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Topic 1: Dismantle Racial Isolation in Public School Education

Questions to be answered:

How do you create schools with diverse student bodies? How do you promote within-school integration? How do you ensure high levels of teacher and student performance in the midst of change?

After years of decline following *Brown* and the cases that followed this Supreme Court Decision, segregation in America's school is on the rise. All students in America tend to go to school with a disproportionate number of students of their own race/ethnicity. In addition, students of color tend to go to school with a disproportionate number of low-income students. The following discussion overviews these trends, discusses the factors behind them, and discusses the effects that they have on the quality of education our students receive. It also touches on a critical, but often overlooked, aspect of integration, namely measures beyond demographic balance for creating a truly integrated educational environment

Current realities of segregation

Over the last several decades, the racial demographics of America's schools have undergone some significant changes. First, the student body of our school system is increasingly non-White. A recent study by the Harvard Civil Rights Project found that the enrollment of students of color in the nation's schools is approaching forty percent, almost twice the percentage of students of color in our schools in the 1960's. At the same time, as this report observes, our schools are resegregating rapidly and current levels of school segregation are approaching the levels that existed prior to the implementation of *Brown's* desegregation mandate.¹

Recent statistics indicate that Whites are the most segregated of all public school students. Among students of color, Latinos are the most segregated and Black students also tend to be highly segregated. Asians, on the other hand, are the most integrated students of all major racial/ethnic categories. The Harvard study noted above also found an emergence of a large number of schools that are almost entirely non-White. One-fourth of Black students in the Northeast attend such schools as do one-ninth of Latino students throughout the country.²

These patterns of segregation are found on Long Island. Overall, approximately one-fourth of Long Island's school children are of color and approximately three-fourths are White. Few of the 125 school districts on Long Island, however, reflect these proportions. A 2002 report commissioned by ERASE Racism and produced by the Institute on Race and Poverty found:

Of the 125 Long Island school districts, 76 have 80% or more White students, and 44 are more than 90% White. More than half of Long Island's African American and Hispanic

¹ Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, *Brown at 50: King's Dream or Plessy's Nightmare?* (January 2004) (<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/reseg04/brown50.pdf>)

² Id.

students are concentrated in just thirteen districts, each of which has a student body that is over 60% students of color. In seven of these thirteen districts more than 90% of the students are students of color.³

Overlap of racial and economic segregation

Schools and school districts that are racially segregated also tend to be economically segregated. Specifically, schools and districts that have high percentages of students of color also tend to have high percentages of low-income students. This is true nationally and in Long Island. The Harvard Civil Rights Project has found that schools that are over 90% African American and/or Latino are *fourteen* times more likely than schools that are over 90% White to have a student body that is also predominantly poor. On Long Island, the typical Black child attends a school with a poverty rate two and one-half times higher than that of the typical White child's school. The poverty rate in the typical Hispanic child's school is also more than twice the poverty rate in the typical White child's school. Moreover, the Institute on Race and Poverty found that of the ten Long Island school districts where more than 40% of the students were poor, nine had student bodies that were at least 60% students of color.

Consequences of Racial/Economic School Segregation

Since the mid-Twentieth century, there has been a wealth of research conducted on the negative effects of attending schools that are racially and economically segregated. Some of the more significant findings of this research include:

- A recent report of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is part of the U.S. Department of Education, noted that “the highest poverty schools had higher rates of student absenteeism and a lower percentage of their students with a “very positive” attitude toward academic achievement than schools with the least poverty (i.e., those with 10 percent or fewer eligible).⁴
- Students in racially and economically segregated schools are more likely to fail to graduate from high school than students in integrated and non-poor schools, regardless of whether they are poor themselves.⁵
- Schools that are segregated tend to provide a less effective learning environment for students that attend them.⁶
- Schools with the highest poverty rates also tend to have lower rates of parental involvement in school activities such as open houses.⁷ It is important to note, however,

³ Institute on Race and Poverty, Racism and the Opportunity Divide on Long Island (July 2002) (http://www.eraseracismny.org/downloads/reports/IRP_Full_Report_with_Maps.pdf)

⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, Condition of Education 2003 (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003067.pdf>)

⁵ Gary Orfield, Daniel Ioson, Johanna Wald, and Christopher B. Swanson, *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis* (2004) (http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/call_dropout04.php)

⁶ See, for example, William T. Trent, *Outcomes of School Desegregation: Findings from Longitudinal Research*, 66 *Journal of Negro Education* 255 (1997).

⁷ Center for Education Statistics, Condition of Education 2003 (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003067.pdf>)

that this does not mean that low-income parents tend to care less about the education of their children than other parents. Low-income parents are more likely to face impediments to attending such events such as lack of transportation and the need to work non-traditional hours.

- Segregated school districts tend to have lower tax bases than other districts and thus less ability to generate revenue to meet the costs of education. Moreover, because of these smaller tax bases, low-income districts must tax their residents at higher rates in order to generate levels of revenue comparable to those of other districts.⁸
- Segregated schools are more likely than predominantly White schools to have high pupil/teacher ratios and less likely to offer advanced curricula and to have adequate technological resources such as computers and laboratory equipment.⁹
- All students, whether White or of color, educated in segregated schools are denied the benefits of an integrated educational environment. These include reductions in racial prejudice and stereotyping, and increased ability to function in an increasingly multicultural society and employment market.¹⁰

Causes of Racial/Economic Segregation

A number of factors contribute to the racial and economic segregation of our schools. The primary contributor is racial and economic segregation of our communities. When schools and/or school districts are unable to draw from an integrated pool of students, they cannot create integrated schools. On Long Island, there are a very large number of school districts relative to the size of the student body. Recent data indicates that the average district in Nassau County has only 3,638 and the average district in Suffolk County has only 3,505 students. These geographically small districts replicate the residential segregation of Long Island in its schools.

Federal court decisions subsequent to *Brown* have also limited the potential for desegregating schools within and across district boundaries and allowed for the resegregation discussed earlier. In the early 1970's, the Supreme Court held that inter-district remedies are inappropriate, even when necessary to achieve meaningful school desegregation. Similarly, the Court has held that segregation levels should be assessed in relation to the overall demographics of a district. Thus, where segregation exists at the district level, segregated schools within the district are considered desegregated from a legal perspective. These legal developments, combined with a decline in intentionally segregative practices by school districts, have led to the cessation of court-ordered desegregation nation-wide and have created very limited potential for new desegregation lawsuits under federal law.

Strategies for Creating Integrated Schools

⁸ Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability*, Revised Edition (1997)

⁹ Carol Ascher, *Successful Detracking in Middle and Senior High Schools*, *ERIC Digest* No. 82 (October 1992)

¹⁰ Institute on Race and Poverty, *Student Voices Across the Spectrum: The Educational Integration Initiatives Project* (2000).

The most effective mechanism for desegregating Long Island's schools would be to desegregate Long Island's neighborhoods. Short of this, achieving widespread school desegregation will require redrawing Long Island's school district boundaries in such a way that individual districts encompass White neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color. Given the large number and small size of districts on Long Island this would require district mergers. One possible method for merging districts would be for incorporated areas to incorporate adjacent unincorporated areas. Given that most students of color on Long Island live in unincorporated areas, this would create some desegregative potential. The case for merging districts may be strengthened by the fact that several small districts could be combined without creating a single district that requires students to travel burdensome distances to attend a desegregated school. Merger also has its economic benefits. A 1992 report of the New York State Temporary Commission for Tax Relief on Long Island found that per pupil education costs increase by \$1,000 to \$8,000 in districts with fewer than 5,000 students.¹¹

Other areas that have merged several school districts to create one desegregated district include Charlotte, North Carolina and Louisville, Kentucky where county-wide districts were created. These mergers succeeded in reducing segregation levels in the schools and also led to decreased residential segregation. In Louisville, pro-integrative housing policies also contributed to desegregation.¹²

On a smaller scale, pursuing cross-district desegregation without disturbing district boundaries would allow some students on Long Island to attend desegregated schools. In the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, inter-district magnet schools have been created to allow students from multiple districts to attend school together. These magnets offer enhanced curriculum in an effort to attract students attending schools in districts that are already successful.

Some regions have also created cross-district attendance policies for students that attend segregated schools. For example, the Chapter 220 program in the Milwaukee region allows some students of color that live in attendance zones of the Milwaukee School District that are greater than 30% minority to attend schools in suburban districts. Studies of the program have found that Milwaukee students able to attend suburban schools outperformed Milwaukee students who applied for, but were denied, transfer.¹³

Cross-district strategies such as these may be more easily accomplished than more systemic changes such as district merger. At the same time, by their very nature they are limited in scope

¹¹ New York State Temporary Commission for Tax Relief on Long Island, *Financing Government on Long Island*, p. 1-2 (1992).

¹² Manuel Pastor, Peter Dreier, J. Eugene Grigsby III, and Marta Lopez-Garza, *Growing Together: Linking Regional and Community Development in a Changing Economy* (April 1997) (Summary Report) (paper of the International & Public Affairs Center, Occidental College); Gary Orfield, *Metropolitan School Desegregation: Impacts on Metropolitan Society*, in *In Pursuit of a Dream Deferred: Linking Housing and Education Policy* (Peter Lang Publishing, 2001)(citing the Kentucky Comm'n on Human Rights, *School and Housing Desegregation Are Working Together in Louisville and Jefferson County* (1983)).

¹³ John F. Witte, *The Effectiveness of School Choice in Milwaukee: A Secondary Analysis of Data from the Program's Evaluation* (1996) (University of Wisconsin-Madison).

and effect. Students that are able to participate in these programs will reap benefits, but most students will continue to attend segregated schools.

Creating an Integrative Environment at the School Level

Successful integration requires more than creating a numerical balance of students at the school level. As is discussed below, discriminatory policies in the areas of tracking/ability grouping, special education, and discipline can create segregation within a school even though it is desegregated in the aggregate. In addition to equitable policies in these areas, creating a truly integrated school requires the creation of an environment that is welcoming and accepting of all students. Gordon Allport has suggested that integration in schools cannot be accomplished unless the following key components are included: 1) personal interaction among all students; 2) student involvement in cooperative action to achieve mutual goals, 3) social norms favoring cross-ethnic contact; and 4) equal-status contact among all students.¹⁴ Other studies report the benefits of increased interracial contact, provided students are brought together under conditions of equal status with an emphasis on common goals, rather than individual and intergroup competition.¹⁵ One way to accomplish this is to promote extracurricular activities that encourage equitable interracial contact.

Curriculum is also extremely important. To be integrated, a school must teach multicultural curricula. Such curricula are designed to enable students to function in and value the various cultures that exist in the United States. It requires an assessment of the content of academic programs, and where necessary, amending this content by integrating information about and the perspectives of a variety of cultures.

Issues for consideration:

- What strategies might be pursued in the short- and long-term to create more desegregated learning opportunities on Long Island? What are the potential pitfalls?
- What are the barriers to achieving desegregation on Long Island? What would it take to overcome them and at what cost?
- To what extent do schools on Long Island offer environments that are welcoming and inclusive? If necessary, what can be done to improve this?

For further reading:

Institute on Race and Poverty, *Racism and the Opportunity Divide on Long Island*
(http://www.eraseracismny.org/resources/reports_maps.php)

¹⁴ Gordon W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, 25th anniversary edition (1979).

¹⁵ Stuart W. Cook (1979). Opportunities for future social science contributions to school desegregation. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention symposium, "25 Years After *Brown vs. Board of Education*—Perspectives-Prospects." New York, NY, September 1-5, 1979; Janet W. Schofield, Promoting positive peer relations in desegregated schools, *Educational Policy*, 7(3) (1993).

Harvard Civil Rights Project, *A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools, Are We Losing the Dream?*

(<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/reseg03/AreWeLosingtheDream.pdf>)

Rebecca Gordon, Applied Research Center, *Education & Race: A Journalist's Handbook*
(<http://www.arc.org/downloads/RaceandEducation.pdf>)