with the impacts of residential segregation with transportation; and replacing harmful policies with intentional policies designed to support diversity, access, and mobility for all students.

Integration: Integration is about what happens inside the school community. It is about creating the conditions for all students to thrive and reap the benefits of diverse

learning environments. This means we are building culturally responsive, restorative, antiracist, and inclusive educational spaces. Real integration is not just about moving bodies; it is about the movement of resources and opportunity, pedagogy and curriculum, and school cultural practices to meet the needs of a diverse student body. The following conceptual tool describes our theory of action (Table 3.2-1). If the goal is to dismantle and diminish the various impacts of educational segregation, it is important to understand that desegregation and integration must be done concurrently and include a multifaceted approach in order to accomplish the following:

- Dismantle concentrations of privilege and vulnerability through innovative approaches to student assignment.

- Support the creation of inclusive and culturally sustaining spaces.

- Deconstruct discipline practices that disproportionately impact students of color.

- Invest in culturally sustaining hiring practices that ensure equitable representations of faculty and staff.

Table 3.2-1. Conceptual Tool Describing the Theory of Action

Goal	Policy/practice
Desegregation	Equitable student assignment policy Recruit and retain diverse faculty
Integration	Culturally responsive policy, practices, and curriculum Restorative justice and Social Emotional Learning Teacher diversity Building strong multiracial parent/caregiver communities

A 21st Century Framework: The 5 Rs of Real Integration

Designed by New York City high school students from the group IntegrateNYC[17] and channeling the 1976 *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* Supreme Court decision[18] creating "Green Factors," the 5 Rs is a framework for analyzing the impacts of segregation and a pathway for building truly integrated schools. This framework was used to create the Brooklyn-based D15 Diversity Plan[19] and was adopted by the NYC School Diversity Advisory Group in 2019.[20] Through my work at the New York University Metro Center's Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative, our Integration and Innovation Initiative[21] has used this framework to support schools and districts of

various sizes from New York City to Salem, Oregon, and Sausalito, California, in designing plans for desegregation and integration. The 5 Rs serve as an effective framework for a root cause analysis that can be used at the school or district level to shape policy decisions (see Table 3.2-2).

Table 3.2-2. The 5 Rs Root Cause Analysis

- *Race, class, and enrollment:* How are the student assignment policies in my school/district dismantling or perpetuating segregation?
- *Resources*: How is the distribution of resources in my school/district dismantling or perpetuating segregation?
- *Relationships*: How is my school/district using culturally responsive and inclusive practices to build inclusive and culturally affirming educational spaces for all students?
- *Representation*: How is my school/district working to recruit and retain a representative and diverse staff? A curriculum that represents the contributions and creativity of historically underrepresented cultures?
- *Restorative justice:* How is my school/district dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline?

It is crucial to couple policy design and public engagement through participatory and interactive community engagement strategies. Using the 5 Rs as a tool for framing and root cause analysis offers multiple entry points for stakeholders to consider the impacts of and solutions to segregation.

The instruments of racial oppression have evolved over the years, and so too must our analysis, tools, and responses to racism. Discussions of the harm of educational segregation must refrain from anti-Black, anti-immigrant, anti-poor, ableist, and other deficit-based framings of the impact of educational segregation. We can articulate the problems of segregation without demonizing, shaming, or humiliating communities of color. We can also frame our solutions to benefit those most marginalized by segregation. Integration must be in service of racial justice. This begins with participatory public engagement.

Culturally Responsive Public Engagement

Public engagement is a core component of building successful equity initiatives. School and district leaders must consider public input in making policy decisions, and they also have a responsibility to make decisions that are rooted in serving all students and families equitably. Historically, public dissent has been leveraged by white communities

and local governments to oppose desegregation,[22] and the current racial backlash in schools is fueled by white nationalism. Communities of color, especially Black communities, have legitimately expressed concern, skepticism, and pain when discussions of integration and desegregation arise.[23] Ensuring the public is part of the process of change will result in their continuing and sustained support. We are not only integrating schools; we are integrating communities.

Youth voices should play a significant role in shaping community discussions around integration and equity. We partnered with youth to design the framework of the 5 Rs for this very purpose. Meaningful youth engagement includes their voices inside and outside traditional youth leadership roles and should center students who are most impacted by the policies and practice of segregation. Youth spaces should be student-led and include adult allies with the understanding that they are there to listen and learn. Similarly, engagement focused on parents/caregivers should be linguistically accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive. Through the use of charrettes, public workshops, block parties, plays, and other culturally competent activities, community members can lend a constructive voice and perspective to the decision-making process, while also building community across differences. Convening representative advisory councils, youth leadership councils, and other groups can help ensure that underrepresented voices have a seat at the table. Public engagement must go beyond the school board meeting.

Finally, school and district leaders have a crucial role to play in holding the intersecting pieces of work together. Public engagement can also come with public education. School and district leaders must articulate a clear vision for equity and integration and a commitment to making the investments needed to be successful. Table 3.2-3 presents suggestions for ensuring culturally responsive public engagement.

Table 3.2-3. Tips for Culturally Responsive Public Engagement

- Communicating the goals and intentions of diversity/desegregation/integration processes
- Identifying a diverse and representative group of stakeholders to serve on a working/advisory group
- Embedding racial equity/literacy training into working group and public engagement activities
- Sharing data in an inclusive and accessible way
- Making meetings linguistically accessible through translated materials and interpretations with bilingual meetings, when possible
- Compensating community members for their time and expertise

Making Data Come to Life

Through our work in New York City and across the country, we have learned the power of using accessible and interactive data to tell the story of segregation. Working with our partners at Territorial Empathy, an urban design firm, and IntegrateNYC, we have helped launch the interactive website Segregation Is Killing Us,[24] a participatory and community-based analysis of the impact of segregation and COVID-19 in New York City.

In addition, our Real Integration Hub[25] is full of resources, advocacy tools, and interactive data visualizations of the integration movement in New York City. We can leverage data to visualize the patterns of segregation and also elevate efforts to desegregate and integrate schools at the local, state, and national levels. These tools support advocates on the ground, policymakers and bureaucrats seeking to transform the system, and elected and appointed officials charged with building diverse public schools.

21st Century Integration Resource Center at NYU Metro Center: A Model for Others to Consider

As a national research and technical assistance center, the 21st Century Integration Resource Center at NYU Metro Center has the skill, capacity, and experience to work with schools and districts all across the country to dismantle inequitable and segregative policies. As we outline above, this work requires a multifaceted approach that includes public engagement, policy design, research, technical assistance, and professional development. The NYU Metro Center was launched more than 40 years ago as a federal Equity Assistance Center, with the mission of supporting school desegregation. Over time, our work has expanded to support many facets of educational equity but always with the goal of dismantling segregation. As we seek to reestablish our role as a technical assistance center devoted to the mission of school integration, our approach includes building partnerships with five to seven local educational agencies (LEAs) and/or school districts to develop a 3-year plan to address educational segregation. Through the lens of the 5 Rs, we will target three priority areas with LEAs to begin their work and provide strategic support for public engagement, professional training, and technical support, along with funds to pay educators and other staff to participate in the training and implementation.

We will prioritize the development of racially just:

1. **Curriculum and teaching practices:** Building CRSE environments.

2. **School discipline practices**: Building restorative and social-emotional practices.

3. **Student assignment policies:** Building inclusive student assignment policies.

In Table 3.2-4, we provide a general timeline of activities that partner LEAs can expect to participate in.

Table 3.2-4. Timeline of 5 Rs Activities for Local Educational Agency Partners

Year 1: Framing the work: Building public awareness	Year 2: Implementation	Year 3: Progress monitoring and evaluation

Launch project
• Root cause analysis
• Participatory public engagement/education
  – Making data come to life
  – Convene a representative advisory council
  – Convene youth advisory council
	Professional development
	• Training/coaching for CRSE practices
	• Training for restorative practices and addressing disproportionality
	• Training/community building support for parents/caregivers
	• Training/community-building support for students
		Ongoing professional development

Share implementation plan
• Policy change
  – Culturally responsive and sustaining educational (CRSE) practices
  – Admissions
  – Discipline
Action steps/timeline
	Public engagement
	• Ongoing progress monitoring by advisory council
		Public engagement
		• Ongoing progress monitoring by advisory council
		• Public review of goals
		• Continuing the work

Our mission is to support our partners to build sustainable policies and practices and shift actions and mindsets to cultivate integrated and equitable educational spaces for all students. There is no "one size fits all" approach to desegregation and integration. However, there are principles, practices, and frameworks that can help us seek solutions to segregation that are community-centered while repairing racial harm. This means framing the harm and solutions to segregation in a way that does not demonize communities of color and instead considers the compounding and intersectional harms

of segregation (the 5 Rs) and leveraging participatory public engagement strategies and interactive, inclusive data tools to help communities shape solutions that are equitable, inclusive, and reflect the priorities of the people living in these communities. Our 21st Century Integration Resource Center at NYU Metro Center can be a vehicle for continuing the critical work of school integration.

We can build integrated schools. It will not be easy, but for too long schools serving Black and Brown students have had to make do with the crumbs of a segregated school system. Dr. King was right about the arc of moral justice being long, but a year after his assassination, Nina Simone was also right in the song *Mississippi Goddam* when she sang,

---

"That's just the trouble, **Too Slow**!

Desegregation! **Too Slow**!

Mass participation, **Too Slow**!

Unification, **Too Slow**!

Do things gradually

Would bring more tragedy."

The time to act is now.

Notes

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Fostering More Integrated Schools Through Community-Driven, Machine-Informed Rezoning

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Introduction

Education scholars and practitioners have long highlighted the adverse consequences of school segregation by socioeconomic status (SES) on the academic performance and attainment of lower SES students.[1,2] One reason for this is that SES segregation often impedes the equitable distribution of qualified teachers, opportunities for advanced learning, and other resources across schools.[3,4] Yet a resources-first view often misses the role that networks and social capital can play in uplifting students and families: School integration can help students and parents access "bridging social capital" that can expose them to new career pathways and other quality-of-life- enhancing opportunities.[5,6] There is evidence that socioeconomic integration can reduce inequalities in academic outcomes,[7,8] especially when care is taken to cultivate an educational and social environment that is inclusive and responsive to the new mix of students.[9,10] Integration can also promote more empathy and compassion for different lived experiences[11]—suggesting that integration, when done thoughtfully, can benefit all students and families.

Yet actual socioeconomic integration remains elusive across many districts, largely because affluent families decide where to live and send their children to school based on factors related to income.[12,13] This can recapitulate neighborhood segregation in schools because, across the United States, the vast majority of students attend the schools closest to their homes by virtue of how "school attendance boundaries"—or catchment areas—are drawn.[14,15,16] The expansion of school choice programs has sought to challenge the geographic determinism of boundary-driven school assignment and

thereby also mitigate school segregation.[17] Yet school choice also sometimes perpetuates segregation because of family self-selection into particular schools.[18,19,20] Furthermore, where students live can also influence the priorities they are assigned to attend certain choice-based schools,[21] or even which schools are part of the choice set.[22] This makes attendance boundaries an important factor in school attendance policies.

Challenges in Changing Attendance Boundaries

Unfortunately, changing attendance boundaries is often highly contentious because parents worry about longer travel times,[23] reassignment to lower quality schools,[24] safety,[25] home valuations,[26,27,28] and community cohesion[29,30] among other factors. These concerns can block boundary changes altogether[31] or lead families to leave their schools and districts.[32,33]A number of issues contribute to such public outcry in the face of boundary changes: [**loudest voices**] the loudest voices are the ones that receive the most attention;[34,35,36] [**transparency**] families challenge boundary changes because they mistrust proposed methods and aims,[37] and/or argue they lack transparency;[38] [**individual over collective**] family school selection is a "tragedy of the commons": [39] families support policies that will benefit their own children even if doing so may harm others' and stifle progress on broader societal issues like integration; and [**inherent preferences**] families simply do not want diverse schools: they may be racist or classist,[40,41] fail to value diversity, opt to focus on other interventions like reducing school funding disparities,[42] or other factors. Each of these issues poses a formidable challenge to fostering integration through boundary changes. While [inherent preferences] is arguably most entrenched and difficult to change, it is possible that making progress on the first three might help foster greater integration as the longer term work of the last one continues.

Recommendation: Community+Machine Rezoning

What would it take to better understand how tractable the issues of [loudest voices], [transparency], and [individual over collective] really are, and identify practical pathways to making progress toward mitigating them? Districts often use ArcGIS and other software to display potential rezonings to families for input, but the processes used to produce these options are often manual—hence, time consuming and not always clear to communities. To address these issues, researchers and school districts can form

researcher-practitioner partnerships (RPPs) to develop and evaluate new community-driven, machine-guided school rezoning programs across America.

Focusing on racial and ethnic segregation, our team recently developed artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and applied them to thousands of U.S. school districts to show, via a **publicly available dashboard**,[43] that it may be possible to redraw school attendance boundaries in ways that could reduce segregation while also slightly reducing travel times.[44,45] The issue of school segregation is hardly a technology problem—indeed, it is an intricate social and political problem—but thoughtfully designed human-centered technologies that are supported by AI may be useful tools in the fight for more integrated schools for a number of reasons:

- Although many machine learning algorithms are opaque and prone to bias,[46] redistricting algorithms can be interpretable: Families can see which factors the models weigh to produce alternative boundaries designed to achieve a particular goal (which may help address [transparency]).

- These algorithms can seed "human+AI" collaborations[47] by factoring in community preferences[48] to automatically create different boundary scenarios more efficiently than humans wielding GIS/mapping software—and, perhaps, mitigate human biases in the process.

New civic technologies that surface AI-generated policy proposals can help address [loudest voices] by creating new channels for different voices to participate in the community feedback process. They might also help families learn from stories and ideas that differ from their own, potentially helping to mitigate [individual over collective]. Critically, these channels can be more accessible than typical channels, such as giving speeches at school board meetings.[49,50] Given that contentious local changes like boundary redrawing are primarily a societal, not a technological problem, this approach should be guided through a value-sensitive design (VSD) process.[51] VSD is an iterative framework in the field of human-computer interaction that identifies and accounts for stakeholders' values while designing new technologies. It considers how technology affects human values, on an individual and group level, and how these values can shape technology. Given this, along with VSD's prior application in similar contexts,[52] we believe it offers a useful framework for this work. Focusing on socioeconomic integration, which is of interest to many school districts, we pose the following overarching research questions to anchor new approaches to community-driven, machine-informed rezonings across

school districts: (1) Can a community engagement strategy based on asynchronous technologies yield feedback from families who generally do not engage through traditional district channels? (2) Can algorithmically designed attendance boundaries increase support for policies that promote socioeconomic integration? and (3) Does highlighting the potential gains that new SES diversity-promoting boundaries may offer to families increase support for these boundaries? RPPs may explore these questions via the following three phases:

Phase I: Preliminary Modeling and Exploration

Using geocoded, anonymized student counts by Census block shared by school districts, RPPs can explore which current attendance boundaries are most responsible for socioeconomic segregation across the district. This may involve expanding our team's existing rezoning algorithms to account for specific requirements set forth in the partnering district's boundary redrawing policies—e.g., preserving the stability of existing feeder patterns. RPPs may also seek to anticipate family demand for certain schools in the face of boundary changes (using historical data and leveraging existing demand choice models as a starting point).[53] This choice modeling may help make rezoning models more robust by accounting for family dynamics that might affect eventual socioeconomic integration (like opting out of assigned schools) and also advance the existing frontier of school assignment modeling—which, to our knowledge, has included little work on computational models that jointly change boundaries and anticipate family responses to such changes. Using these data and algorithms, RPPs may identify which groups of two to three elementary, middle, or high schools with bordering attendance boundaries (i.e., "school clusters") have the greatest potential for achieving more socioeconomic integration. RPPs may then choose x school clusters as the sites of analysis and engagement (where x is selected by the RPP)—prioritizing those that exhibit the greatest potential for integration.

Phase II: Gathering Initial Community Input

Next, working with trusted community organizations, nonprofits, influencers, and leadership at the schools comprising each cluster, RPPs can recruit families to participate in small-group conversations to learn more about what parents in the targeted communities value when it comes to (a) drawing school boundaries and (b) having their children interact with a socioeconomically diverse set of peers—namely, whether and why socioeconomic diversity in schools is important to them. Values underlying family

preferences can be inferred through qualitative thematic analyses of conversation transcripts and applications of recent advances in natural language processing (NLP), using tools similar to those that our team has developed and deployed to support community feedback analysis in school districts (https://www.feedbackmap.org). Comparing findings from qualitative analyses and NLP tools can also help contribute to the limited but emerging literature on both the promises and pitfalls of large language model–based tools for supporting qualitative research.[54] RPPs can use the insights from these small-group discussions to design and develop an asynchronous community engagement platform, which is created to achieve the following objectives that correspond to the aforementioned research questions: (1) Engage audiences from different linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds—particularly those who do not typically participate in district-wide community engagement efforts; (2) engage families in an iterative dialogue about boundary planning that values their contributions—even if eventual policy decisions do not align with their desires; and (3) help parents gain exposure to the perspectives that different parents have on the topic of school boundaries and socioeconomic diversity. This platform can be iteratively prototyped, incorporating user feedback into the development process.

Phase III: Iterative Community Deployment

RPPs may next work with trusted school and community leaders to deploy the feedback platform to families attending schools in the selected clusters, tracking inbound traffic sources and using optional demographics questions to measure the extent to which the platform engages families who are usually underrepresented in typical district community engagement efforts (to explore Question 1). The platform can show different SES-diversity-promoting boundary scenarios; a transparent explanation of any constraints and prior community feedback that were factored in by the algorithms in order to produce them; and finally, their expected impacts on school-level demographics, travel times, and other outcomes families might find relevant. Families can then have an opportunity to indicate how likely they are to support the depicted boundaries (through map annotations as well as close-ended feedback) and offer open-ended feedback to further contextualize their decisions. RPPs can use both qualitative methods and the NLP tools described earlier to analyze families' feedback, inferring their underlying values and priorities and translating them into items that are then encoded back into the algorithms— for example, new constraints on the rezoning models or new importance weights on existing constraints. The algorithms then regenerate new boundaries that seek to foster

SES integration while respecting parents' expressed values and preferences, aiming to resolve value conflicts similar to prior applications of VSD.[55] These updated boundary scenarios can be transparently explained to parents. To explore Question 3, RPPs may also design and run randomized A/B tests to evaluate what impact, if any, exposing families to boundary preferences and priorities that differ from their own has on the extent to which they support policies that might help foster more diverse schools.

After at least two such iterations (and perhaps more, depending on community interest and the district's timeline), RPPs can generate a final set of boundary scenarios that promote integration while also factoring in community concerns, and explore how boundaries might change under different feedback aggregation schemes: for example, a scheme where each piece of input from families is weighted equally versus a scheme where input from groups is weighted proportional to the group's relative population across the school clusters of interest. District leadership can then review these results and select a final set of boundaries to share with the community, along with a detailed review of how community feedback was incorporated to arrive at them. The configurations can also be presented to the school board for review as a proposed policy change. At the end of the project, RPPs may conduct 1:1 semi-structured interviews with parents across both clusters to explore Question 2: the extent to which participants found the community engagement model to be transparent and trustworthy—especially in comparison to prior engagement efforts. Crucially, parents can also share ideas for how to foster inclusive environments in schools post-integration, to ensure segregation does not manifest in smaller scales like classrooms and cafeterias.[56,57,58]

Conclusion

We believe this approach offers a new, interdisciplinary method for seeking to address an age-old problem that continues to perpetuate inequalities in the life outcomes of children across the country. Such efforts are new; hence, they require thorough development and evaluation. Yet they have the potential to result in the practical implementation of policies that increase integration, create new networks of bridging social capital,[59] and ultimately help reduce achievement gaps for students across the district. These efforts may also help foster more trust among families and district leadership overall—which can help strengthen collaborations to improve education in upcoming years. Finally, they can seed the development of new "sociotechnical

infrastructure" and associated best practices for conducting participatory rezoning projects across other school districts.

The challenges before us are large, but the opportunity is even larger. Integrated schools are seeds of hope that can blossom into intergenerational change to produce a future where we are more connected, more supportive, and more compassionate across divides than we are today.

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School Rezoning: Essential Practices to Promote Integration and Equity

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What Is at Stake When District Leaders Redraw School Attendance Boundaries?

Over the past several decades, many school districts have experienced rapid demographic shifts and population growth alongside rising racial and socioeconomic segregation across schools. When school boards draw and redraw attendance boundaries to address these concerns, the process is often referred to as school rezoning. School systems around the country, including those in Washington, DC; New York City; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; and Howard County, Maryland, have recently engaged in major rezoning efforts that seek to balance racial and/or socioeconomic composition, over- or under-enrollment, and the need to build new schools.

School attendance boundaries that divide students into schools within districts help structure segregation.[1,2] With approximately 85% of public school children attending their local public schools, boundaries drawn around proximate neighborhoods often reinforce the strong relationship between residential and school segregation.[3]

There is a legal basis for redrawing attendance boundaries to reduce segregation. Under the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA), districts are prohibited from adopting rezoning schemes that create more segregation than if students were zoned to their closest schools. In the aftermath of *Parents Involved*, a Supreme Court ruling prohibiting the use of an individual student's race/ethnicity in student assignment, rezoning schools based on the racial/ethnic makeup of neighborhoods remains, for now, one of the few race-conscious policies available to address school segregation.

The Research Behind Rezoning for School Integration

Between 2020 and 2022, a research team at Virginia Commonwealth University examined school rezoning processes in two Virginia school districts. With support from the William T. Grant Foundation, the team engaged in an in-depth, multicase study and conducted semistructured interviews with 15 school leaders and community stakeholders; examined 3,339 public comments across two districts' rezoning processes; and methodically analyzed school rezoning policy criteria in Virginia. Given the dearth of research on school rezoning, the team also sought to expand the research base by conducting a systematic literature review of rezoning processes to strengthen district and policy implementation. The interdisciplinary nature of the work underscored policy, legal, and practical aims. Portions of it were conducted in partnership with colleagues and students at Penn State, at the request of former Governor Ralph Northam's education secretary. Findings were shared broadly with key stakeholders, including district superintendents and the Virginia School Boards Association.[4]

Across both the urban and suburban districts, the team identified salient themes to mobilize change related to rezoning implementation. More specifically, findings from a critical examination of the 3,339 written public comments highlighted the complexity of public opinion on rezoning policies related to (a) competing values and visions for school diversity, (b) racialized conceptualizations of community members' sense of belonging, and (c) forms of boundary maintenance used to discursively resist boundary changes by excluding students and families of color from crucial resources.[5] Likewise, findings from qualitative interviews with the 15 community members revealed that how stakeholders understand race and whiteness—with regard to rezoning-related history, the broader history of resistance to school desegregation, and past and present racial dialogue—thoroughly shapes, and is shaped by, the political and public engagement dimensions of school rezoning.[6] Findings provide a lens for school leaders and policymakers to better understand how, and the extent to which, race is imposed in school assignment decisions, particularly as it relates to whose voices are elevated and diminished throughout the process.

Rezoning for School Integration: Policy Development

Based on the team's qualitative study of the contemporary school rezoning process in these two Central Virginia school districts, as well as the review of the literature on

school rezoning, we have identified five essential practices for rezoning for racial integration.[7]

First, school leaders should offer a rationale for rezoning for greater school diversity. It should be presented affirmatively, as in, "School diversity is an asset. The benefits of school diversity accrue to all students and are especially robust if students are equitably integrated." The rationale must also state clearly that racial and socioeconomic segregation should be disrupted or prevented.

Second, community and school leaders need to speak openly about the racialized history surrounding school and residential segregation. Many stakeholders in the rezoning process presume a historical blank slate when it comes to existing school attendance boundaries. But distant and not-so-distant echoes of earlier rezoning and/or school desegregation efforts will emerge during contemporary processes, often absent crucial context. For instance, calls for "neighborhood schools" ignore the ways government-sponsored segregation in housing and education have shaped neighborhoods. Leaders should anticipate the emergence of ahistorical, race-evasive narratives and meet them with a clear accounting of how the past shapes the present when it comes to rezoning.

Third, school leaders must set clear, measurable, and race-conscious integration goals. While the legal context surrounding race consciousness in education is contested, racial diversity remains a compelling government interest. During the rezoning process, educational leaders should seek to ensure that school-level racial and economic diversity roughly reflects the overall racial and economic diversity of the district (within plus or minus 5–10 percentage points). Potential school zone configurations should not be considered if they fall outside those flexible margins.

Fourth, educational leaders should prioritize integration as a rezoning criterion. Integration should rise to the first or second decision-making priority among a given set of criteria. This matters because too often common rezoning criteria—for example, adhering to natural boundaries or reducing transportation—are in direct conflict with integration.

Fifth, and relatedly, leaders should not assume that prioritizing transportation efficiency or relying on boundaries like rivers or roads is desirable when crafting school attendance boundaries. Centuries of racial discrimination in planning, land use,

infrastructure, and construction mean that an overreliance on land features, built or natural, will likely reify segregation.

Rezoning for School Integration: Policy Implementation

Given the barriers identified in our own research and the extant rezoning literature, we also recognize that developing integrative rezoning policy alone may not translate to more integrated schools. Indeed, outcomes are also influenced by the processes that school boards use to translate policy into new boundary lines. These processes must reduce barriers like public distrust—particularly among stakeholders with generational memories of past segregative policy efforts—and disproportionate representation that minimizes or renders invisible historically marginalized groups. Implementing inclusive processes for public engagement is another crucial ingredient to foster more integrated attendance zones.

Inclusive public processes should expand access to public input opportunities and feature leadership responses through multiple communication channels.[8] One promising model is the civic engagement process of the city of Minneapolis during the creation of its 20-year Comprehensive Plan, which included intentional efforts to involve and empower historically underrepresented citizens and build community capacity (https://minneapolis2040.com/#) Another is the 2018 middle school desegregation plan for District 15 in New York City Public Schools (https://d15diversityplan.com/), which included a thoughtful and detailed design process for planning, outreach, and decision making facilitated by an organization with a track record of community dialogue and education on race and racism. More generally, district collaboration with external organizations that have proven expertise in public engagement, educational equity, and school integration can yield positive results.

Elevating the voices of those left out of traditional public input processes also means being responsive to that input. Public meetings that build in processes for hearing from the public can foster participants' trust and willingness to keep engaging with the school system.[9] Additionally, efforts to center school youth as participants in rezoning processes are also imperative. Students should be encouraged to participate in traditional public comment, receiving priority at the beginning of the session. High school students should also have a seat at the decision-making table when it comes to rezoning.

Implementation of rezoning processes should also feature improvement cycles that allow policymakers to adapt their processes based on what is working well to expand participation, voice, and representation. As the K–12 sector increasingly uses the principles of improvement science or organizational improvement to address instructional or operational challenges, K–12 governance is an area ripe for the same strategies.[10] Through a research-informed partnership, rezoning policies can be written to leverage frequent action for integration, and rezoning processes can be designed to learn what is working to promote equitable engagement in implementation. Then, successes can be expanded to other policy efforts centered on addressing inequities and promoting diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion

Regular engagement with school rezoning presents school district leaders with frequent opportunities to either reduce or exacerbate segregation. Too often, as research from Virginia highlights, school officials are unprepared to proactively lead the dialogue on race and racism—past and present—that will ensue. When districts do emphasize school diversity as a priority in rezoning, its meaning can become highly contested without a clear definition and measurable goals. And without intentional safeguards and procedures for equitable community input, public engagement surrounding school rezoning may be dominated by the most resourced and politically powerful groups. Growth in the use of rezoning as a lever to reduce segregation will take partnership, support, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

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Designing Learning Pathways to Promote Pre-K–12 School Integration

Segregated schooling exists in all grade levels and education environments. For instance, because of the severe racial wealth gap, young children may experience extreme preschool segregation in areas without universal public pre-K programs. This makes the expansion of early childhood education—to families of all income levels and regardless of ZIP code—a promising approach to overcoming the segregating effect of school attendance zones that regulate K–12 public school enrollment.

The harms of segregation also manifest through in-school learning pathways like gifted-and-talented or ESL programs that perpetuate a deficit framing for many students. Authors of the essays in this part outline ways to advance school integration through inclusive learning plan pathways, in addition to interventions around race and place.

Integration at the Start: Designing Pre-K Choice and Enrollment Systems to Promote Equity and Excellence

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As the benefits of prekindergarten (pre-K) programs have become evident, many states, school districts, and recently the federal government have set universal access as an explicit policy goal.[1,2] Contexts as varied as Boston, the District of Columbia, Florida, Iowa, New York City, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin enroll at least 70% of their 4-year-olds in publicly funded pre-K programs; Georgia, New York State, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Texas serve more than 50%.[3] These and other pre-K expansions represent a sharp departure from the long-standing practice in public preschool programs, such as Head Start, of limiting enrollment to low-income families, which in effect segregate children by income and often by race/ethnicity.

Pre-K expansions have the potential to change this segregated landscape, but only if bold policy actions are taken. As pre-K doors open more widely, middle- and working-class families who do not qualify for public programs for low-income families—yet cannot afford the lofty tuitions of private preschools—will suddenly have affordable options. To serve this growing and diverse enrollment, states and districts commonly use "mixed-delivery" systems that locate programs in varied settings, such as public schools, charter schools, and community-based centers.[4] Within these systems, families can assess their pre-K options and choose where to enroll within the constraints of program capacity and how public officials decide to allocate pre-K seats.[5] These choice and enrollment processes typically operate outside K–12 school-assignment systems that tend to replicate residential segregation in public schools. Yet, increasing evidence indicates that pre-K settings are highly segregated by income and race/ethnicity, even in universal contexts. To counter this trend, assertive policy initiatives are needed to realize the rich opportunities posed by pre-K expansions to reduce the severe socioeconomic

and racial/ethnic segregation currently evident in the nation's public schools and pre-K systems.

Striving for Quality in Segregated Contexts

Efforts to achieve universality have gained policy and political momentum from empirical research that indicates short- and long-term gains from pre-K attendance.[6,7,8] State funding for pre-K initiatives more than doubled from $4 billion in 2002 to $9 billion in 2021.[9] Evidence that pre-K learning gains are strongly correlated with higher quality programs has motivated concerted policy efforts to promote equitable access to high-quality programs.[10,11] Despite these efforts, empirical evidence suggests that program quality is often unequally distributed, even in universal contexts, with families in lower income and racially segregated communities having less access to programs with high-quality teaching.[12,13,14,15,16] This discomforting reality highlights the inherent challenge of constructing pre-K systems that achieve both excellence and equity, given the nation's history of residential segregation and inequitable access to educational opportunity.

Our own work has indicated high levels of segregation across an urban universal pre-K system, but also some opportunities for integration.[17] We examined the interplay between New York City's pre-K choice and enrollment process and the highly segregated residential context in which families make their decisions. We described the nature and location of racial/ethnic segregation across pre-K programs, and the extent to which it varies by children's race/ethnicity.[18] We also contrasted segregation among programs with different enrollment priorities and programmatic offerings. We then explored segregation patterns across New York City's five boroughs and 32 community school districts, highlighting the degree to which those patterns relate to local racial/ethnic enrollment characteristics. Finally, we conducted a simulation that leverages family pre-K choices to maximize site-level racial/ethnic diversity and reduce between-site segregation.

We found that pre-K programs in New York City are extremely segregated by child race/ethnicity. The results indicate the complex interactions among family choices, seat availability, site-level enrollment priorities, and the city's algorithm for allocating pre-K seats.

A clear challenge facing integration efforts is that areas with multiple program options and greater racial/ethnic diversity exhibit the most extreme segregation, hinting at a pattern of self-sorting among families and a choice architecture that fails to promote integration. However, we found that most of the measured segregation lies within local communities rather than across them, suggesting that reducing segregation would not necessarily require families to choose programs far from home, removing a commonly cited obstacle to integration efforts. Our policy simulation also provides a considerable degree of hope. We found that providing families one of their top three choices—but in a manner that selects sites based on their racial/ethnic representation—reduces both overall segregation and segregation between particular racial/ethnic groups. Under the simulation, children would have to travel only 0.2 miles more to their pre-K site. We argue that this approach is more likely to withstand legal scrutiny, given that families are not being denied choice to further the aims of integration.

Overall, the results indicate both inherent challenges and significant opportunities to foster racial/ethnic diversity in pre-K programs within a highly segregated residential context and across sites that include programs primarily intended to serve low-income families. When considered with other research indicating that children of color are more likely to attend lower quality programs than white children, these findings call for bold policy strategies to promote integration in pre-K settings. Such strategies could be informed by a growing body of research that finds higher learning gains among children, particularly low-income children, who attend classrooms with peers diverse in background and skill levels.[19,20,21,22] In short, equitable access to program quality, the north star of most pre-K expansions, and integration could go hand in hand.

Challenges and Possibilities of Pre-K Expansions

There are several challenges to promoting integration in pre-K settings that researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders must realize. Even in areas comprising diverse child populations, residential segregation can make program integration difficult when parents prefer programs close to home. This pattern of segregation can be exacerbated by choice and enrollment systems that allow higher resourced families to navigate the process to gain access to higher quality programs for their children. Lack of transportation options for low-income families may further aggravate this inequity.[23] Finally, low-income families may seek services that are not provided by sites serving high-income families, creating incentives for those with lower incomes to select high-

poverty sites that focus on their strengths and needs. Each of these challenges, although varying in extent and severity in different areas, demands consideration when constructing a strategy to promote pre-K program integration.

At the same time, pre-K expansions pose new opportunities for several reasons. First, they offer enrollment to working-class, middle-, and upper-income families who have otherwise been excluded from public early education programs. They rely on choice and enrollment systems that allow parents to select among multiple settings within or outside their school districts, possibly mitigating the negative implications of neighborhood segregation that bedevil public school enrollments. They allow service-rich Head Start and childcare programs, which traditionally have enrolled only low-income families, to serve families across the income distribution. And finally, concerted efforts in both red and blue states to promote and align pre-K quality systemwide provide fertile ground for integration efforts, given the correlation between program sociodemographic composition and quality.

With these challenges and possibilities in mind, we propose a strategy to promote the integration of children by racial/ethnic and economic background in early education settings and to fulfill the goal of promoting equitable access to quality pre-K programs.

Conceptual Framework

The early education field has much to learn about families' decision making from recent advances in economic theory regarding how individuals choose among the options presented to them. Before these new perspectives, some economists and social scientists envisioned a school choice process unfettered by government intrusion, enabling families to identify the best schools for their children and exercise their market power to gain access.[24,25] More recent work in the burgeoning field of behavioral economics has raised important questions regarding the extent to which families make autonomous choices in the market for education. In this view, school choices are affected by the design or "choice architecture" of the application and enrollment process that is created for families, including the menu and nature of options presented, the information they receive about these options and how to compare them, and the ease of choosing and enrolling.[26]

This perspective beckons policymakers to consider how they structure and present educational choices to families and whether this structure and presentation serves their stated policy goals. Pre-K choice and enrollment systems are a salient example of choices that are shaped by policy decisions, as families navigate a process of application and enrollment that has been prescribed and designed for them by policymakers. Information on program options that might offer the potential for integration, for example, may be limited, hard to access, dependent on social networks, or entirely absent. Hence, we reject the premise that segregation in universal pre-K contexts is solely a reflection of self-sorting by parents, and we call upon policymakers to scrutinize how the choice and enrollment system could direct families to integrative options.

Proposed Strategy

The proposed strategy to promote integration in pre-K programs would engage three to five urban areas in different states. Each would locate its efforts within a research-to-policy partnership or collaboration that provides real-time data to inform and support sustained policy innovations to affect pre-K choices and enrollment patterns. Each effort would comprise a four-step process:

Step 1: Establish Data Systems

Create new or augment existing data systems to track choice and enrollment patterns by systemwide and site-level sociodemographic composition; teacher quality and compensation; classroom quality; and program services for families.

Step 2: Conduct Research to Inform Policy

Use data to conduct two types of research:

a. *Conduct quantitative research* to analyze the severity, geography, and nature of segregation, as we have done in New York City. This research would distinguish between within-district or within-census-tract segregation and cross-district or cross-census-tract segregation and address such questions as:

- How severe is program-level segregation, and how does it vary by geographic area and type of segregation?

- How far do families travel to access pre-K programs, and how does it differ by their residential census tract, sociodemographic characteristics, and the quality of the programs where they enroll?

- How far would families have to go to access integrated programs?

- How does participation in the formal choice and enrollment process affect program-level segregation/integration?

b. *Conduct mixed-methods research* to gain a better understanding of how and why parents choose their pre-K programs. This research would address questions such as:

- How do families learn about and select pre-K programs?

- What needs, preferences, and priorities shape their pre-K decisions?

- How do families perceive and value integrated programs, and under what conditions would they choose them for their children?

- How do families experience the formal choice and enrollment process? What obstacles do they encounter? What changes would they recommend? Why do some families elect not to use the choice system and enroll directly in pre-K programs?

Step 3: Use Research to Determine Policy Strategies

Use these research findings to select policy levers that would promote pre-K integration within the local social and political context, and design a choice and enrollment system to reflect those selections.

The core policy options fall into three categories that complement one another: (1) promote integration by altering program options for families; (2) promote integration by allocating a portion of program seats for subgroups of children; and (3) promote integration by designing a user-friendly choice and enrollment system that reflects policy decisions in #1 and #2. All policy strategies would operate within a voluntary choice and enrollment system in which public officials design a choice and enrollment system, invite parents to participate, and then allocate program seats while trying to accommodate parent preferences within the constraints of program capacity.

a. *Promote integration by altering program options for families*. Responding to family needs, preferences, and priorities, policymakers alter the supply of pre-K choices to accommodate families while promoting integration. These policy actions include the following:

- Locate programs in or near mixed-income workplaces (e.g., corporate offices, universities, hospitals).

- Locate programs on neighborhood borders between low- and higher income communities.
- Subsidize transportation for families who choose to travel outside their neighborhoods for pre-K programs.
- Expand services for lower income families in higher quality sites, drawing on models such as community schools.
- Increase the supply of higher quality sites by, for example, closing teacher compensation gaps between school-based and center-based programs.

b. *Promote integration by allocating a portion of program seats for subgroups of children.* To complement an altered supply of program options, policymakers enact a controlled-choice system in which a percentage of pre-K seats are prioritized for subgroups of children, such as children eligible for free-and-reduced-price lunch, children who are homeless, and children whose families are affected by incarceration.

While this strategy has been tested in New York City on an experimental basis, the strategy should be enacted systemwide (though not in every program) to promote integration effectively. Programs that are candidates for integration could be identified through an RFP process that would offer funding and in-kind services, such as technical assistance, to support the integration process. The strategy would thus be strengthened by simultaneously devoting resources to support program leaders, teachers, and families as they adapt to the assets and needs of a diverse community in transition to integrated classrooms. Resources should be used in part for teacher and family engagement to nurture ground-level support for and ownership of integration efforts.

Note that implementing controlled choice would likely reduce the number of families who receive their first-choice program, a number that public officials like to maximize and advertise when inviting parents to enroll in pre-K. However, this reduction would be balanced by fulfilling the goal of greater integration and the tandem pursuit of program quality. And although support for such efforts varies by political context, public support for integration initiatives can run higher than might be expected.[27]

c. *Promote integration by designing a choice and enrollment system that reflects policy decisions in #1 and #2.* Having selected a mix of policy levers that align with local

strengths, needs, and the sociopolitical context, policymakers design choice and enrollment systems that reflect their strategies.

For example, if policymakers decide to encourage families to travel outside their neighborhood, they could highlight such options in the choice and enrollment process and ensure that subsidized transportation is available. If policymakers opt to boost services for low-income families in sites selected for integration, they could market such enhancements to low-income families. If certain programs allocate seats for subgroups of children, these sites could be marketed as welcoming locations for diverse families. And, as noted, the program allocation process can be structured so that family preferences are honored, but in a manner that increases program diversity. In all cases, concerted efforts should attend to how well the choice architecture equitably serves all families, including those in lower resourced, multilingual, and/or socially isolated communities.

Step 4: Collaborate Across Areas

While these strategies would be crafted to align with the local context, they would be strengthened and sustained by a research-to-policy partnership and collaboration with similar peer efforts across geographic areas. Such collaborations enable innovative policymakers to draw upon real-time data, share ideas, learn from each other, and help to surmount the inevitable obstacles that arise. (For examples, see https://nnerpp.rice.edu/early-childhood-education-subnetwork/.)

Conclusion

This strategy represents a call for concerted research and policy attention to the potential of innovative initiatives to help integrate public schools via universal pre-K choice and enrollment systems. Our research in New York City could be replicated in other urban/suburban areas to identify challenges and opportunities to foster greater program-level racial/ethnic and economic integration. Such diversity would further strengthen ongoing nationwide efforts to create equitable access to high-quality pre-K programs. However, time is short: Pre-K choice systems are under construction and increasingly used by higher resourced parents who are learning how to navigate the process to their advantage. To create a level playing field in which all parents have access to high-quality and integrated programs, research needs to inform bold, innovative policy initiatives now.

Chapter 4.1: Integration at the Start: Designing Pre-K Choice and Enrollment Systems to Promote Equity and Excellence

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Integration and Immersion: The Potential of Two-Way Dual Language Immersion Programs to Foster Integration

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Introduction

From the peak of school desegregation in the 1980s, the nation's schools have reversed course toward resegregation.[1] This trend persists despite the United States becoming more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse since the mid-20th century.[2,3] Dual language immersion (DLI) programs present a unique solution that could not only counteract historical segregation between white and Black students but also potentially diminish segregation of the growing population of multilingual learners (MLs).

Benefits of School Desegregation

Evidence consistently shows the positive effects of school desegregation and the detrimental effects of segregated schools. Black students who attend desegregated schools show higher levels of academic achievement compared to peers in racially segregated schools. Moreover, this same research shows no negative effect on the academic achievement of their white peers.[4,5,6] Nonacademic benefits of desegregation include greater openness and acceptance of different races and ethnicities as well as greater life satisfaction and better health outcomes.[7,8,9] In contrast, segregated schools are associated with lower quality educational environments and poorer student outcomes. These schools tend to have higher teacher turnover and fewer experienced teachers, both of which correlate with lower academic achievement.[10] In addition, such schools offer less advanced coursework that could better prepare students for postsecondary educational success.

Increasing Enrollment and Persistent Segregation of MLs

After the United States lifted immigrant quotas in 1965, immigration increased dramatically.[11] In 1970, immigrants made up 4.8% of the U.S. population, whereas now

they make up closer to 14% of the overall population.[12] Although the percentage of foreign-born residents from Spanish-speaking nations is the highest share of immigrants among current residents, Asian immigrants have surpassed Hispanic immigrants as the largest group of new immigrant arrivals in recent years.[13] Regardless of racial identity or nationality, evidence shows that the majority of foreign-born residents speak a language other than English at home.[14] Among students, MLs make up about 10% of students in public schools.[15] In 2019, students whose home language was Spanish made up 75.7% of MLs, followed by Arabic (2.6%) and Chinese (2%).

Racially and ethnically marginalized English-speaking students are often isolated in schools with high concentrations of racially and ethnically marginalized and low-income students. MLs, however, not only attend similar schools but also are often isolated in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes.[16] This constitutes a form of within-school segregation that is associated with lower achievement outcomes and less access to advanced coursework.[17,18] Much of this linguistic isolation stems from educating MLs from a deficit-oriented perspective. This approach views the home language of MLs as an obstacle to overcome instead of an asset to their education. Some states have gone as far as to prohibit classroom instruction in any language other than English.[19] Although many of these states have reversed their prohibitions and DLI programs have become increasingly popular, a deficit-oriented perspective of MLs persists in part because of the common use of ESL programs. DLI programs, and two-way immersion (TWI) programs, in particular, represent a way to create racial, ethnic, and linguistic integration in schools.

Possibilities of DLI Programs for Integration

DLI programs provide instruction in two languages: English and a partner language, the most common of which is Spanish.[20] Under the umbrella of DLI, *one-way* DLI programs serve students from one linguistic group, but *two-way* DLI programs are ideally designed to enroll 50% native speakers of the partner language and 50% native English speakers. In doing so, TWI programs seek to bring together linguistically diverse student populations, which has the potential to facilitate racial and socioeconomic desegregation as well.

Not only do TWI programs have the potential to promote desegregation, but they are also a politically viable approach to doing so. As of 2022, 49 states and Washington, DC, had approved the use of a statewide Seal of Biliteracy, which is an award students can earn upon high school graduation if they have attained proficiency in two or more languages. The

widespread use of this seal demonstrates the value that nearly all states in the nation place on biliteracy. One educational model for developing biliteracy is language immersion. Although precise numbers for TWI programs are not yet available, a 2021 canvass of DLI programs indicated that there are more than 3,600 DLI programs across the United States.[21] The five states with the most DLI programs represent both sides of the political landscape: California, Texas, New York, Utah, and North Carolina, indicating that DLI as an educational model is popular in politically and geographically diverse parts of the country.

Benefits of DLI Programs

In addition to being a politically viable strategy for promoting desegregation and integration, research consistently demonstrates the cognitive and academic benefits of bilingualism and DLI programs. In general, researchers have documented the cognitive benefits of bilingualism,[22] and numerous studies find that DLI programs are related to positive outcomes in academic achievement for both MLs and native English speakers.[23,24,25,26,27] The positive impacts of DLI programs are for language development as well as other subject areas. Although causal research has shown fewer significant effects for Black students because of the small numbers of Black students enrolled in TWI,[28,29] descriptive research suggests there could be positive effects of TWI programs on Black student achievement.[30,31] In addition to academic outcomes, DLI programs strive to promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism, all of which could help facilitate positive intergroup contact and enhanced cultural competency, ultimately facilitating greater integration.[32,33]

Challenges to DLI Programs as an Integration Strategy

Although TWI programs offer great promise for supporting students' academic success as well as promoting desegregation and integration, there are equity concerns that must be addressed. First, Black students may be underrepresented in TWI programs,[34,35] which limits the utility of TWI programs in promoting desegregation among a broader number of historically marginalized racial groups. As the popularity of TWI programs grows, concerns exist about the gentrification of DLI programs through opportunity hoarding by white middle-class families and crowding out MLs.[36,37,38,39,40,41] Gentrification of TWI strand programs, in which a school houses students who participate in a TWI program as well as students who do not, can lead to a school-

within-a-school—essentially creating school buildings that have two distinct and often segregated programs.

To address these potential challenges, schools and districts offering TWI programs must be proactive in ensuring equitable access to these programs. One strategy for doing so is strategically placing TWI programs in racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse residential areas that could attract diverse groups of students. Allowing enrollment from across a larger area than traditional catchment zones, such as an entire school district, may be beneficial. Disseminating information about the academic and social benefits of TWI programs to traditionally under-subscribed students of color in accessible ways and languages could also help address this potential problem. District and school leaders should continuously monitor enrollment and be proactive in seeking to recruit a more racially diverse TWI population.[42]

Because most programs have Spanish as the partner language, there is also a concern that the focus may be on using native Spanish speakers, often Hispanic students, as language models and prioritizing support for native English speakers, often white students, rather than prioritizing the needs of native Spanish speakers.[43] To address this concern, teachers and leaders must intentionally center the needs of native partner language speakers and lift up the partner language throughout the school day, including in academic instruction and nonacademic conversations.

These equity concerns, and others, underscore the need to develop and highlight best practices in TWI programs. Such practices not only facilitate desegregation—that is, bringing together students from different racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic groups in a learning environment—but also promote true integration—that is, fostering authentic, equal-status interactions among students from different groups who are experiencing fair and equitable treatment in the learning environment.

Supporting Integration in TWI Through Research

As previously described, existing research documents the short-term, long-term, academic, and nonacademic benefits of desegregation as well as the cognitive benefits of DLI programs. To connect these two often-siloed bodies of research, additional research is needed to explore (a) the extent to which TWI programs are desegregated; (b) the ways in which teachers and leaders facilitate true, meaningful integration within

racially, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse TWI classrooms; and (c) how teachers and leaders address challenges to promoting integration in TWI programs.

TWI programs can offer one way to promote desegregation and true integration. However, additional research about and support for TWI programs are needed. An essential first step is to analyze enrollment trends in TWI programs to determine whether TWI programs facilitate desegregation. In particular, research should examine the extent to which TWI programs are desegregated for students from all racial groups. In doing so, it would be particularly important to identify programs that successfully desegregate students from multiple racial groups, especially Black students who have traditionally been underrepresented in TWI programs. Moreover, research to understand whether strand TWI programs create segregated schools-within-schools and how TWI programs affect district-level desegregation would also be valuable.

A second phase of research could explore integration within racially desegregated TWI programs. Multiple case studies of best practices could highlight the ways in which teachers and leaders facilitate true, equitable integration among students from diverse racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. To understand what attracts families to participate voluntarily in TWI programs and the value they place on integrated TWI programs, it would be important for research to explore the perspectives and experiences of students and parents from all racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

While highlighting and sharing best practices, research could also identify the challenges to promoting integration that exist in desegregated TWI programs. For example, one potential challenge is related to TWI teachers: Many TWI programs are staffed by native partner language teachers from countries outside the United States because of bilingual teacher shortages.[44] While this offers students the valuable opportunity to learn from someone with a different life perspective and authentic exposure to a different cultural background, it is salient when thinking about the potential of TWI programs to promote integration. Because of their personal and cultural experiences, teachers from outside the United States likely have different understandings of the race relations in the United States and how to facilitate cross-race interactions and learning in a TWI classroom. Research could illuminate best practices regarding ongoing support and professional development for all teachers, especially international teachers, about historical and contemporary race relations as well as how to facilitate intergroup contact. Researching best practices and challenges related to

facilitating integration in other aspects of desegregated TWI programs, such as curriculum and pedagogy, would also be valuable.

Supporting Integration in TWI Through Policy

In addition to supporting integration in TWI through research, we propose creating a federal grant program to help schools develop DLI and TWI programs. Immersion programs are intended to have the same curriculum as traditional English-only classes, but because a large proportion of instruction is in a partner language, they often require additional funding. As mentioned above, the difficulty of finding certified DLI or bilingual teachers can force schools and districts to look abroad to staff their programs. This process can add costs to compensate third-party organizations for recruitment abroad and legal fees to help these teachers acquire and maintain their visas.[45] Much of the additional funding that supports immersion programs has gone to a district's central office to pay for these costs.[46] The need for curricular materials in the partner language is another expense. To avoid the time-consuming burden of translating existing materials into the partner language, schools or districts may choose to purchase them instead. To DLI and TWI teachers, these materials are critical to teach their students appropriately in the partner language.[47] Other potential TWI-related expenditures may include additional transportation for students, hiring district program administrators, and analyzing the demand for creating or expanding existing programs.[48] This proposed grant program would help schools and districts pay for these and other costs of DLI or TWI programs, provided they commit to using their program as a vehicle for integration. An initial funding level of $75 million could allow multiple districts to develop TWI or DLI programs. Given the narrower focus of the proposed grant than the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) and President Biden's proposed FY2024 budget that includes $149 million for MSAP, $75 million to support the development of TWI and DLI programs is an appropriate funding level to begin this grant program.

The proposed grant would award funding based on the model of the immersion program, the program's enrollment numbers, and the current combined state and local per-pupil expenditures. Although one-way DLI programs could facilitate desegregation, TWI programs should be prioritized because they inherently require a diverse body of students. The grant would offer two tiers of funding: a larger grant for TWI programs and a smaller one for one-way DLI programs. By offering a higher level of funding to TWI programs, the grant program might incentivize schools and districts to consider

developing TWI programs. Existing research on immersion programs suggests they spend an additional 4%–12% of per pupil expenditures for every student enrolled in the program.[49] We recommend awarding one-way immersion programs with 5%–10% of combined state and local per-pupil expenditures for every student enrolled and 10%–15% for every student enrolled in a TWI program. Grantees would be awarded funding for 5 years and could reapply as many times as they like once their grant expires. As part of their application process, applicants would be required to demonstrate how their program would contribute to the racial and ethnic integration of their school or district. Preference would be given to applicants who detail how they are setting up their programs to persist in the future. To distribute funds equitably among districts, multiple characteristics of districts should be considered, including locale (urban, suburban, rural), region of the country, and proportion of Title I schools. Without consideration for equity, awards may be biased in favor of wealthier districts with greater access to staffing resources, such as professional grant writers.

This grant program could be a politically viable solution because it shares some resemblance to two other federal programs: the now-defunct Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) and the existing MSAP. Although FLAP no longer exists, it was passed with bipartisan support as part of No Child Left Behind. While FLAP funded schools with innovative language programs more broadly, it did not focus exclusively on DLI or TWI programs.[50] Congress has continually reauthorized MSAP since its initial authorization in 1985. The focus of MSAP is to serve as a funding source to make schools more racially and ethnically desegregated. Yet, as with FLAP, there is no particular focus on DLI or TWI programs. By sharing aspects of these bipartisan programs and narrowing the focus to creating DLI and TWI programs, we believe this policy proposal could provide a more targeted approach both to funding high-quality language programs and fostering school integration.

Conclusion

Separate bodies of research consistently demonstrate the benefits of integrated schools and DLI programs. Given the ideal enrollment of TWI programs with 50% native speakers of the partner language and 50% native English speakers, these programs could serve as an asset-based strategy for facilitating integration among students from diverse racial, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds. Additional research and

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How Expanding Transitional Kindergarten in California Can Promote Integration

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Introduction

Although the overall public school population in the United States has increased in diversity, and a majority of students are now non-white, public schools in the United States remain highly segregated by race, ethnicity, and economic status.[1,2] Integrated schools became the law of the nation after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, but many districts were slow to integrate. In fact, many schools remained de facto segregated well into the 1960s.[3] Segregation levels decreased after court-ordered desegregation measures in the 1970s, especially in the South.[4] As within-district segregation decreased, however, between-district segregation increased, particularly in areas where school districts tended to be smaller and more numerous.[5] This form of de facto segregation, facilitated by white flight and racist housing market practices, was more difficult to address after the Supreme Court's 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* decision ruled against court-ordered interdistrict desegregation plans. Even within districts, many families became frustrated with busing plans, and a movement emerged that supported a return to neighborhood schools in the mid-1990s. After the peak of integration in the early 1990s, schools began to resegregate[6] as federal oversight was gradually removed, considering integration goals met. In the most recent U. S. Government Accounting Office report, more than a third of students attended a school where the majority of students were the same race or ethnicity, and 14% attended schools where almost all of the student body was the same race or ethnicity.[7]

The academic literature supports the notion that diversity has positive political and sociological benefits for a pluralistic society. In terms of measurable educational outcomes, analyses of the desegregation plans that followed the *Brown v. Board* ruling found reduced high school dropout rates for Black students,[8,9] as well as reductions in the probability of incarceration and increases in wages, employment, and health status.[10] Researchers have also found gains in social and academic skills for students of

all racial groups who attend racially and economically diverse schools, including higher overall academic achievement[11] and specific gains in mathematics[12,13] and literacy.[14] More recent research notes that all students can better learn how to live in our increasingly diverse society—a skill that employers value—if they attend racially diverse schools.[15]

However, the modern legal and political context has made it difficult for leaders to address the challenge of current resegregating educational environments. After growing increasingly skeptical of the use of race as a criterion for achieving school balance over several years, the Supreme Court ruled in 2007 that students' race could not be used explicitly to achieve or maintain integration, striking down the continuing voluntary school desegregation efforts underway at the time in both Seattle and Louisville.[16] Given this precedent, solutions to racial segregation now must be race-blind to avoid challenge in this legal environment.

Segregation in Early Childhood Education Programs

Scholars have less often focused on segregation in early childhood programs, but early childhood programs are actually more segregated than K–12 environments.[17] Enrollment in publicly funded preschools has doubled in the last decade,[18] but most of these programs are means-tested,[19] resulting in classrooms that serve only low-income or otherwise at-risk children. Many also focus on using the non-English home languages of young children,[20] which can result in classrooms that are segregated by language and thus, often, ethnicity. One study of the composition of preschool classrooms found that classrooms with high proportions of students of color also had high concentrations of children from low-income households, as is often seen in K–12 schools. In this study, only 17% of preschool classrooms were both racially or ethnically diverse and had students from higher income homes.[21] Furthermore, high-quality preschool programs are not equally accessible to families from all racial and income backgrounds,[22,23] making integration efforts even more important to improve access for all families.

The demographic makeup of preschool classrooms has implications for young children's development. Research has found that exposure to racially diverse faces when children are young reduced implicit bias in adulthood, specifically toward Black individuals.[24] In an older but important study of kindergarten students, children in diverse classrooms had more early, cross-racial friendships,[25] which are important in the formation of later

racial attitudes. We also know that children begin to understand racial distinctions by about 6 months of age and can show racial bias as early as age 3.[26] Diverse, collaborative, "equal status" settings like preschool classrooms are one of the factors that help shape children's healthy attitudes about race.[27] Diverse preschool environments may also better support children's language development; one study found greater language development among students in economically diverse preschools compared to preschools that served only income-eligible students.[28]

Furthermore, the siting of early childhood programs can help set precedents and patterns that could help integrate the K–12 schools those preschoolers will enter. Bringing high-quality early education to public schools can attract and retain families of all racial backgrounds to those schools. This is specifically possible when prekindergarten (pre-K) programs are located in public schools and even more facilitated when the programs are also administered by those districts. In Washington, DC, schools became more diverse after the district's universal high-quality pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds was implemented.[29]

California's Transitional Kindergarten Program

The creation of the transitional kindergarten (TK) program in California has changed the early childhood education landscape in that state. California's Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 revised the cutoff date by which children must turn 5-years old for kindergarten entry in that year. The act established September 1 as the new kindergarten eligibility date—3 months earlier than the previous date of December 2. The Kindergarten Readiness Act also established TK, defined as the first year of a 2-year kindergarten program, for all students affected by the birthdate eligibility change. Instead of enrolling in regular kindergarten, students who had reached age 5 between September 2 and December 2 were to receive an "age and developmentally appropriate" experience in TK before entering kindergarten the following year.[30,31] Thus, TK began to be offered in the 2012–13 school year, beginning first by serving only children with birthdays between November 2 and December 2, and gradually adding another month of eligible birth dates over the following 2 years.

To examine whether California's TK program is effective at improving school readiness and learning outcomes for students, the American Institutes for Research evaluated the TK program as it was implemented during the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years.[32] This

study used a rigorous regression discontinuity design to examine whether TK led to positive outcomes, for which students, and under what conditions. Findings showed that TK gave students an advantage at kindergarten entry on all academic skills assessed, including literacy and math skills. This advantage was notable, given that more than three-quarters of the comparison group of students (those who just missed the birth date cutoff for eligibility) attended other center-based early childhood programs. More specifically, the study revealed that the impact of TK on student readiness for kindergarten was similar even when the program was implemented slightly differently in different classrooms; differences in student-to-teacher ratios, instructional quality, or even duration (full day or half-day schedules) did not change the program's impact. Therefore, we surmise that the features that all TK programs have in common that also differentiate them from other early childhood programs—such as their school-based location and bachelor's degree–level teachers with kindergarten teaching experience—are what drive TK's impact. One of these key characteristics is the fact that the program is not means tested, permitting more diverse classrooms by race and income.

TK Expansion as an Opportunity

California is now in the midst of expanding TK to serve all 4-year-olds. The start of the 2022–23 school year marked the beginning of the expansion, a move the state legislature approved in 2021. To roll out the expansion gradually, the age eligibility window will again widen each year (adding January and February birthdays in 2022–23, March and April birthdays in 2023–24, and so on) until all 4-year-olds—nearly half a million children—will be eligible in 2025–26. This will effectively create a universal pre-K program in the state and add many new students to California's public school buildings. **With this expansion of TK in California, districts in the state have a unique and time-sensitive opportunity to influence the racial and economic makeup of both TK programs and the schools they are located within by setting policy about where TK programs are located and how attendance boundaries are set.**

When TK first rolled out in California, serving only students in a narrow age range, slightly fewer than half of districts offered TK in one or more "hub" schools, in which eligible students from across the district attend TK and then return to their home schools for kindergarten. Creating hub schools often makes the facilities challenges of serving younger children (e.g., having bathroom facilities that are appropriately located and sized for 4-year-olds) easier for districts, because adaptations needed for the new

4-year-olds do not have to be made at all school buildings. At the time of initial rollout, an estimated 42% of districts offered one or more TK hubs within their districts. Large districts were far more likely to offer hubs than smaller districts.[33] Given their more densely populated catchment areas and potentially fewer transportation challenges, making it more feasible for families to attend a school other than the one in their neighborhood, large districts may have had more flexibility to offer hub arrangements to their students.

Decisions to create hubs versus locating TK programs in all of a district's elementary schools can have implications for the demographic makeup of students. On the one hand, establishing hubs can bring together TK students from two or more schools' catchment areas, mixing students from different neighborhoods and facilitating the creation of more diverse classrooms. This could work particularly well if districts are strategic about the placement of hubs. For example, in a hypothetical district where the south side of the district is predominantly one particular race and the north side is another, siting one TK hub in the north and one in the south would perpetuate the existing segregation of schools, whereas siting them more in the east and west, where they draw students from both racial groups, could interrupt those historical patterns and create more diverse schools. On the other hand, offering TK in all elementary schools could make it easier for all eligible families to access the program by reducing travel burden and enticing new families previously uncommitted to their neighborhood public schools to enroll their children to take advantage of the free, high-quality, research-supported program. Bringing new families into public schools in California through TK may help add diversity to those schools, as it did in Washington, DC.

Next Steps for Districts

Decisions about where to locate TK classrooms—in hubs or in all schools—may play out differently in different district contexts. Gilroy Unified School District (USD), for example, which has a large, diverse overall student population, currently uses a hub model for TK. Like many California districts, Gilroy is majority Latine, with 60% of its population Latine students, and 40% non-Latine. However, residential segregation is notable in the city; according to a recent study from UC-Berkeley,[34] two of the 10 most segregated Latine neighborhoods in the entire Bay Area are in Gilroy. In 2021–22, Gilroy USD offered TK at two of its seven elementary schools, and in 2022–23, as the program began its expansion, they introduced TK at a third school.[35] Each of these schools has

slightly different demographic makeups, providing access to TK for all families while also encouraging diverse classrooms. Similarly, in Davis USD, hubs have been intentionally located such that two schools' regular catchment areas feed into each TK hub, again promoting the mixing of students from different neighborhoods toward more diverse classrooms.

In some districts, on the other hand, the most important consideration may be easy access to TK for all families, so districts may prioritize offering TK in every elementary school. In addition to prioritizing access for all families to the high-quality program, this strategy also may offer some benefits in terms of creating more diverse schools. Offering TK in every elementary school can (a) make the program more easily accessible to all families and (b) attract parents to neighborhood schools for a free, high-quality, research-supported preschool program that they might otherwise have to pay for. A study of New York City white families found that parents were bothered by segregation within and among schools, but they were simultaneously anxious and concerned that their children access the "best" (often interpreted as mostly white) schools.[36] A high-quality early learning experience could help incentivize these parents to remain committed to their neighborhood public schools, and this retention could support continued diversity.

In addition, districts like Gilroy and Davis that use a hub model have a chance to rethink the attendance areas of those schools as the number of schools offering TK increases. Structuring attendance areas intentionally can create more racially diverse TK programs and schools as a whole. Restructuring catchment areas will have to focus on income rather than race to survive in today's legal context, but in California, race and income are still, unfortunately, highly correlated; Hispanic families are more than twice as likely as white families to live in poverty, according to the California Poverty Measure, which is "an approach to gauging poverty in California that accounts for geographic differences in the cost of living, factors in tax credits and in-kind assistance that augment family resources, and subtracts medical, commuting, and child care expenses."[37] Hubs also provide districts with other opportunities for establishing mechanisms that can potentially promote integration in the later grades, such as extending the shared transportation resources that could bring students from different neighborhoods into a hub to grades beyond TK.

Even in districts without TK hubs, district leaders will have the opportunity to make decisions about attendance adjustments. As TK expands, more students will be entering elementary school buildings around the state. With this increase in student population, district leaders may have to adjust attendance areas to ensure that no school is overcrowded or severely underfilled. At those decision points, leaders can choose either to perpetuate existing patterns of segregation, or take steps to create more integration opportunities.

California's state and district leaders have a unique opportunity to make changes at this time, not only because TK expansion has just begun to roll out, but also because of patterns of declining enrollment in many California districts due to emigration out of high-cost areas and often out of the state entirely. In addition, families made different decisions about early childhood education during the COVID-19 pandemic, which have lingering effects today. Kindergarten is not mandatory in California, so many parents chose not to send their rising kindergartner to school in 2020, knowing that virtual kindergarten would provide neither needed child care nor a quality early educational experience for their child. When private schools began offering in-person education sooner than public schools did, many families who could afford to do so sent their kindergartners to those private schools. And many stayed in those schools, not returning to public schools after that kindergarten year.[38] Because private schools and those families that can afford to choose them tend to be substantially less diverse than public schools,[39] this exodus is impacting public school demographics. Given these circumstances, it will be even more critical to attract families of young children to public schools.

Next Steps for Research

Given that different strategies for selecting the location of TK classrooms as the program expands can have different implications and outcomes in districts with varying circumstances and demographics, more information is needed to understand these relationships. Additional research can help inform strategic decisions. A landscape study quantitatively examining relationships between districts' policies on TK program locations and school and overall district demographics would be a useful starting place. Such a study could be expanded to include in-depth interviews with district leaders to better understand how they are choosing the location of TK classrooms, and to what extent they are considering classroom integration a priority. Parent voices are also

critical; focus groups with families can help us better understand their decisions regarding whether and where to enroll their students, and whether and how diversity is a factor in those decisions. From these interviews, case studies of districts that have strategically located TK programs to attract diverse families to their schools may be created to help other districts interested in fostering integrated environments consider next steps.

Conclusion

Prior research has documented the impact that TK has on children's kindergarten readiness skills. We also know, although it has been less emphasized and studied, that integration in early childhood education environments is critical for children's development. California is just embarking on an expansion of the TK program to include all 4-year-olds, phasing it in over the next 4 years. Thus, California's districts have a unique and time-sensitive opportunity to be intentional and strategic about their TK decisions—such as how attendance areas are drawn and where TK hub programs are located—as the program expands. This would help expand access to high-quality early childhood education, foster families' continued commitment to diverse schools into later grades, and create solutions for racial segregation while remaining race blind.

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Collaborative Cross-Sector Approaches to Education and Equity

Segregation is a multidisciplinary issue that affects many areas beyond education, including health, workforce opportunities, and more. Multisector coordination has become crucial to present-day "Integration 2.0" efforts and advancing educational equity. Authors in this part outline how collaborative approaches can help overcome some of the pitfalls of past integration efforts by connecting across fields of study, developing shared narratives and understandings, and bridging geographies.

As many of the essays in this compendium make clear, people-centric, collaborative approaches lead the way in guiding researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and communities toward designing more integrated, equitable schools for the future.

Community Development for Integrated Schools: The Detroit Choice Neighborhoods Initiative

Sarah Winchell Lenhoff, Wayne State University, Huriya Jabbar, University of Southern California, DeMarcus Jenkins, University of Pennsylvania, and Kara S. Finnigan, University of Michigan

More than 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*,[1] U.S. schools remain racially[2] and economically[3] segregated. Although many have questioned the research[4] that helped justify the Supreme Court decision that "separate was inherently unequal," empirical studies have confirmed that segregation harms students of color and those who live in poverty. As a result of the structural inequities surrounding opportunities and resources, students who attend segregated schools have lower academic achievement[5] and lower educational attainment, and they earn less[6] over their lifetimes. Under court orders, efforts to desegregate schools largely "worked" following Brown—students of all races benefited[7] from attending desegregated schools—but these efforts were short-lived. In addition, many students of color and their families had to endure racist responses and practices that were never addressed as part of these policies.

Any attempt to sustain desegregation efforts faces challenges. Given mandated busing and the *Milliken v. Bradley*[8] decision, in which the Supreme Court ruled that school systems did not have to desegregate across district boundaries, many white and higher income residents left cities for the suburbs,[9] supported by racist and exclusionary housing and mortgage-lending practices.[10] Large urban school districts such as those in Detroit, Milwaukee, and Cleveland became majority Black and today serve highly segregated, mostly low-income students.[11] Students of different races now tend to live separately and, in turn, attend different schools. But desegregation is still our most effective tool for educational equity.[12] Rather than give up on inadequate attempts at desegregation, we need to examine new approaches to integrating schools.

Efforts to integrate schools through housing reforms or school choice policies have often failed to disrupt segregated patterns. One reason may be that these policies focus

on just one sector—housing or schools—neither of which can tackle the problem alone. Instead, cities may benefit from place-based **community development interventions**, such as the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to integrate neighborhood schools. These approaches combine mixed-income housing with new educational opportunities and purposeful efforts to create community cohesion. Cities across the U.S. have received CNI grants, yet few studies have explored their implications for school integration. [13] How might investing in high-poverty neighborhoods change the composition of local schools? We need both a robust theory of how community development interventions may spur school integration, and an empirical investigation into the long-term impact.

Why Haven't School Choice Policies Worked?

Although not necessarily designed for desegregation, charter schools are one strategy that severs the link between housing and school assignment, permitting students who may not live near each other to attend school together, which could potentially lead to schools that are less segregated. In reality, however, charter schools have exacerbated rather than ameliorated the problem. Across the country, charters tend to be more racially segregated than the traditional public schools nearby. [14] Both school practices and parents' choices contribute to higher segregation. Schools make decisions about location,[15] embed subtle messages in their marketing[16] about who belongs, and can "cream-skim"[17] affluent or higher performing students. Parents can also reinforce or increase segregation. Even when white families say they care most about academics, many choose schools based on racial or socioeconomic characteristics, and they avoid schools[18] that are racially diverse. In gentrifying areas, where there may be hope for school integration as white and affluent residents move into historically low-income, Black, or Hispanic communities, schools often remain segregated. New residents use school choice to enroll elsewhere, and in some cases, neighborhood schools experience short-term integration as new residents enroll, but they become resegregated as long-time residents of color are displaced.[19]

Other policies, like interdistrict choice and magnet schools, also have the potential to reduce racial and economic segregation by allowing public school students to enroll in schools outside their attendance zones or districts. These too have had limited effect because they do not disrupt the root causes of structural inequality and are often a Band-Aid rather than a solution to regional inequities.[20] Even with controlled expansion

of these forms of choice, individual preferences, school decisions, housing availability, and transportation[21] inequities typically reproduce school segregation by race and class. Choice alone cannot achieve equity or overcome broader structural inequities.

Why Haven't Housing Interventions Worked?

If school choice cannot break the link between segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools, we might expect housing-based interventions to be more promising. Despite the promise of housing-based integration programs, public investment is far outpaced by the demand.[22] Underinvestment in housing, particularly affordable or publicly subsidized housing, keeps many low-income and racially minoritized residents from moving to more affluent neighborhoods.[23] Housing programs that do exist are often not designed to promote integration, and public housing has a sordid history of segregation. The results from the few housing programs that have sought to integrate residents are mixed. For example, the Moving to Opportunity project, which provided vouchers for low-income families to move to low-poverty neighborhoods, had positive effects only among those with children who moved[24] at a young age; older children were adversely affected. The programs had positive outcomes (increased college attendance) and intergenerational impacts, providing more evidence that where one lives matters for economic and educational opportunity. Yet programs that move residents from their neighborhoods can risk further depressing the areas that they move from and create risks for families who may not be supported in their new schools and neighborhoods, particularly if they are racially minoritized in predominantly white settings. Given these tensions, there is a need to invest in the neighborhoods where low-income and Black residents already reside and to ensure that all residents benefit when neighborhood change occurs.

Community Development for Integrated Schools

Housing interventions and school choice have not led to racial and economic integration because they have failed to build on the assets of neighborhood communities. To integrate schools, we must integrate communities themselves. Rather than remove low-income or racially minoritized residents from their neighborhoods (e.g., through school busing or Moving to Opportunity) or schools (e.g., via charter schools or school choice), community development initiatives must cultivate new social networks across race and class by creating physical spaces where neighbors can live, get

to know each other, and attend school. To be clear, we are not arguing against interdistrict choice, busing, or housing voucher programs, but we also need place-based strategies that invest directly in high-poverty communities. Community development for integrated schools values a community's cultural wealth,[25] cultivates it, protects it, and builds on it to create cross-sector and democratic approaches to neighborhood improvement and integration.

Some research suggests that desegregation is most effective when carried out in individuals' early education rather than in K–12.[26] Yet many cities have a shortage[27] of high-quality integrated early childhood spaces. When parents' social networks[28] are diverse, children's racial bias decreases. Community development for integrated schools promotes intergroup social engagement through playgrounds and early childhood centers, and it offers educational opportunities throughout the pre-K–20 pipeline.

Community development for integrated schools is grounded in what social science suggests are the strongest mechanisms for spurring racial and socioeconomic integration. The most important of these is the broadening of social networks through social contact. When lower income children interact more with higher income peers, they benefit[29] from increased information and support for navigating systems that are often designed to exclude, such as the college application process, insurance registration, or public services. They then combine this critical knowledge with their own cultural capital[30] to successfully navigate public systems. Furthermore, when white families interact with racially minoritized families in deep, sustained ways, they may become less racially biased[31] and more likely to choose schools in ways that foster integration. And the benefits of integration are clear for white students, as well. White students in racially diverse schools report[32] higher levels of student engagement, civic participation, and sense of belonging than white students in segregated schools. In this way, we see community development for school integration as a cyclical, exponential process that may lead to better outcomes for all students over time.

The Corktown CNI

In Corktown, a 1-square-mile neighborhood just west of downtown Detroit, only half of the 1,000 children in the neighborhood attended a public school in 2021–22. In part due to Detroit's expansive school choice policies, they attended 97 different traditional public and charter schools, and only 98 children attended Corktown's zoned school.

Corktown's racial demographics make it uniquely positioned to benefit from community development for school integration. Although Detroit is the most segregated city[33] in America, Corktown is racially diverse, with 59% of residents identifying as Black, 28% as white, and 6% as Hispanic. Yet the public school enrollment of students in the neighborhood was 90% Black in 2021–22.

With the Ford Motor Company's recent $740 million investment in a new autonomous vehicle campus in Corktown and its near-complete restoration of Michigan Central Station, a neighborhood landmark, many residents and policymakers are concerned about the possibility of gentrification. In the City of Detroit's Choice Neighborhoods application, it reported that the median home value in the neighborhood rose to $179,583 in 2020, whereas the median income of neighborhood residents was just $28,910, lower than that of the city overall, with 41% of Corktown residents identified as "extremely low income." Investing in Corktown during this critical transition period will help determine whether urban development there can translate into more opportunities for all residents or simply lead to the ouster of long-standing lower income residents, as we have seen in other cities across the United States.

The Corktown neighborhood in Detroit has been selected for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods Implementation (CNI) grant. This grant is intended to improve current public housing, create additional affordable housing units, and provide wraparound services for residents of Corktown. With this grant, the City of Detroit seeks "to ensure that residents of all income levels can remain in the neighborhood, and experience and participate in the neighborhood's economic activity."[34] Over the next 5 years, the CNI will create more than 800 new mixed-income housing units in Corktown, which will include replacing 86 existing public housing units and building 65 new Section 8 units, nearly 500 affordable units, 161 market-rate units, and 40 for-sale home-ownership units. The CNI will also support the development of a new mixed-income early childhood center and community gathering space near the existing K–12 neighborhood school, along with educational and economic wraparound services.

Investing in Community

The Detroit CNI is a place-based school integration intervention that combines **education** and **housing** strategies within a greater neighborhood investment plan. This

intervention envisions an integrated neighborhood that disrupts historical and predicted segregation patterns by purposely facilitating **community cohesion**. It seeks to proactively take advantage of the opportunity for racial integration with new community investment and increased housing stock, while forestalling the potentially negative impacts of urban development and gentrification.

The intervention includes three primary elements:

- **Education:** An early childhood center designed to be mixed income, located in the heart of the neighborhood just blocks from the zoned elementary-middle school. In addition, the CNI will support family case managers and wraparound services outside the formal school system, including tutoring and postsecondary transition support.

- **Housing:** Replacement low-income units and new mixed-income units fully integrated into the existing community with efforts to remove physical barriers to community interaction, and upgraded facilities to fit into the neighborhood aesthetically.

- **Community Cohesion:** A community-engaged process for neighborhood development, including community meetings to obtain input on the planned initiatives, case management for low-income families, and new common spaces (e.g., a community center, parks, and a newly constructed greenway).

The mechanisms through which the Detroit CNI may lead to greater school integration are threefold (see logic model in Appendix 5-1). First, the initiative will improve and create new low-income housing alongside the construction of "market-rate" units. The CNI thus increases opportunities for residents of different races and classes to live near each other. We see this as the first necessary step toward school integration.

Importantly, the CNI does not stop at housing; this initiative also generates new opportunities for neighbors to develop social ties, work together toward common causes, and participate in new educational opportunities within the bounds of an existing neighborhood. Without mechanisms to foster trust and build relationships among people from different races and classes, simply residing in the same neighborhood may not lead to integration. The CNI does this by removing physical barriers to interaction (i.e., fencing between the public housing development and the rest of the neighborhood), creating community centers and shared spaces, and soliciting community input. These efforts to build trust among community members and facilitate

social cohesion are often missing in other interventions, but we see them as critical in the logic of school integration through community development.

Not only will residents of different races and classes live near each other, they will have opportunities to interact, learn about, and develop social bonds with their neighbors. Research in Detroit,[35] as well as scholarship from other contexts,[36] shows that social networks are the most reliable source of information when families choose schools. Although families of all races and income levels prefer schools close to home, they discuss the options they are considering and they solicit advice from friends and family members, listening especially to trusted social contacts who have personal experiences with schools. Therefore, we view the increased social contact and community building of the CNI as a mechanism for families to expand their social networks and trusted sources of information about schools, which may lead to integrative school choices.

Finally, the CNI will invest in new educational resources through an early childhood center that will double as a community center, and it will improve the conditions surrounding neighborhood schools through beautification efforts. These investments may improve residents' perceived quality of the neighborhood public school and induce more families to enroll their children there, which in turn may create greater diversity in the social networks in which the neighborhood schools are being recommended. We hypothesize that Corktown children across race and class will be more likely to enroll in preschool and elementary school together, increasing the likelihood of racial and socioeconomic integration. The promise of this community development intervention will be realized only if residents across race and class see themselves as co-designers who are helping to create the future of integrated Corktown. The City of Detroit has committed to a community-engaged process with the potential to do just that.

Studying a Promising Approach to School Integration

As we have shown, many promising approaches to school integration have not succeeded. Rigorous, community-centered research is essential to identify the short- and long-term impact of CNI in Corktown. As scholars with deep personal and professional connections to Detroit, we believe a study of the Corktown CNI should capture rich data over time to deeply document and understand the changes associated with the initiative. Research should examine the effect of the Corktown CNI intervention on student enrollment decisions and on the racial and socioeconomic integration of the

early childhood center and the K–12 schools in the neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods. It is just as important to measure the mechanisms and conditions that create these outcomes, so research activities should also focus on topics such as neighborhood race- and class-based segregation, politics, power, and community input in the redevelopment process. A robust, evidence-generating research study on the Corktown CNI would include these elements:

- An evaluation of the housing program's impact on multiple outcomes (e.g., school integration, student attendance and achievement, health, political engagement).

- An examination of the mechanisms that drive those outcomes (e.g., student and parents' social networks, social cohesion, resources, and community advocacy).

These two components would enable researchers to answer questions such as, what actually happens when families from different racial and economic backgrounds come together in a residential building complex, a preschool, or a community center? What conditions foster authentic relationships across differences? How do residents work together, if at all, toward shared goals? Where do conflicts emerge? Learning from these challenges could help inform future integration efforts across sectors.

This research should be conducted through cross-sector collaborative relationships (such as those cultivated through the Detroit PEER[37] center at Wayne State) with school district officials, community organizations, and education advocacy groups, including the parent- and youth-led grassroots organizing group 482Forward. Interviews, observations, surveys, and administrative data should be collected to document changes as they occur, as well as to follow residents over time after the HUD grant concludes to examine long-term outcomes. To the extent possible, data should be collected at baseline from both Corktown residents and a representative sample of other Detroit residents to compare how both the mechanisms and outcomes change over time for those in and outside the Corktown footprint.

To ensure that the research is community centered and nonextractive, interim findings should be shared with residents to inform interpretation and refine future research protocols. The research team should also coordinate with other researchers studying similar initiatives across the country to share ideas and see how these dynamics are playing out differently across contexts, with important implications for policy design.

Conclusion

Integrated schools and communities do not just lead to better short- and long-term outcomes for all involved; they are needed to counter the growing divisions in our country, for the sake of social cohesion and democracy. Where school choice policies and housing interventions that move low-income residents have not succeeded, we see community development as an underexplored pathway to integrated neighborhoods, social networks, and schools. The HUD-supported Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, with its explicit focus on racial and social equity, has the potential to build on existing community assets while strengthening ties between neighbors in cities across the country.[38] We look forward to joining a growing community of scholars, activists, and civil servants interested in investing in communities and learning from the experiences of their residents.

Appendix 5-1: Logic Model of Community Development for Integrated Schools

Figure 5-1.A-1. Logic Model of Community Development for Integrated Schools

Note. The logic model graphic was designed by Whitney Miller, a research assistant at the Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research at Wayne State University.

Notes

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Stories of School Travel: Using a Mobility Justice Framework for Desegregation Research and Policy

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In the Hunters View public housing project in San Francisco, California, children rode hours on public transit buses from their high-poverty neighborhood to "low-performing schools" in all corners of the city, when they could have walked mere feet to a comparable local elementary school. When asked about their choice, parents shared that their priority was keeping their kids healthy and safe, which meant sending them out of their neighborhood suffering from gun violence.[1]

In West Hartford, Connecticut, many families of color coming from the adjacent city of Hartford through an interdistrict desegregation program have trouble attending school events, extracurricular activities, and parent–teacher conferences because of poor transit connections and limited school district funds for yellow buses or taxis. A school administrator said to me, "Don't tell my bosses, but sometimes I drive the kids home after an event. I know I'm not supposed to do that, but how else are they going to get there?"[2]

Michael Dumas, a scholar of education and the Black experience, described the "everyday assaults" he, as a Black child, experienced on his way to a desegregated school in Seattle in the 1980s: "My shortcut through the alley might put me directly in the path of a growling stray dog who sometimes ran loose back there." If he forgot "to set the alarm, or [took] too long eating breakfast" he would have to take public transit: "First, the 48 bus north…where I would get off…to wait on an often windy freeway overpass for the 75 to the white, affluent Wedgewood neighborhood where my short legs would endure yet another hill, to get to the school building at the top. Late." Meanwhile, white students whose parents drove them to school had extra time "to hang out at their lockers…or chat casually with teachers, who would ask them questions like, why don't you try out for band, or get involved in French Club? Even on these days, when we arrived on time, we were already too late."[3]

Stories of school travel are all around us. They capture parents' complex decisions that transcend simple conceptions of "good schools." They reveal the trade-offs district leaders balance in the face of diminishing budgets for transportation and give us a window into the risks some educators take in bucking their district's policies to personally drive kids home. They elevate the hardships Black and Brown youth experience when navigating complex and less-than-reliable public transit systems. They point out how the journey to school creates ripples and waves in students' delicate social dynamics and in classrooms that teachers manage every day.

Yet, overall, in formal research and policy circles, the journey to and from school remains underexamined and underappreciated. As we think about Integration and Equity 2.0, we would do well to include transportation as a critical element. Desegregation schemes require both the right configuration of policies and programs within schools and the physical pathway to get to schools. After all, contemporary approaches to desegregation[4] are predicated on a student's ability to physically get to a new, often further afield, school. Desegregation programs intentionally decouple schools from their neighborhood context to reverse discriminatory housing and land use policies; disrupt the cumulative negative consequences of entrenched segregation; and enable better academic, health, and life outcomes.[5] Regardless of the type of effort—redesigned school attendance boundaries and feeder patterns, controlled choice plans, magnet or diverse-by-design charter schools, and/or interdistrict transfer programs—they cannot be successful without some investment in transportation. In other words, across diverse geographies, achieving integrative goals is impossible without intentional and sustained attention to transportation.

A Gap in Understanding

A few recent reports have shed light on the constraints school districts face and how they manage diminishing transportation resources, exacerbated by pandemic-related budget cuts, health and safety measures, and bus driver shortages.[6] Even a small sampling of press coverage from across the country reveals some of the political and logistical headwinds districts face in trying to implement integration plans and the transportation needs associated with these plans.[7] Research, however, has provided a nuanced sense only of the poor conditions at a young person's starting point (an under-resourced, racially and socioeconomically segregated neighborhood) and her aspirational destination (a better resourced, diverse, and integrated school).

But the journey to get to and from school is a central plot in the struggle for desegregation and as such also deserves more rigorous attention in research, policymaking, and program design.[8] Currently, the way we ask questions and assess the success of desegregation programs does not fully account for the experiences—positive and negative—of young people on their journeys to school. Dumas's testimonial above about "everyday assaults" perhaps most poignantly drives home the burdens—or "suffering" in Dumas's words—that young people bear as they participate in desegregation. Researchers and policymakers have not made space for these experiences.[9] Notably, Dumas's struggle is not only the function of his bus ride, but a result of the intersecting dynamics of household activity, wage and labor policy, housing and land use policies, food security, and school access, as well as the physical and social topographies that young people and their families manage daily. Reconfigured or additional bus routes alone would not have ameliorated his pain. Rather, his testimony suggests that the overlapping and compounding realities of school travel in the context of desegregation require transdisciplinary approaches to research and policy making.

Perversely, many already draw from a wide range of disciplines to construct arguments opposing school district desegregation policies. For example, in the past few years, parents and decision makers in Howard County, Maryland, spoke with deep ambivalence about how to manage the movement of students across their countywide school district during a recent attendance rezoning process.[10] They expressed commitment to ensuring that all students had access to high-quality education, but when actually confronted with an alternative attendance boundary design to decrease concentrated poverty, they voiced empirically dubious concerns about health and environmental impacts of long bus or car rides.[11] After a recent review of the school travel literature, I can confirm that we do not have evidence to definitively assess the consequences of commuting to school, particularly when weighed against remaining in a segregated school or neighborhood. But parents across the country who oppose desegregation pick up arguments circulating in smart growth and sustainable transportation circles, which emphasize the need to reduce "vehicle miles traveled" and greenhouse gas emissions in school travel.[12]

Opponents also elevate the ideal of a walkable neighborhood school and the importance of active travel to school (walking and biking) for physical health.[13] But these ideals neglect the deeply racist and exclusionary values imbued in early neighborhood

designs with segregated schools at their centers.[14] They do not adequately reconcile their normative commitment for active travel to neighborhood schools with the reality that those schools and neighborhoods reflect patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation. Walkable school attendance zones can actually cement concentrated poverty and disinvestment in some places and opportunity hoarding and white privilege in others.[15] As Nikole Hannah-Jones has stated, commuting by bus to a desegregated school "was not always easy, but I am perplexed by the audacity of people who argue that the hardship of a long bus ride somehow outweighs the hardship of being deprived of a good education" endemic to high-poverty and racially segregated schools that we otherwise conscript so many Black and Brown children to attend.[16]

Toward a Transdisciplinary Understanding of Educational Justice

Elsewhere, collaborators and I have argued that a mobility justice framework can build understanding of school travel and its implications in both transportation and educational equity.[17] Here, I argue that this framework is particularly relevant in the context of school desegregation program design and implementation. A mobility justice framework opens transdisciplinary possibilities by looking beyond material movement— how we get from home to school—to also consider the larger systemic configurations that foster or constrain free, easy, and fearless movement for all groups.[18] This framework takes up issues of public spaces broadly and "governance processes that lay claim to regulate those spaces," be those transportation, housing and land use, education, or policing policies, all of which contribute to cementing patterns of segregation.[19] Thus, it is broadly applicable in rural, suburban, and urban places that are struggling with implementing desegregation policies and achieving integrative outcomes.

Mobility justice demands attention to school desegregation by a more expansive set of stakeholder perspectives. It also suggests a broader portfolio of methods to (re)conceptualize how school desegregation gets implemented and what school travel in that context looks like. Beyond questions of benefits and burdens, we seek justice for young people and their families beyond simplistic measures of distributive justice, turning to a more restorative or reparative approach that considers the historical "origins of disparities and the ongoing processes that continue to reproduce them."[20] Further, we can find procedural justice by expanding our methodological toolbox to shift "who is involved in decision making, the extent to which they can affect outcomes, and whose knowledge is considered valid."[21]

An Agenda for Participatory and Policy-Changing Research

As the opening vignettes encapsulate, understanding of how desegregation programs and their transportation strategies are actually lived by young people, parents, and educators remains elusive. As argued above, a mobility justice framework has the potential to illuminate the transdisciplinary realities of school travel and to the material lived experiences of intersectional identities for historically minoritized and marginalized peoples. But how? Mobility justice is not only a conceptual framework but also a call for a particular methodology, one that shifts the locus of control and power away from researchers and policymakers and that foregrounds systemic oppressions and the subjectivities of students and families. Unfortunately, researchers and policymakers do not generally ask the questions or conduct the data collection and analysis that would yield insights that center young people and parents as protagonists in their own school travel story.

Expanding our methods beyond those traditionally used in transportation and education policy research can help. Right now, in transportation, we focus on things such as the mode, cost, frequency, speed, and distance of a particular trip because "transportation research paradigms may give relatively less attention to social issues, qualitative data, and local knowledge, while emphasizing quantitative data, modeling, physical factors, and infrastructure building."[22] Likewise, education research and policy traditionally measure outcomes through quantitative metrics like test scores, absentee or graduation rates, and the like. Thus, my provocation is to initiate and design research with and for young people, families, and educators.[23] Students and families can drive the questions they want answered about how to realize the aspirations of desegregation policies. Looking beyond traditional approaches to desegregation research, policymaking, and program design is the path to a model of integration defined not simply by proximity (Black students learning with white students), but one that truly disrupts power in schools, policymaking, research, and ultimately, the broader society.[24]

To do so requires creating safe spaces through intentional relationship building over time and shared inquiry processes characteristic of participatory-action research methods, for which we have many precedents. From the early Civil Rights Movement to contemporary efforts, young people have led and continue to lead in fights for integration and educational justice.[25] Their work centers the experience and expertise of young people, families, and educators in the study of systemic oppression, in this case

through public education and transportation infrastructure investments that yield "arrested mobility."[26] These approaches ensure that those who ask the questions that push for change are the same people who bear the consequences. When this happens, their needs, burdens, and benefits are not merely speculative on the part of third-party researchers or policymakers, but rather they are the central drivers of change. Research and related policy or program outcomes are accountable to these young people and their communities.[27]

Research questions can start as descriptive explorations of students' daily travels, environments, and emotions. Interviews, focus groups, travel diaries, and ride-along and auto-ethnographies, along with photography and film, will help capture suffering, fears, joys, and other visceral and somatic experiences[28] of the school journey, and complement travel survey and administrative data that are fed into models and projections that usually shape transportation decisions. Analysis could include how different modes and pathways are affecting physical and mental health and a young person's readiness to learn when they arrive at the school door. Comparative analysis could examine how school travel for the purposes of desegregation is experienced and perceived relative to school travel in general. A mobility justice framework would also call attention to how school travel affects the subjectivities of students and families, depending on their multiple and intersectional identities.

Further, studies can explore the experience of educators in the classroom managing students who arrive after long and varied trips. Learning with educators about their experiences in classrooms with students who travel to their schools from outside the neighborhood or district may include more observational studies, auto-ethnography, and interviews or focus groups. Administrators also have important insights into issues that transcend their local school district and travel up the chain to state and federal budgeting and policymaking, particularly those that constrain the ability of local districts to provide transportation for desegregation programs.[29]

Envisioning Possibilities for Change

Research and resultant evidence-based policymaking or program specifications should be guided not only by statistical measures, quantitative modeling, and outcome-based assessments. Rather, qualitative data that capture processes in real time and are gathered directly from the constituencies who have the daily experience of travel to

school can inform policy and practice at all levels. Participatory research is iterative, so it has a built-in opportunity for real-time learning, change, and programmatic response to interim findings. For example, insights can help district administrators better plan routes, bus bell schedules, extracurricular activities, family engagement, and the like. Student research on their school travel can be connected to other curricular activities in social studies, math, and English language arts classes. Furthermore, these findings can also inform school district decisions regarding school assignment boundaries, school siting, and budgetary priorities for desegregation programs. Longer term, research can inform regional transportation policies and planning, federal regulations on the use of education funds for transportation expenses, and cross-agency guidance for collaborative efforts across the U.S. Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation.[30]

A mobility justice framework relies on transdisciplinary perspectives that take seriously the full range of issues raised by respondents and community researchers, the full impact and application of which remains yet to be known. Questions in other domains— neighborhood change, housing and land use, commercial development, policing, arts and culture, to name a few—will surely emerge and complete the full story arc. Policy interventions may well exist outside of education that can make the journey to desegregated schools not one of hazards and burdens, but rather one of learning and connection. Ultimately, participatory research and consultative processes with students, families, and educators can help inform how desegregation and transportation policies, operations, data collection, and funding can better align with their needs and support them on their literal and metaphorical journeys to and through places of learning.

Notes

1. Personal communication, November 2007.

2. Personal communication, February 2022.

3. Dumas, M. J. (2014). "Losing an Arm": Schooling as a site of Black suffering. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *17*(1), 1–29. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2013.850412

4. I use the terms "desegregation" and "integration" interchangeably to mean "the practice of bringing together students from different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds in an attempt to address systemic educational inequities and foster social cohesion across lines of difference." From Chirichigno, G., Tegeler, P.,
    & Hollinger, A. (2020). [Policy Brief 10]. National Coalition on School Diversity.

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8. Historically, transportation has been the stage and weapon in battles over (de)segregation for generations. For a recent account of the history of forced busing and transportation debates, see Hannah-Jones, N. (2019, July 12). It was never about busing. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/opinion/sunday/it-was-never-about-busing.html. Legal precedent emanates from Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 US 537 (Supreme Court 1896), a case about public transportation and "separate but equal" public facilities. The landmark Brown v. Board of Education, 347 US 483 (Supreme Court 1954) decision that overturned *Plessy*, in part hinged on a Black parent, Oliver Brown, suing his local school district to allow his daughter to attend her neighborhood school, which at the time was designated for white students, instead of getting bused out of their neighborhood to a segregated Black school elsewhere in the district. Subsequent court decisions acknowledged the ways that physical access through transportation provision is central to legal remedies. Also see Green v. County School Board, 391 US 430 (Supreme Court 1968); and Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Bd. of Ed., 402 US 1 (Supreme Court 1971).

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11. This is not to suggest that weaponizing school transportation for an anti-integration agenda is new, but rather that today, arguments add layers of "sophistication" by drawing from scholarship outside the field of education.

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15. For a discussion of the pitfalls of walkability in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, see, for example, PolicyLink, ChangeLab Solutions, and Safe Routes to School National Partnership. (n.d.). *Maximizing walkability, diversity, and educational equity in U. S. schools: A convening report*. https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/maxamizing-walkability-diversity-and-educational-equity-in-us-schools; Chirichigno, G., & Zimmerman, S, (2012, November). *Promoting safe routes to school programs in low-income communities and communities of color: Challenges and opportunities.* [White paper from annual symposium.] National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity. https://www.consumerfreedom.com/app/uploads/2013/02/Copy-of-2012-NPLAN-Symposium-Documents.pdf

    For a recent comprehensive review of Active Transport to School literature and critique, see Bierbaum, A. H., Karner, A., & Barajas, J. M. (2021). Toward mobility justice: Linking transportation and education equity in the context of school choice. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *87*(2), 197–210. https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01944363.2020.1803104

16. Hannah-Jones, N. (2019, July 12). It was never about busing. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/opinion/sunday/it-was-never-about-busing.html

17. Bierbaum, Karner, & Barajas, *Toward mobility justice.*

18. Untokening. (n.d.). *Summary: What is mobility justice?* http://www.untokening.org/summary

19. Untokening, *What is mobility justice?*

20. Bierbaum, Karner, & Barajas, *Toward mobility justice* (p. 199). See also Sheller, M. (2018). *Mobility justice: The politics of movement in an age of extremes*. Verso.

21. Bierbaum et al., *Toward mobility justice* (p. 199).

22. Lowe, K. (2021). Undone science, funding, and positionality in transportation research. *Transport Reviews*, *41*(2), 192–209.

23. I appreciate the skepticism that may result from a researcher suggesting "more research" as a crucial next step. In general, despite my vocation, I am loath to call for research for research's sake. But in the case of school travel and desegregation, I am confident that parents and district leaders are making bold assertions and decisions about the educational, health, environmental, and budgetary impacts of transportation schemes for desegregation in the absence of robust empirical, and especially qualitative, data.

24. Kirkland, D. (2021). Using research evidence to address segregation: A racial equity perspective. *Poverty & Race,* (October-December). https://www.prrac.org/using-research-evidence-to-address-segregation-a-racial-equity-perspective-by-david-kirkland-oct-dec-2021-pr-issue/

25. See, for example, IntegrateNYC, a youth-led organization, that "develop[s] youth leaders who repair the harms of segregation and build authentic integration and equity." IntegrateNYC. (2022, December 5). *Building school integration and education justice*. https://integratenyc.org

26. As Michelle Fine commented in a recent interview, "I want to be clear that we are *not* studying people/communities/groups—together we design projects so that, in collaboration and with critique and radical imagination, we are studying systems of oppression—economic, criminal legal, educational, foster care—that privilege some and oppress others." Sukhadia, Q. (2022, April 27). No research about us, without us: Discussing the Public Science Project's community-based research practice with co-founder Michelle Fine. *Distributaries* [blog]. The Center for Humanities, City University of New York. https://centerforthehumanities.org/distributaries/interview-with-michelle-fine

    "Arrested mobility" is a framework that reveals "how the inalienable right to move, to be moved or to simply exist in public space has been denied by legal and illegal authority," specifically to Black Americans. Brown, C. T., Rose, J., &Kling, S. *Arrested mobility: Barriers to walking, biking, and e-scooter use in Black communities in the United States.* New Urban Mobility Alliance. https://www.numo.global/news/report-arrested-mobility-barriers-walking-biking-and-e-scooter-use-black-communities-us

27. For more on accountability see, for example, Fine, M. (2018). *Just research in contentious times: Widening the methodological imagination* (pp. 114–116). Teachers College Press.

28. For an example of attending to youth's somatic experiences of urban life, see Welch, B. J., Bierbaum, A. H., & Rusli, A. (2020). Mindful mapping: An integrated approach to helping youth navigate neighborhood change. In J. Loebach, S. Little, A. Cox, & P. Eubanks Owens (Eds.), *Handbook for designing public spaces for young people: Processes, practices and policies for youth inclusion* (pp. 14–35). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780429505614/chapters/10.4324/9780429505614-35).

29. See, for example, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Final Policy Statement on FTA's School Bus Operations Regulations, 49 CFR Part 605 [Docket No. FTA–2008–0015]. § (2008). https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2008/09/16/E8-21601/final-policy-statement-on-ftas-school-bus-operations-regulations

30. For example, efforts to make transportation an allowable expense in the Magnet School Assistance Program and repealing statutes that prevent federal funding from being used for transportation for school integration. See, for example, George, J. (2021, March 3). *Federal action removes long-standing obstacle to school integration*. [Blog]. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/federal-action-removes-long-standing-obstacle-school-integration

    On cross-agency guidance, see, for example, Castro, J., King, Jr., J. B., & Foxx, A. R. (2016, June 3). *Dear colleague letter: AFFH and school segregation*. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Transportation. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/06032016-dear-colleagues-letter.pdf

Strength in Collaboration: How the Bridges Collaborative Is Catalyzing School Integration Efforts

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> What are other school districts doing to create diversity in their magnet schools? Have any other schools had success de-tracking their high school classes? How can we support our housing clients to help them find good schools for their children? How can we diversify our schools without leading to "white flight?" Who else is doing this work?

Over the years, our team of education researchers at The Century Foundation (TCF) has heard questions like these from dozens of education and housing leaders who are trying to advance integration in their schools and neighborhoods. They are looking for support in what feels like uncharted territory. They feel alone.

Our TCF team often shares research summaries or provides technical assistance to organizations based on our knowledge of successful integration strategies. But one of the most effective ways that we have been able to support local school integration efforts is to offer connections with leaders in other communities who have tackled similar challenges, thereby catalyzing school integration efforts by spreading ideas across the ecosystem. School and housing leaders learn things through peer conversations that reports or consultants cannot give them. When tackling a problem as vexing and complicated as segregation, leaders are more motivated and produce more creative solutions when they can think through challenges with other practitioners in the trenches whose experiences both mirror and diverge from their own.

In 2020, we launched the Bridges Collaborative to facilitate more such opportunities. The result was a forum for practitioners to share what works (and what does not), exposing leaders to innovation and providing opportunities for collaboration at the national and regional levels that ultimately advance integration.

In creating the Bridges Collaborative, we also aimed to create a national social and political ecosystem that would be more accepting of school integration work. We set out on a mission to supplement the peer-to-peer work with in-depth messaging research and training so that we might help partners surmount what has historically been the most challenging obstacle: convincing stakeholders to take actions that will lead to less segregation.

What has emerged from the work of the Bridges Collaborative, therefore, has been not just one groundbreaking idea for how to further school integration right now, but rather a set of unique approaches our members have taken that collectively have been shared, amplified, and spread through the work of the collaborative, supplemented by a strategic effort to shift public opinion on the broader issue of integration. The value proposition is simple: For school integration to make progress, there must be a forum for practitioners to come together on equal footing to learn about new approaches and how to implement them, as well as to share challenges and brainstorm strategies for surmounting them. Moreover, there must be a more favorable public narrative to enable practitioners to implement what they learn. Integration leaders are stronger together. That is the promise of the Bridges Collaborative.

The Need for Collaboration and Compelling Messaging to Achieve Integration

Five decades of research suggest that socioeconomic and racial integration is one of the best design principles for creating successful schools that produce strong results for students and society.[1] But despite this research consensus that integration is beneficial to all students, diverse learning environments remain a scarce educational resource, and segregation is a stubborn scourge in American public schools. Nationwide, two out of five Black and Latino students attend schools where more than 90% of their classmates are non-white, while one in five white students attends a school where more than 90% of students are also white.[2] This segregation undergirds systemic racism, creates social strife, and leaves our children unprepared for an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world. As economist Heather McGhee explains, "segregation sends disturbing messages not just to Black and brown but also to white children."[3]

School segregation and education inequality are not products of nature: They are the result of racist school and housing policies—conscious decisions by lawmakers—

combined with individual choices made in a society steeped in white supremacy. The work of school integration should be the work of racial healing, to undo those racist structures and build a better educational future for all children founded on principles of racial equity and democracy.

Undertaking this work can be challenging, logistically and politically. School systems that are committed to advancing school integration—like Roaring Fork School District in Colorado, Shaker Heights City School District in Ohio, and Blackstone Valley Prep charter school network in Rhode Island—are often in communities surrounded by segregated districts where integration is nowhere to be found on the list of priorities. In a recent effort to catalog school integration efforts across the country, we identified 119 school districts and 66 charter schools or networks that consider race and/or socioeconomic status in their student assignment or admissions policies.[4] Although these districts and charters, plus others that are actively working on developing integration programs, have a lot to offer in terms of practices, policies, and approaches to integration, they still represent a small slice of school districts and charter schools nationwide. School integration can be lonely work. To avoid reinventing the wheel, leaders need concrete examples and lessons learned from practitioners who have implemented solutions to this vexing problem.

Finally, the fight for school integration over the years has been set back by strategic and coordinated attempts to turn popular opinion against integration efforts. Recent redistricting efforts in Howard County, Maryland,[5] and elite school reform efforts in New York City[6] are emblematic of such attempts. In both cases, opponents labeled reforms as unfair and even racist in some cases as they beat back efforts to make schools more integrated, and they argued that those districts should spend more time improving segregated schools as a solution.

As author Matt Delmont meticulously documented in his seminal book *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation*, the language of local control, "neighborhood schools," and the very notion of busing have their roots in the advocacy of segregationist white people such as Louisa Day Hicks.[7] Many of these terms and concepts now enjoy immense popularity, even among some people of color, many of whom are totally unaware of their origins. Practitioners who hope to combat segregation in their communities also need strategic language at their disposal to

supplement their initiatives, and ultimately a friendlier political ecosystem for implementing solutions to segregation.

Launching an Integration Collaborative

In 2020, TCF issued a call for school districts, charter schools, and fair housing organizations to apply to join a cohort focused on increasing access to diverse, integrated, and inclusive schools and neighborhoods. That fall, we launched the Bridges Collaborative with 57 schools, school districts, and housing organizations. Members include some of the largest school districts in the country, as well as single-site charter schools, and various housing nonprofits and housing authorities across both red and blue states. In contributing to the national conversation on the benefits of school diversity, the Bridges Collaborative seeks to improve the specific conditions in the local communities represented and to highlight successes, demonstrating what is possible. Collectively, our members are given the space and opportunity to learn from one another, develop grassroots political support, and discuss successful strategies for integration.

Creating Spaces for Collaboration on Integration Across Sectors and Geographies

Throughout the first cohort, the Bridges Collaborative engaged 250 participants from across 22 states in more than 300 hours of programming. The Bridges Collaborative seeks to increase access to diverse, integrated, and inclusive schools and neighborhoods and improve the quality of these schools and neighborhoods through two primary mechanisms. First, by strategic, meaningful collaboration among partners, and second, through relevant and accessible research and expertise curated by TCF and the Bridges Collaborative.

To that end, the Bridges Collaborative offers national convenings, regional convenings, and peer collaboration groups. National convenings take the form of multiday programming and provide the space for all Bridges members to attend interactive sessions featuring Bridges members and national experts; lead their own sessions on regional successes, outcomes, and points of inquiry; experience substantial opportunities for networking; and visit local schools and places of historical interest. Mia Hall, executive director of equity and excellence at Fort Worth Independent School

District, described how participating in a neighborhood tour of and site visit to an integrated school in Howard County, Maryland, helped make the goals for integration that Fort Worth is working toward more concrete: "Before coming to this national convening, I only could aspire or imagine in my head what an inclusive, integrated, high-performing high school would look like.... It's now no longer an aspiration... it's now more of a destination. It's a real place that actually exists that I can now see."[8]

Bridges Collaborative regional convenings offer several Bridges teams from different schools, school districts, and housing organizations the opportunity to jointly host learning sessions in their communities. Previous regional convenings focused on sharing best practices for school integration in North Carolina; regional solutions to segregation in Milwaukee; exploring the potential for school-housing partnerships in Dallas/Fort Worth; and exploring avenues for future strategies across district, charter, and housing partners to ensure a more integrated city in Los Angeles. These regional convenings provide an opportunity for school districts, housing organizations, advocates, and policymakers to discuss specific regional goals. These convenings also serve as a launching pad for further collaboration and calls to action within their respective communities. In North Carolina, for example, district officials, school board members, city council members, and leaders from local housing authorities came together to present problems of practice and promising solutions. One district presented preliminary data from their efforts to redraw attendance boundaries and revise admissions priorities for magnet schools; in the process, the district created relationships with leaders from other districts in the region who had tackled similar enrollment planning issues in the past.

The Bridges Collaborative also provides peer collaboration groups. Each peer collaboration group is designed as an opportunity for smaller clusters of Bridges Collaborative teams from across the country to explore a specific topic and engage in peer learning. Throughout the inaugural cohort, the Bridges Collaborative offered more than a dozen peer collaboration groups on topics such as comparing districtwide enrollment strategies that lead to integration, making the research-based case for integration, zoning reform, and building empathy across difference in politically diverse school communities. Members can reference an abundance of research presented by the Bridges Collaborative during the sessions that includes both resources from other organizations and original research conducted or commissioned by the TCF team, such

as polling and messaging research on how best to frame the issue of school integration. Members frequently follow up with one another to forge ongoing connections across organizations.

Finding ways to measure the effectiveness of Bridges Collaborative's efforts to create spaces for collaboration and spur new connections is important for honing and improving our model. A team from the American Institutes for Research (AIR), funded by the AIR Equity Initiative, has selected Bridges Collaborative as the subject for a multiyear study on education capacity-building, which is providing important insights for our work.[9] Initial findings of the study include a social network analysis of Bridges Collaborative members that shows positive trends: After joining the collaborative, Bridges members report increased interactions with other Bridges member organizations and external organizations.

Dynamic Ideas for Spreading Integration

What are some of the most promising ideas that Bridges Collaborative members pursue? Although there are far too many to list here, we have listed a sampling of some of the most innovative approaches practiced by Bridges members that exemplify the types of ideas that will catalyze the next wave of integration across the country.

- In a large public school district in Texas, the school district has opened a set of brand new schools under its "innovation zone," which attracts families with a specialized focus (e.g., arts, sciences) and that uses a unique algorithm to admit students (as opposed to traditional school boundaries) to ensure a roughly equal proportion of low-income students and middle-/upper-income students. These schools have become some of the most successful and sought-after schools in the district.

- In a large U.S. city, a housing mobility nonprofit has connected low-income families with housing vouchers to housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods that have "A-rated" schools and offered a variety of supports and services to ensure that families have a successful transition and that students succeed academically in some of the best schools in the city. This model breaks down the traditional barrier of housing stock for housing voucher recipients being available only in areas with low-quality educational options. The students in this program have thrived socially and academically.

- In a northern U.S. district, leaders successfully launched and executed a community engagement series that led to the overhaul of the middle school admissions process, leading to a new system that uses a weighted lottery to ensure diverse student bodies across all middle schools in the district. The schools are diverse and there has not been the "white flight" that critics of the process predicted.

- In a school district in North Carolina, two schools with dramatically different school populations and separated by only 1 mile successfully executed a merger (one campus became K–2 and the other became 3–5) and became two successful, racially and socioeconomically integrated campuses.

Providing Strategic Language and Shifting Public Opinion

In addition to serving as a convener of practitioners, an initial focal point of our work with the Bridges Collaborative was to conduct research on effective messages for garnering support for school integration. We partnered with the Topos Partnership, a well-regarded polling, messaging, and public opinion firm, to conduct talk-back testing and message testing in a large, national poll to understand how we might help our members talk about these issues, as well as begin to win back the public narrative on the issue of school integration.

The initial work resulted in some very promising findings. First, despite many advocates' tendency to lean into social justice framing on the school integration issue (e.g., focusing on historical discrimination, prejudice, redlining, racism), a much more effective frame with the general public is messaging that leans into the direct benefits of an integrated education to individual students. Second, specific frames are more effective than others for different segments of the population. For instance, the social justice framing polled particularly effectively with Democratic women and Black respondents, but not with Republican or Asian American respondents.

We documented our findings on a comprehensive messaging guide, which we have provided to all of our Bridges Collaborative members. We also authored a public report describing the results of the polling work.[10] Finally, we have conducted five training sessions for our members on how to talk most effectively about school integration, digging into our messaging guide, revealing some of the data specific to certain subpopulations, and guiding partners to craft their own localized messages using effective framing.

Bridges members have reported that the messaging work we have done with them has been some of the most useful and effective training, helping them think about their initiatives and consider framing as part of the process rather than an afterthought. Moving forward, we will continue to share and spread the messaging results and partner with other advocates to help change the national popular view of this issue.

Seeding More Connections

The Bridges Collaborative has reopened its membership to invite additional schools, school districts, and housing organizations to apply to join the collaborative on a rolling basis.

As we continue this work with members new and old, we are focused on several goals that have emerged from the learnings of our initial years of Bridges Collaborative work:

- *Deepen cross-sector networks in a region.* Some of the Bridges Collaborative activities that have yielded the most connections, conversations, and cross-pollination of ideas have happened where school districts, charter schools, housing organizations, and other community organizations from the same region have all come together. In areas where we do not have all of these partnerships lined up yet, where currently a lone school district or charter school or housing organization is a member, we are working to recruit other members from the region.

- *Continue empowering Bridges Collaborative members to grow their local networks.* Bridges' regional convenings pushed the organizations involved to consider who else in their local communities—neighboring school districts and charter schools, school board members and city council members, grantmakers, social service organizations, researchers—could be valuable partners in their integration work. We will continue to create opportunities for Bridges Collaborative members to reach out to new partners, because these connections are strongest when organizations take ownership of making these connections.

- *Advocate for state-sponsored collaboration spaces.* While nongovernmental organizations like Bridges Collaborative play a critical role in supporting work to advance integration, state and federal education, housing, and transportation departments should also use their convening power to bring leaders together to look for collaborative solutions to address segregation.

- *Deepen the messaging research and adapt to specific community needs.* Our initial messaging work has been very promising; however, as our research makes clear, adapting overarching messages and language to communities requires intentional work listening to and understanding local contexts. The Bridges Collaborative must continue connecting local work with the broader narrative to ultimately shift public opinion on this issue.

Chris Thiel, legislative policy manager for Milwaukee Public Schools, is part of the Bridges Collaborative team from Milwaukee that hosted a regional convening. He described how connecting with leaders in their region and across the nation has brought renewed energy and progress to their community's work on integration:

> Over the last several years, frankly, before the Bridges Collaborative came along, the impetus and the desire to continue to [do] this kind of work existed, but it didn't have a focus. And when you had conversations in our community, people just wondered: *Will we ever be able to do this work again?* So the Bridges Collaborative, and the conversations we've been able to have locally and nationally now, have really reinvigorated that conversation and brought back to the fore the passion that people have for integration.[11]

This is the goal of the Bridges Collaborative: to serve as a hub for practitioners across the country and reignite a national movement addressing school and housing integration. "School systems can't do it alone," Effie McMillian, executive director of equity at Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, explained. "So we need elected officials. We need housing authorities. We need school leaders. We need everybody to come to the table."[12] Collaboration within and across sectors is essential for sharing knowledge and resources and creating political power for the change needed to advance integration. Integration requires committed work over time and constant problem solving, as well as an ecosystem that is hospitable to positive change. Whether through the Bridges Collaborative, other national organizations, or locally driven efforts, creating spaces for education and housing practitioners to collaborate is essential to fostering the discussion and solidarity needed to tackle the vexing problem of segregation and chart a more integrated, inclusive future for students and families.

Notes

1. See, for example, Johnson, R. (2015, August). *Long-run impacts of school desegregation and school quality on adult attainments*. [National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 16664]. https://gsppi.berkeley.edu/~ruckerj/johnson_schooldesegregation_NBERw16664.pdf; Mickelson, R. A. (2008). Twenty-first century social science research on school diversity and educational outcomes. *Ohio State Law Journal*, *69*, 1173–1228; and Brief of Amicus Curiae 553 Social Scientists, Parents Involved v. Seattle School District 551 U.S. 701 (2007) (No. 05-908).

2. Authors' calculations, U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data, 2018–2019.

3. McGhee, H. (2021). *The sum of us: What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together*. Random House Publishing Group.

4. Potter, H., & Burris, M. (2020). *Here is what school integration in America looks like today*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/school-integration-america-looks-like-today/.

5. Goldstein, D. (2019, November 12). Where civility is a motto, a school integration fight turns bitter. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/12/us/howard-county-school-redistricting.html

6. Harris, E. (2018, June 2). De Blasio proposes changes to New York's elite high schools. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/nyregion/de-blasio-new-york-schools.html

7. Delmont, M. (2016). *Why busing failed: Race, media, and the national resistance to school desegregation*. University of California Press.

8. M. Hall, interview with TCF, May 20, 2022.

9. See Sambolt, M., (n.d.). *Bridges Collaborative continuous improvement study*. American Institutes for Research. https://www.air.org/project/bridges-collaborative-continuous-improvement-study

10. Potter, H., Lallinger, S., Burris, M., Kahlenberg, R. D., Edwards, A., & Topos Partnership. (2021). *School integration is popular. We can make it more so*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/commentary/school-integration-is-popular-we-can-make-it-more-so/

11. C. Thiel, interview with TCF, May 20, 2022.

12. E. McMillan, interview with TCF, May 20, 2022.

Epilogue

Tyra Beamon and Marwa Doost, AYPF Powered by the Children's Defense Fund

Introduction

Effective school integration prioritizes student leaders, ensuring that students are equipped with the resources needed to maintain a sense of belonging in school—a necessary component of successful integration efforts. Ariel H. Bierbaum, in "Stories of School Travel: Using a Mobility Justice Framework for Desegregation Research and Policy," outlines the importance of expanding the existing Eurocentric methodological toolbox for decision-making processes to include varying student voices for school integration efforts. Accordingly, this epilogue serves as a student-led response to address school integration, written by Tyra Beamon, a 26-year-old Black American woman, and Marwa Doost, a first-generation Afghan American, who both serve as youth policy consultants with the American Youth Policy Forum, powered by the Children's Defense Fund. Tyra brings to this epilogue her unique experiences, having attended nine schools before attending Tuskegee University, where she earned a BA in English. Tyra is an AmeriCorps alumna and former middle school teacher turned advocate committed to transforming communities through policy advocacy, health and wellness programming, and youth-led decision making. Tyra is currently pursuing an MA in educational transformation with a concentration in advocacy and policy at Georgetown University.

Marwa Doost has a diverse educational background, having attended traditional public schools and charter schools, as well as homeschooled herself throughout her K–12 education before graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, with a BA in honors English and a minor in global poverty and practice. Marwa is a community organizer and educational advocate who has dedicated herself to improving educational equity efforts at the local, federal, and international levels, and she now works at the Oakland Unified School District to ensure career readiness and equal opportunity for all students. Tyra and Marwa have drawn on their student and professional experiences to construct an epilogue focused on two points: (a) the impact of the student experience on students' sense of belonging; and (b) efforts to engage families, students, and key educators at the school level for effective integration. Therefore, ultimately, this

epilogue serves as a call to action for system-wide coalitions and government entities to emphasize youth voices and knowledge in decision-making processes.

Student Experience and Sense of Belonging

A well-rounded student experience should foster a student's sense of belonging and agency. Matthew Gonzales, in "Racially Just School Integration: A 21st Century, Student-Led Strategy," highlights the importance of inclusive classroom environments that encourage all students to challenge each other and build on one another's diverse knowledge. There is an assumption that diversity in school integration efforts automatically creates a better school climate; however, the reality is that there is an ongoing struggle to increase students' sense of belonging within the school climate, even in desegregated school settings. Gonzales elaborates on how "[s]tudents of color, Black girls in particular, face harsher and more persistent disciplinary policies, feel less connected to curricular choices that reinforce and glorify a Eurocentric view of education, and rarely if ever experience the exponential benefits of having teachers who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of their neighborhood or country." Gonzales's essay highlights the reality for many students of color across the nation, including one of the authors of this epilogue, who has been unable to fully participate in academic opportunity due to limited staff diversity, ineffective learning circles, Eurocentric curricula, and lack of equal opportunities.

Marwa's Experience

The traditional public school system with its stagnant school climate undermines student success and belonging among students. As a product of Arizona's K–12 public school system, my student experience consisted of being one of the few Afghan Muslim students in the district, with teachers who struggled to effectively engage with other students of color and me. For example, my questions regarding limited curriculum resulted in teachers proposing "solutions" that placed the burden on me to develop a sense of belonging. Teachers had me partner with the one other student of color in hopes that we would help each other in the back of the classroom, away from the other students. These circumstances imposed an environment of exclusion within school integrative efforts. Additionally, the lack of diverse educators, combined with the limited and exclusionary curriculum, restricted us to a one-sided Eurocentric view of academic subjects that made it difficult to establish a sense of belonging at school. This impacted not only my own learning, but my classmates' global

perspective of the world. The education my classmates and I received failed to acknowledge important international and global contributions such as the impact of Arabic or Turkish root words on English spelling, Native American influences on American cuisine and culture as seen in history books, or the representation of diverse role models that went beyond stereotypical portrayals of our community in literary stories. These 'modern school integration practices … lack a firm commitment to cultural pluralism because of a focus on traditionally defined achievement,' as Stewart, Reichenberger, and Sorrell suggest in "School Integration Approaches Beyond the White Gaze: Centering Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous Youth." These shortcomings create metrics meant to encourage assimilation rather than honoring culture and individual identity. They foster a climate of tension and exclusion for youth of color and others seen as 'different.' Ultimately, then, this experience highlights the detrimental impact on student academics when educators and curricula lack diversity, which consequently acts as a barrier to embracing a sense of belonging at school.

Tyra's Experience

I recall, from my own experiences as a Black girl growing up in inner city Los Angeles schools, having several teachers who looked like me and came from communities I grew up in. Most of my teachers were first-generation college graduates who saw value in returning to the very communities that had raised them and influenced their journeys. Such unique experiences helped me connect to my education in a way that allowed me to see myself in the curriculum and see myself as a valuable member of the school community. Teachers like Mrs. Hope and Ms. DeCree nurtured in me a sense of pride for being a gifted and smart Black girl and advocated that my voice be utilized in decision-making spaces such as the School-Site Council, where I was able to provide a student perspective on matters like student learning, education programs, school improvement planning, and accreditation issues. I was never asked to fragment any parts of my identity or to fit into any model. I was empowered to be me and to lead boldly. School was a safe place where our stories, our voices, and our gifts were protected and respected. It is critical that we acknowledge the value of students seeing themselves reflected in their teachers and curriculum. I believe that such integration efforts can benefit all students and move us toward educational equity. Research even demonstrates,

> Regular exposure to and interactions with individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially during childhood, combat stereotypes, strengthen students' abilities to become comfortable with peers from different backgrounds, reduce unconscious implicit biases inside and outside the classroom, and lead to innovative and greater social cohesion.[1]

Many students' experiences of belonging in school settings differ, yet all students deserve to have educational experiences that affirm their identities and cultural backgrounds. Schools should be spaces that build on the connections between the school and community, and ultimately breed success and motivational outcomes like improved performance and enhanced well-being.

Empowering Multilingual Learners and Fostering Agency in Educational Conversations

Students of color across the nation, specifically multilingual learners and newcomer students,[2] are struggling to acclimate to schools, which hinders their ability to embrace leadership positions in school integration efforts. Jennifer B. Ayscue and Victor Cadilla, in "Integration and Immersion: The Potential of Two-Way Dual Language Programs to Foster Integration," underscore how often these communities are left out of the conversation on school integration. Multilingual learners in particular lack access to grade-relevant social circles and curricula, which isolates them from their peers and classmates. Ayscue and Cadilla describe in greater detail how multilingual learners "not only attend similar schools but also are often isolated in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes," a form of segregation within schools that separates students and is associated with lower academic outcomes and less opportunity and access to rigorous coursework. This linguistically based, exclusionary model, rooted in the stereotype that multilingual learners are deficient, also impacts resettling refugee and newcomer students, who are not represented in the ongoing discussion of how to promote a sense of belonging that fosters agency in school integration efforts.

Multilingual learners and newcomer students hold significant weight in conversations in school integration efforts regarding their reduced sense of belonging and agency. For example, beginning in August 2021, Operation Allies Welcome brought in more than 85,000 Afghan refugees across the United States, with roughly 44% of them children held on U.S. military bases, many of whom were integrated into the public school

system.[3] In an attempt to welcome these students onto school campuses, there has been a nationwide focus on increasing resources for newcomer centers within schools. These newcomer programs are implemented differently across schools and focus primarily on placing newly arrived students into classroom cohorts or groups where students of the same grade level or background are encouraged to stay together for meals, learning opportunities, and extracurricular electives. While such programs may help students acclimate to the American climate, it is important to underline that this approach categorizes the student's home language and background experiences "as an obstacle to overcome" as opposed to an asset that broadens the student and their classmates' perspectives on the global world, according to Ayscue and Cadilla. This deficit-oriented perspective of newcomer and multilingual learners contributes to a negative school climate because students of color begin to feel discouraged from becoming experts in their academics or leaders in local school councils and decision-making spaces. As a result, this mixed class of multilingual learners and newcomer students promotes a misleading perception of school integration and diversity in the overall school climate, when in reality, these students are struggling to fully integrate and develop a sense of belonging for themselves in the broader school community.

Educators have a responsibility to invite students to be co-creators within their classrooms and schools, where students are motivated to make decisions about their learning. An integrated school model in which multilingual learners and newcomers feel they belong should not prioritize pull-out programs, where students are removed from their regular classrooms to receive supplemental education. Instead, each student should be considered as an individual and given preferences regarding whether learning in a smaller setting builds success for them or not.

Tyra's Experience

In my first year as a co-teacher of English Language Arts to a diverse group of eighth graders, I witnessed students adopt deficit mentalities that they are 'different' or 'less than' when they are excluded or isolated as a result of a learning difference. Such practices are harmful and don't promote agency or belonging for our students. An integrated school model where multilanguage learners feel they belong looks like school staff going the extra mile to ensure everything they present to students and their families is translated into their native languages. I found myself staying up later and arriving to work a little earlier to make sure my students who were learning English as a

second language had supplemental materials that would allow them to follow along with their peers during collaborative learning.

To promote educational equity, we must ensure that each student's culture and identity is represented in staff, curricula, and pedagogy, which would acknowledge their needs to be seen and heard, and for every student to thrive in an integrated school environment.

Conclusion: Community Integration and Public Engagement Efforts

For integration efforts to prevail in an education system recovering from centuries of achievement gaps, unequal access, and racism, stakeholders and allies alike must be willing to take collective action. As stated in "Racially Just School Integration: A 21st Century, Student-Led Strategy," "We aren't only integrating schools; we are integrating communities." Integration in both spaces should center as many voices of the community as possible—students, families, and teachers, especially those impacted by segregationist policies and those likely to be left out of conversations. Youth with relevant lived experience are the most important to amplify in decision making regarding integration and equity, because it will be their generation's responsibility to carry out the advocacy to implement long-lasting systemic change. Students are our future leaders and should be engaged as experts and critical voices when planning for and moving toward transformation in our society. To meet the moment, funders, district leaders, and policymakers have a call to invest in the promotion and expansion of youth-led engagement in all efforts to eradicate segregation in America, and definitely in our schools.

Notes

1. Warner, S. R., & Duncan, E. (2019). *A vision and guidance for a diverse and learner-ready teacher workforce*. Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/Vision%20and%20Guidance%20for%20a%20Diverse%20and%20Learner-Ready%20Teacher%20Workforce_FINAL010919.pdf

2. California Department of Education. (2023). *Newcomer students*. https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/newcomerstudnts.asp
    The California Department of Education defines newcomer students as "an umbrella term for foreign-born students who have recently arrived in the United States. Newcomer students may include, but are not limited to, asylees, refugees, unaccompanied youth, undocumented youth, migratory students, and other immigrant children and youth identified by the local educational agencies."

3. Napolitano, J. (2022). Young Afghan refugees in America adjust to new norms—Especially for girls. *The74*. https://www.the74million.org/article/young-afghan-refugees-in-america-adjust-to-new-norms-especially-for-girls/