

# Stories of School Integration



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# School Integration in Practice: Lessons from Nine Districts

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

At a time when American society is being torn along racial, ethnic, economic, and religious lines, school leaders in a small but growing number of districts are quietly taking steps to make things better. Largely under the radar, school boards and superintendents are making deliberate efforts to bring students of different backgrounds together in order to improve learning for all. According to The Century Foundation's latest inventory, one hundred school districts and charter schools across the country—educating over 4 million students—have decided that separate schooling for rich and poor, and for students of different races, is fundamentally at odds with the American Dream and the national ideal of *e pluribus unum*.<sup>1</sup>

For two decades, The Century Foundation (TCF) has been researching and reporting on socioeconomic school integration programs that promote economic and racial diversity as a way of fostering social mobility and social cohesion. The case for pursuing these policies is powerful: low-income students in mixed-income schools are as much as two years ahead<sup>2</sup> of low-income students in high-poverty schools; and diversity benefits middle-class students as emerging research<sup>3</sup> has shown that being in diverse learning environments can make students smarter. We are, to coin a phrase, stronger together.

But how exactly does a school district go about creating socioeconomically and racially integrated schools? The U.S. Supreme Court's 2007 decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle*<sup>4</sup> struck down racial integration plans in Seattle and Louisville but allowed the use of socioeconomic factors (and the use of race at the geographic rather than individual student level). In 2007, TCF released a profile of twelve districts that detailed some early efforts at socioeconomic school integration.<sup>5</sup> Since then, the number of districts pursuing socioeconomic diversity has more than doubled, as has the sophistication of those plans. So TCF has commissioned a new set of nine district case studies written by Century Foundation fellow Halley Potter, policy associate Kimberly Quick, and three outside authors: Carole Learned-Miller, Suchi Saxena, and Kim Bridges.<sup>6</sup>

The authors examine policies in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Champaign, Illinois; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Eden Prairie, Minnesota; Hartford, Connecticut; Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky; New York, New York; and Stamford, Connecticut. The list includes districts located in red and blue states; those found in northern, southern, and midwestern regions; plans that have been around for decades and those that are brand new; and sites that range from large urban districts with low-income populations in

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/school-integration-practice-lessons-nine-districts/>

MAP 1. ONE HUNDRED SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS PURSUING SOCIOECONOMIC INTEGRATION



excess of 80 percent to smaller, wealthier suburban districts just beginning to experience growing diversity. Despite their considerable variety, some common themes and lessons emerge from the reports on these districts.

## 1. When socioeconomic diversity policies are well implemented, they appear to produce strong academic outcomes for students and better prepare them for living in a diverse society.

Almost all of the districts studied that have had socioeconomic integration plans in place long enough to have an effect are seeing positive student outcomes. For example, in Cambridge, which has had a socioeconomic integration plan in place since 2001, students outperform those in demographically similar districts in Massachusetts on state English, math, and science exams. Moreover, 90.5

percent of black students, 88.7 percent of Hispanic students, and 89.5 percent of low-income students in Cambridge graduated high school in the 2014–15 school year. That compares to a 73 percent black student graduation rate and 82 percent overall graduation rate nationally in the 2013–14 school year, the most recent year for which data are available.

Likewise, in Greater Hartford's inter-district non-selective magnet schools, the black/white and Hispanic/white achievement gaps in reading were about half as large as the comparable statewide gaps. The achievement differences are smaller not because white students do worse, but because all subgroups of students perform better. Of course, high performance might be explained by the fact that only the most motivated students apply to magnets, but careful research comparing magnet school lottery winners and losers has found positive results for student achievement.

In Stamford, too, low-income students perform above

the state average and gaps in graduation rates between disadvantaged and advantaged students have fallen substantially. In Jefferson County, the proportion of students deemed College and Career Ready nearly doubled between 2011 and 2015. And 95 percent of Jefferson County high school juniors reported feeling either “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” to “work and live in diverse settings.”

The major exception to the rule of high performance is Champaign, where achievement gaps remain large, perhaps because of tracking within schools, an issue we discuss below.

## **2. While school integration is often politically challenging, key steps—such as the use of choice and incentives—can smooth the path to community support**

Most of the districts profiled use public school choice and incentives (such as magnet schools), rather than compulsory busing, to achieve integration. Many use a system called “controlled choice,” in which families choose from a variety of special options and districts honor choice with an eye to socioeconomic integration.

Many districts are able to marry choice and integration quite successfully. In Champaign, close to 90 percent of kindergartners receive their first choice school. In Jefferson County (Louisville), the first choice placement rate is also 90 percent. The reliance on choice rather than compulsory busing in Louisville may be one explanation for the dramatic uptick in community support over the years. In the 1970s, 98 percent of suburbanites opposed the busing plan, but by 2011, 89 percent said the school district’s guidelines should “ensure that students learn with students from different races and economic backgrounds,” as Kimberly Quick and Rebecca Damante explain in a separate Century Foundation report on Louisville.<sup>7</sup>

Special magnet offerings can be critical to attracting a broad cross section of students. For example, Hartford is able to draw suburban students into one of the poorest cities in

the country using a system of forty-five magnet schools. The proportion of Hartford students attending integrated schools has increased from 11 percent a decade ago to a projected 46 percent in 2016.

Some districts using magnets such as Cambridge, are seeing rising public school enrollment—a reversal of the white and middle class “flight” phenomenon some have associated with integration efforts. Dallas’s Solar Preparatory School has attracted a diverse group of students to a socioeconomically integrated magnet program, including many pupils who had been using private or charter schools.

In order to ensure that choice plans are equitable, family information centers have been established to ensure that all parents make informed choices. And successful districts also provide free transportation. As Dallas’s Office of Transportation and Innovation Chief Mike Koprowki notes, “Choice without transportation really isn’t choice for many families.”

Instead of using magnet schools and public school choice, some districts, such as Eden Prairie Minnesota, redrew school boundary lines to create greater integration. This led to a political backlash and the resignation of the superintendent there. But even here, students became used to integrated schools and the newly drawn boundary lines remain in effect. An Eden Prairie principal noted, “The nice part is to be able to look back on it and say, ‘See, when the dust settles, everybody is OK.’”

Money can be another important incentive for voluntary integration. In 2015, New York State used federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds to encourage socioeconomic integration as a school turnaround strategy. Several New York City community school districts are working to design controlled choice admissions policies, efforts which might not have continued in the absence of funding.

## **3. Setting clear system-wide goals for integration increases the likelihood of achieving success.**

Not surprisingly, setting clear goals to integrate all schools in a district leads to much broader integration than programs focused on a small subset of schools. Cambridge, Champaign, Jefferson County, and Stamford all have system-wide goals that all schools should be within a range of the district-wide average for disadvantaged student populations and all have been quite successful in achieving integration. In Stamford, for example, eighteen or twenty schools fall within plus or minus 10 percentage points of the district average for socioeconomic diversity. “Having that hard and fast rule was really powerful,” says former Stamford superintendent Joshua Starr.

Some higher-poverty districts, such as Dallas and Chicago, have, by contrast, addressed socioeconomic integration within only a small subset of schools, leaving many students in segregated environments. High-poverty districts might appear to have no choice in the matter, but, as Lesson 4 below suggests, they do have other options.

#### **4. Policies that break down artificial walls between city and suburb can have greater impact than those limited to existing district lines.**

Unlike Chicago and Dallas, two of the jurisdictions profiled—Hartford and Louisville—have broken through urban/suburban walls. Louisville did so by consolidating with suburban Jefferson County schools into a single school system; and Hartford did so through an extensive two-way urban/suburban transfer program.

Earlier Century Foundation research explored the benefits of eight inter-district programs in jurisdictions ranging from metropolitan St. Louis to Boston and Rochester to Minneapolis.<sup>8</sup> The advantages of having a consolidated district is also a key lesson from a forthcoming Century Foundation report from Paul Tractenberg and colleagues on Morris School District in New Jersey. Either approach offers up significant new opportunities for moving beyond separate and unequal schooling.

#### **5. Socioeconomic diversity policies can often lead to racial diversity.**

When the Supreme Court struck down Seattle and Louisville’s racial integration plans in 2007, many feared that racial school diversity would no longer be unattainable. In practice, however, socioeconomic integration programs in many communities have led to vibrant levels of racial diversity. Under Cambridge’s socioeconomic integration plan, for example, 84 percent of Cambridge students attended racially balanced schools in the 2011–12 school year. Likewise, in Chicago, when the district’s ten selective enrollment schools shifted from race to socioeconomic status as a criterion in admission, the schools continued to be racially diverse. In 2013–14, the selective enrollment population was 22 percent white, nearly 30 percent Hispanic, 35 percent African-American and 9 percent Asian. By comparison, in New York City’s selective schools, which do not use socioeconomic status as a factor, student populations in 2013–14 were 5 percent black and 7 percent Latino in a city whose school population overall was 70 percent black and Latino.<sup>9</sup> A Minneapolis socioeconomic integration program that involves suburban Eden Prairie uses income as a screen, but 95 percent of participants are of color. And Dallas’s socioeconomically integrated pilot program has a student population that is 45 percent Hispanic, 25 percent black, 25 percent white, and 5 percent Asian.

#### **6. Districts have grown more sophisticated in defining disadvantage.**

When socioeconomic integration programs first began, most districts adopted eligibility for free and reduced price lunch (185 percent of the poverty line) as an indicator of economic disadvantage because the data are readily available. But that the measure is not ideal. It only looks at family income, not parental education, so the children of temporarily low-income graduate students are counted as disadvantaged. The measure also splits the world into two categories—

those receiving subsidized lunch and those not—which fails to capture the full spectrum of educational disadvantage and advantage running from poor to working class to middle class, and upper class. Finally, subsidized meals data has become less reliable as a measure of disadvantage as more districts take advantage of the ability to grant all students in higher poverty schools free lunch, whether or not individual students meet income guidelines.

In response to these realities, districts have created a number of new, more sophisticated measures of disadvantage. Chicago examines several factors by student Census tract: median family income; adult educational attainment; percent of single-family households; home-ownership percentage; percentage of the population that is non-English speaking; and a school performance variable. These data are combined to create a composite figure for socioeconomic status and then Census tracts are divided into four economic tiers. (Disclosure: I helped Chicago develop this system.) Dallas now uses a version of the Chicago system. Jefferson County, meanwhile, looks at three Census tract measures (income, education, and race), and divides geographic areas into three tiers.

## 7. Districts are more likely to be successful when they ensure integration not only in school buildings but also in school classrooms.

A final lesson from the case studies is that integrating school buildings is only a first step; to promote equity, schools should also seek to reduce economic and racial segregation at the classroom level. Two districts illustrate this point nicely.

On the one hand, Champaign has done a very good job at integrating schools, but there is still a fair amount of stratification within schools. Perhaps as a result, Champaign still struggles with large racial achievement gaps. Stamford, by contrast, has been successful not only in creating socioeconomically integrated schools but also pushing for diversity within classrooms. Superintendent Josh Starr

said “the major issue facing the district was the tracking of students.” After laying the groundwork to create political support, Starr gave a speech on the opening day in 2009, saying “we’re going to eliminate tracking this year,” and “people stood up and applauded.” Stamford eliminated ability grouping in the elementary schools and substantially reduced tracking in the middle and high school grades. Between 2010 and 2014, the proportion of black students taking AP classes nearly tripled and the proportion of Hispanics doing so doubled.

## Conclusion

Socioeconomic integration is important but complicated work. As the number of districts taking on such integration efforts continues to grow, it is critical that best practices be shared and worst practices avoided.

In the past, districts have mostly come to this work on their own and have not had the opportunity to learn from one another. That is beginning to change. Under U.S. Secretary of Education John King Jr., the federal government is seeking to support voluntary efforts to promote integration and is, in coalition with The Century Foundation and the National Coalition for School Diversity, convening districts to engage in peer to peer learning. These case studies below are an important aid in that effort—and to support the larger goal of reviving *Brown v. Board of Education* for a new century.

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## Notes

- 1 Halley Potter, Kimberly Quick, and Elizabeth Davies, “A New Wave of School Integration,” The Century Foundation, February 9, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/a-new-wave-of-school-integration/>.
- 2 Richard D. Kahlenberg and Halley Potter, “Can Racial and Socioeconomic Integration Promote Better Outcomes for Students?” The Century Foundation and Poverty & Race Research Action Council, May 2012, Figure 2, p. 11 [https://tcf.org/assets/downloads/Diverse\\_Charter\\_Schools.pdf](https://tcf.org/assets/downloads/Diverse_Charter_Schools.pdf).
- 3 Amy Stuart Wells, Lauren Fox, and Diana Cordova-Cobo, “How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students,” The Century Foundation, February 9, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>.
- 4 551 U.S. 701 (2007).
- 5 Richard D. Kahlenberg, “Rescuing *Brown v. Board of Education*,” The

Century Foundation, June 27, 2007, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/rescuing-brown-v-board-of-education/>.

<sup>6</sup> From this point thereafter, unless otherwise stated, all data referenced in this paper is derived from the accompanying District Case Study profiles.

<sup>7</sup> Kimberly Quick and Rebecca Damante, "Louisville, Kentucky: A Reflection on School Integration," The Century Foundation, September 15, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/louisville-kentucky-reflection-school-integration/>.

<sup>8</sup> Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Improving on No Child Left Behind: Getting Education Reform Back on Track* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Elite, Separate, Unequal: New York City's Top Public Schools Need Diversity," *New York Times*, June 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/23/opinion/new-york-citys-top-public-schools-need-diversity.html>.

# Cambridge Public Schools: Pioneers of Equitable Choice

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – CAROLE LEARNED-MILLER

The city of Cambridge, Massachusetts is located across the Charles River and just west of Boston. It is a city of more than 110,000 and is home to several select colleges including Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). According to 2015 Census data, 66.6 percent of residents are white, 11.7 percent of residents are black, 15.1 percent are Asian, 4.3 percent are of two or more races, and 7.6 percent are Latino or Hispanic. The median income is \$75,909 and 15 percent of residents are living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> The district had a per pupil expenditure rate in 2014 of \$27,163—more than almost any other district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> During the 2015–2016 school year, there were 6,607 students enrolled in the Cambridge Public Schools.<sup>3</sup> Among those students, 27.7 percent were economically disadvantaged, 21.6 percent were students with disabilities, and 8.1 percent were English language learners.<sup>4</sup> A total of 43 percent of children were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch during the 2014–2015 school year.<sup>5</sup>

For more than thirty years, Cambridge has worked to promote racial and socioeconomic integration in its schools through a system of district-wide public school choice with a focus on equity.

## History of School Integration Efforts in Cambridge

Cambridge is known for its commitment to “controlled choice.” Controlled choice was an approach to school integration largely developed and implemented by student assignment planner and consultant Michael Alves in the 1970s and 1980s after the passage of the Massachusetts’ Racial Imbalance Act. In response to the act, districts such as Boston began to require busing in order to integrate their schools racially. In contrast to approaches based on reassigning students, controlled choice allowed parents to choose schools from across a district while simultaneously giving the district information about the families needed to ensure that schools were balanced racially and/or socioeconomically. Cambridge was the first district in the country to try Alves’s new approach and is still implementing controlled choice today. According to Alves, “Since its adoption in 1981, the Cambridge Controlled Choice Plan has served as a model for many other school districts throughout the United States.”<sup>6</sup>

The Cambridge Public Schools web site on controlled choice states, “The Controlled Choice Policy is designed to create diverse, academically rigorous schools with

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/cambridge-public-schools/>

equal access to educational resources. Controlled Choice began in 1980 when the Cambridge School Committee voted to desegregate the schools by moving away from a neighborhood schools model.” When the percentage of students who receive “paid lunch” and “free and reduced lunch” matches that of the wider district, the school meets the district’s target and is “balanced.”

While the Cambridge plan originally focused on racial integration, the district pivoted to a focus on socioeconomic status in 2001 in anticipation of impending court decisions, says James Maloney, chief operating officer of the Cambridge Public Schools. Cambridge did this work proactively and was never under either a court-mandated or voluntary desegregation plan.<sup>7</sup> Under this revised socioeconomic controlled choice plan, explained Alves, “When the percentage of students enrolled in a school who receive a “free or reduced lunch” is within 10 percentage points of the district-wide percent free and reduced lunch students, the school is deemed to have met the district’s targeted definition for socioeconomic balance and desegregation.”<sup>8</sup> This shift in policy was critical given that, as predicted, the Supreme Court decided in a 2007 case, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, that voluntarily adopted choice-based student assignment policies focusing solely on race violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

## The Current Plan

The School Committee has updated the controlled choice policy over the years, continuing to seek input from Alves. During the most recent review by the Cambridge School Committee, district administrators, and Alves, the district decided to shift to a three-year average for determining the socioeconomic balance of the city, rather than adjusting the percentages every year. According to Linh O, director of registration for the Cambridge Public Schools, “By taking the three-year average (as of October 1 each year)—this year it was years 2013, 2014, 2015—we have a more accurate representation of the kindergarten SES after school begins for each of those years.”

Under the guidance of O, Cambridge families enroll at the Family Resource Center, which oversees student assignment for the district. When determining a school for a child, the Family Resource Center considers the family’s socioeconomic status, their list of three school choices, and issues related to the specific program—such as preparedness for a dual language program, school size, and the balance of girls and boys in the particular grade. Children who do not gain entry to any of their top three choice schools may stay on the waiting list until the next enrollment period begins.

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

Cambridge’s controlled choice program has met many of its goals.

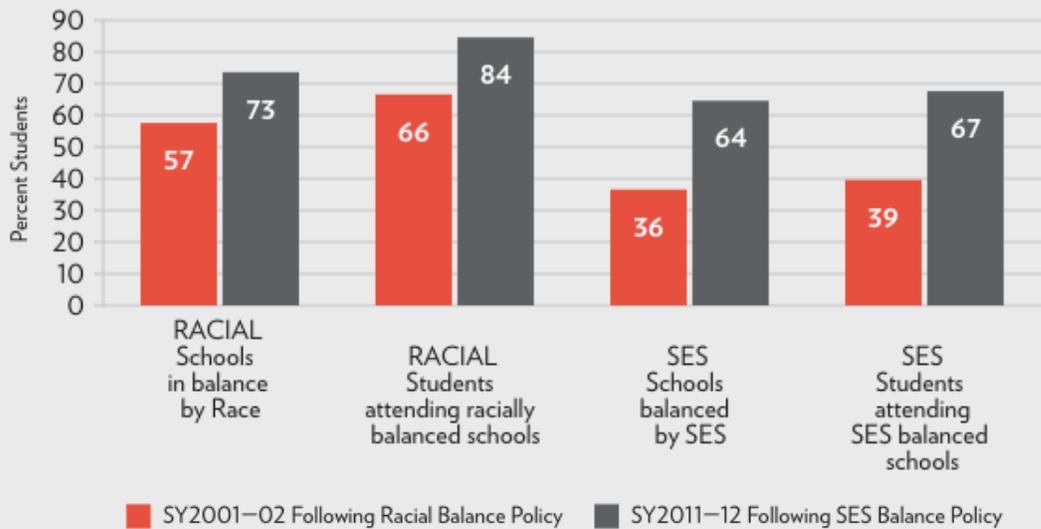
### *More Integrated Schools*

Maloney, who has been chief operating officer of Cambridge Public Schools for twelve years, reports, “While many areas of the country are re-segregating, Cambridge children are less likely than ever before to attend segregated schools.” Figure 1<sup>9</sup> highlights this trend showing 57 percent of the Cambridge Public Schools were balanced by race in the 2001–2002 school year, but 73 percent of schools were balanced by race in the 2011–2012 school year. As a result, 84 percent of Cambridge’s students are attending racially balanced schools as compared with the 66 percent who attended racially balanced schools in 2001–2002. Similarly, the schools are far less segregated socioeconomically with 64 percent of schools being balanced in 2011–2012 as compared to only 36 percent being balanced by SES in 2001–2002. As a result, 67 percent of children were attending socioeconomically balanced schools in 2011–2012, which is up from just 39 percent of students in 2001–2002.<sup>10</sup>

### *Strong Student Achievement*

While accountability measures have changed during the years that the controlled choice plan has been implemented and revised, Cambridge students do well compared to students in similar districts. In an analysis by the Massachusetts Department of Education, Cambridge

FIGURE 1. COMPARISON OF DISTRICT GRADES JK-8 RACIAL AND SES BALANCE  
SY2001-02 to SY2011-12



Source: "Controlled Choice in Cambridge: A Comprehensive Review & Recommendations," Submitted to the Sub-Committee of the Whole (Cambridge School Committee) by Co-chairs Fred Fantini and Alice Turkel, May 2013.

students outperformed students in these demographically similar districts, such as Waltham, Somerville and Medford, on the MCAS exam in English, math and science.<sup>11</sup> In recent years, the state has focused its accountability measures on a school or district's "Student Growth Percentile" (SGP). In English Language Arts (ELA), Cambridge is doing better than the state with a SGP of 54 percent versus the state's SGP of 50 percent. In math, Cambridge and the state have the same SGP of 50 percent.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the state rates Cambridge as a Level 2, which is the second highest rating a district can receive.

Many point to the high school graduation rates of Cambridge students of color as a potential measure of success for controlled choice. While Maloney believes many factors contribute to the high graduation rate, such as the city's wide array of enriching after school activities,

he believes controlled choice could be one important factor.<sup>13</sup> According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the most recent data from 2013-2014 show that across the nation, 82 percent of all students and 73 percent of black students graduate from high school. In Cambridge, according to the Massachusetts Department of Education's most recent data, from the academic year 2014-2015, 91.5 percent of all students, 90.5 percent of black students, 88.7 percent of Hispanic/Latino students, and 89.5 percent of low-income students graduate.

### *Increased Enrollment*

Another potential indicator of the success of school choice in Cambridge is the number of families choosing to send their children to the Cambridge public schools. While competition with private schools is an ongoing issue for the district, enrollment has been increasing for nearly a decade at approximately 2 percent each year, shared Maloney.<sup>14</sup>

## *Choices for Parents, and Diverse Experiences for Children*

Maloney sees other benefits as well including the fact that all children are able to experience and benefit from the city's diversity. Finally, parents are not limited to the school in their neighborhoods. They can choose a school on the other side of the city, if they feel the program best matches their child's needs.<sup>15</sup> O sees many benefits as well. She believes, "Controlled choice promotes more diversity in the classroom; it gives children more exposure of different backgrounds and cultures."<sup>16</sup>

## *More Equitable Access to Quality Schools*

Another important element of Cambridge's approach to controlled choice, according to O, is that children who enter the system mid-year still have access to many of the schools because the district reserves some seats in highly selected schools for low-income children who enroll mid-year. In particular, refugee and homeless children—who are more likely to enter mid-year—have more equitable access to all schools as a result.<sup>17</sup>

## Next Steps

Maloney says one of the challenges has been maintaining the Cambridge schools' unique qualities while simultaneously becoming more accountable to state standards and testing. Prior to the accountability era of the last decade, schools were able to more freely design a creative mission and vision that might attract families from across the city. Another challenge is that, during particular time periods, certain kinds of programs may be more attractive to different parent groups. Currently, the higher socioeconomic parent group is choosing the dual language programs much more than the lower socioeconomic parent group, making it harder to balance those schools.<sup>18</sup>

Another challenge facing Cambridge, according to Maloney, is that ongoing transfers can be destabilizing for the less frequently chosen schools. Families can transfer once per school year. As each summer ends, spaces open up in the more highly selected schools. Parents then pull their children

out of the less frequently chosen schools, making it hard for all educators in the city to plan for the fall.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of future improvements, O would like to see all of the schools become viable options for families. Maintaining a balance is difficult when families are largely choosing only a subset of schools. "We will have some schools that are chosen by more than 15 percent of that applicant pool and some schools where we have only 2 percent choosing that school. In an ideal controlled choice setting, all the schools would be desirable picks for families and the distribution of picks on the lottery would not be so heavily skewed toward only one third of the schools as top choices," explains O.<sup>20</sup>

Cambridge remains a leader in school integration. Administrators' and educators' continued commitment to equity and willingness to reflect and improve their policies over time has allowed the district to evolve and to create increasingly diverse learning environments for students.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Quickfacts: Cambridge City, Massachusetts," United States Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2511000/accessible>.

<sup>2</sup> "School and District Profiles," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/ppx.aspx](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx).

<sup>3</sup> "Information Services – Statistical Reports," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/enroll/default.html?yr=1516>.

<sup>4</sup> "School and District Profiles: Cambridge," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00490000&orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=305&>

<sup>5</sup> "Free and Reduced Price Lunch Enrollment Rates by School District," Kids Count Data Center, 2016, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7417-free-and-reduced-price-lunch-enrollment-rates-by-school-district?loc=23&loc=10#detailed/10/7634-7636,7638-7658,7660-7664,7666-7677,7679-7701,7703-7748,7750,7752-7764,7766-7779,7781-7786,7788,7790-7826,7828->

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6 Michael Alves, phone interview and follow-up email correspondence on August 25, 2016 and September 1, 2016.

7 James Maloney, Cambridge Public Schools, Chief Operating Officer, phone interview on July 29, 2016.

8 Michael Alves, phone interview and follow-up email correspondence on August 25, 2016 and September 1, 2016.

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12 "2015 Massachusetts District Report Card Overview: Cambridge Public School District," NCLB, [http://www.cpsd.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_3042785/File/departments/administration/curriculum\\_instruction/nclb\\_report\\_cards/2014-15/DISTRICT\\_REPORT\\_CARD\\_OVERVIEW.pdf](http://www.cpsd.us/UserFiles/Servers/Server_3042785/File/departments/administration/curriculum_instruction/nclb_report_cards/2014-15/DISTRICT_REPORT_CARD_OVERVIEW.pdf).

13 James Maloney, Cambridge Public Schools, Chief Operating Officer, phone interview on July 29, 2016.

14 James Maloney, Cambridge Public Schools, Chief Operating Officer, phone interview on July 29, 2016.

15 James Maloney, Cambridge Public Schools, Chief Operating Officer, phone interview on July 29, 2016.

16 Linh O, Cambridge Public Schools, Director of Registration, interview via email on August 9, 2016.

17 Linh O, Cambridge Public Schools, Director of Registration, interview via email on August 9, 2016.

18 James Maloney, Cambridge Public Schools, Chief Operating Officer, phone interview on July 29, 2016.

19 James Maloney, Cambridge Public Schools, Chief Operating Officer, phone interview on July 29, 2016.

20 Linh O, Cambridge Public Schools, Director of Registration, interview via email on August 9, 2016.

# Champaign Schools: Fighting the Opportunity Gap

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – HALLEY POTTER

Champaign, Illinois, is a medium-sized city of over 80,000 people located 135 miles south of Chicago, known by many in the state for being home to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. A majority (65 percent) of residents are white, with black residents making up the next largest share of the population (16 percent), followed by Asian residents (11 percent), and Hispanic residents (6 percent). Median family income is below the state average, at roughly \$42,000 compared to \$57,000 statewide.<sup>1</sup>

Champaign Community Unit School District #4 (Champaign Schools) serves roughly 10,000 students in Champaign and neighboring towns of Savoy and Bondville.<sup>2</sup> While Champaign city is majority white, the public school population is more racially diverse. As of fall 2015, 37 percent of students were white, 35 percent black, 11 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian, 8 percent other races and ethnicities. Over half (58 percent) of students are low-income, 8 percent are English language learners, and 14 percent of students have disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

Champaign has implemented a successful plan to desegregate schools, first instituted in response to litigation and now continued voluntarily. However, persistent struggles to address disparities in academic offerings, school

discipline, and perceptions of school climate for students of color have resulted in large academic achievement gaps across both race and socioeconomic status. Perhaps the lesson of Champaign's progress and continued challenges is that desegregating schools is only the beginning of work on equity. In order to improve student outcomes across the district, Champaign must address the opportunity gap that currently prevents all students in the district from having access to the educational resources they need.

## History of School Integration Efforts in Champaign

Champaign is a community with a long history of racial tension, geographically divided between the North End, where most black residents live, and the South End, which is largely white.<sup>4</sup> In 1961, the League of Women Voters found that Champaign had the worst housing segregation in the state of Illinois.<sup>5</sup> And when the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board* came down in 1954, ending legal segregation of schools, Champaign still had all-black and all-white schools, despite Illinois laws prohibiting school segregation. The district bussed white students in the north part of town past their neighborhood schools to an all-white school instead.<sup>6</sup>

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/champaign-schools/>

During the 1960s and 1970s, Champaign began desegregating its schools by creating a magnet school in the North End to attract more white families to a school in that part of town and establishing attendance patterns that sent most black students from the North End to predominantly white schools in the southern part of town.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990s, black community members began raising concerns about the district's enrollment practices and the opportunities afforded black students. In 1996, led by advocate John Lee Johnson, they filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights arguing that the district was placing an undue travel burden on black families and raising concerns about achievement gaps, underrepresentation of black students in high-level courses and programs, and overrepresentation of students in special education.<sup>8</sup>

In response to these complaints and impending litigation, Champaign instituted a choice-based, diversity-conscious enrollment plan in 1997, modeled after Cambridge, Massachusetts' "controlled choice" strategy.<sup>9</sup> The district replaced geographic zone-based enrollment in elementary schools with a system in which families ranked their school choices and were assigned to schools according to an algorithm that looked at families' choices and also ensured racial balance in each of the schools. The district created a planning committee including a racially diverse group of community members to help establish a Parent Information Center (later renamed the Family Information Center) to help families navigate the new choice system and establish plans for outreach.<sup>10</sup>

In 2002, the district entered into a consent decree with the black plaintiffs who had issued the complaint against the district requiring the district to take a number of actions to address racial inequality in the district. The controlled choice assignment process continued. In 2009, in response to the 2007 Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools*, which limited school districts' ability to consider individual students' race in school assignments, Champaign revised its policy to use free and reduced-price lunch eligibility as a socioeconomic indicator replacing race.<sup>11</sup>

That same year, the district and plaintiffs signed a settlement ending the consent decree.<sup>12</sup> As part of the settlement, the district agreed to take a number of actions to continue work addressing racial inequity, including establishing an Education Equity Excellence Committee and revising the district's special education policy.<sup>13</sup>

After the expiration of the consent decree, the district decided to continue their choice-based equitable enrollment system as part of a new voluntary integration plan.<sup>14</sup> In 2011, the district won a \$5 million grant from the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program to support new programming designed to diversify enrollment and improve student achievement in three of the district's elementary schools.<sup>15</sup>

## The Current Plan

Enrollment in Champaign's elementary schools continues to operate through "controlled choice." Families rank their school choices and fill out an application indicating whether or not their child is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The student assignment system ensures that each school ends up with a relatively even balance of low-income students—such that each school falls within 15 percentage points of the district average for enrollment of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch—while also giving a preference to siblings and students that live within a 1.5-mile radius of the school.<sup>16</sup> The district's Family Information Center conducts extensive outreach to families to explain the process and walk them through their school options, holding community forums and open houses throughout the year, and scheduling both daytime and evening opportunities for families to visit schools.<sup>17</sup> Typically, close to 90 percent of incoming kindergarten families receive their first choice school.<sup>18</sup>

District leaders also meet with local real estate agents once a year to explain the enrollment process and ensure that agents are equipped to represent the process accurately to prospective homebuyers.<sup>19</sup> Champaign provides transportation for any student who does not live walking distance from their school, which in a choice-based enrollment system can mean operating a number of

different buses and routes. One of the ways that Champaign has helped to control transportation costs is by having half of its elementary schools operate on an early schedule and half on a late schedule. These staggered start and end times allow one fleet of busses to run two routes each morning and afternoon.<sup>20</sup>

At the middle school level, Champaign maintains integrated schools by developing a feeder pattern of clusters of elementary schools that flow into middle schools, with the diversity established through elementary school admissions creating a foundation for diverse middle schools. The district's two high schools use geographic attendance zones that are redrawn periodically to ensure socioeconomic and racial diversity.<sup>21</sup>

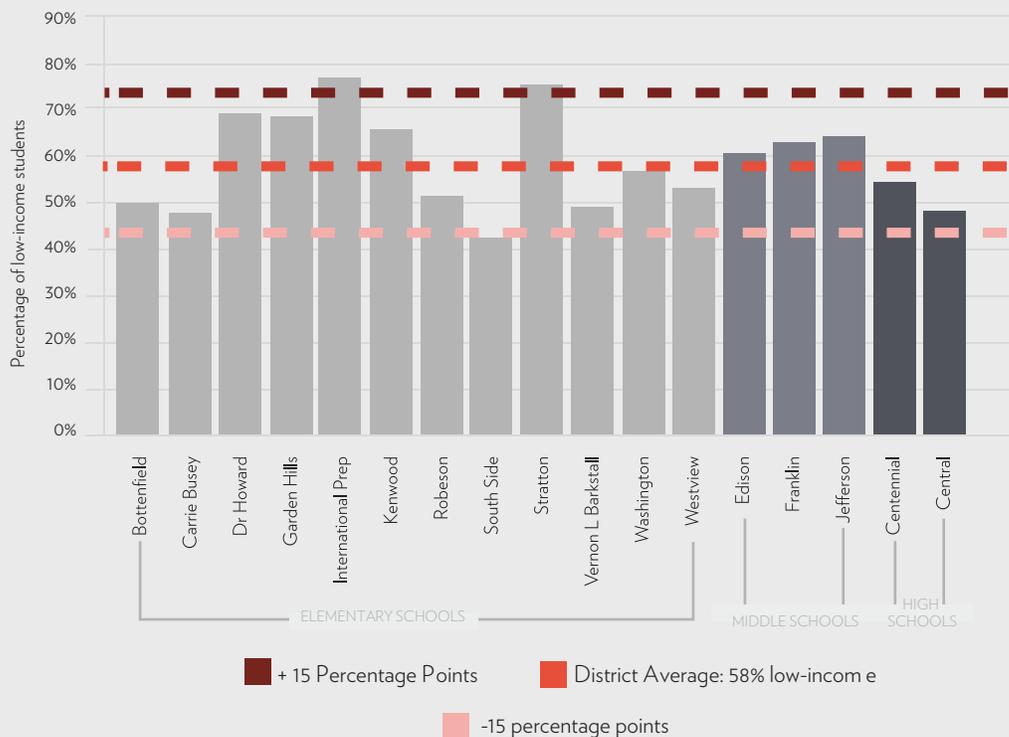
## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

Champaign's efforts to continue work on school integration even after the end of their consent decree have resulted in relatively integrated schools across the district. However, Champaign has struggled to increase integration within schools by boosting diversity in high-level programs and coursework, and achievement gaps in the district remain high.

### School Diversity

Most of Champaign's schools meet the district's goal of falling within 15 percentage points of the district average

FIGURE 1. ENROLLMENT BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS IN CHAMPAIGN SCHOOLS



Note: Low-income students are defined as those who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, who live in substitute care, or whose families receive public aid.

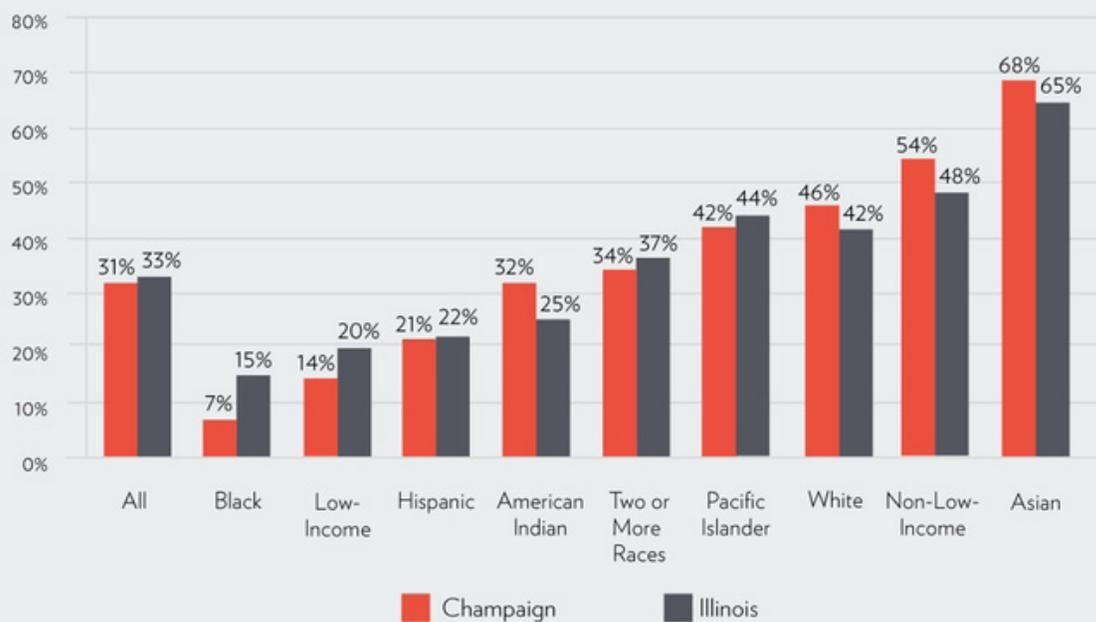
Source: Illinois Report Card, 2014-2015 data, <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

for enrollment of low-income students (see Figure 1). According to Susan Zola, Assistant Superintendent for Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction, the biggest challenge to maintaining socioeconomic balance among elementary schools is continually working to improve schools that fewer families rank as a top choice. The district's federal magnet funding has helped to create new programming, boost student achievement, and increase the number of families choosing some of these schools, but imbalances remain. In some of the under-chosen schools, families may leave mid-year if they are offered a seat at another school, while students who move into the district after the initial registration period end up enrolling in the under-chosen schools because they have seats available. Because the families leaving when they get off a waitlist tend to be middle-class, and families moving into the district after

registration tend to be low-income, this can push some of the schools outside the 15 percentage-point window above or below the district average.<sup>22</sup> Cambridge Public Schools in Massachusetts addresses this issue by reserving seats in some of the district's most popular schools specifically for low-income students who enter the district mid-year, but Champaign does not currently have a similar policy.<sup>23</sup>

Within Champaign's schools, however, there are sharp divides in the demographics of students participating in different academic level programs. At the elementary school level, only 3 percent of black students, 3 percent of Hispanic students, and 2 percent of low-income students are enrolled in gifted programs, compared to 8 percent of white students and 37 percent of Asian students.<sup>24</sup> Across the district's middle schools, only 39 percent of black students, 52 percent

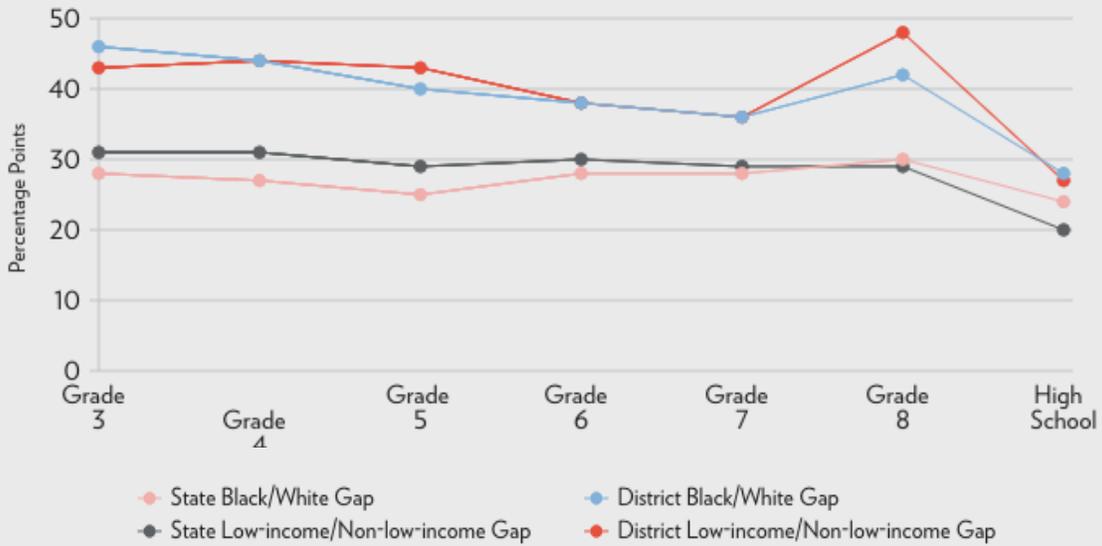
FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS PASSING THE 2015 PARCC ASSESSMENT, CHAMPAIGN SCHOOLS VS. ILLINOIS



Note: Passing is defined as scoring in level 4 ("met expectations") or above. Results combine passing rates for reading and math tests.

Source: 2015 PARCC assessment data, Illinois Report Card 2014-2015, <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

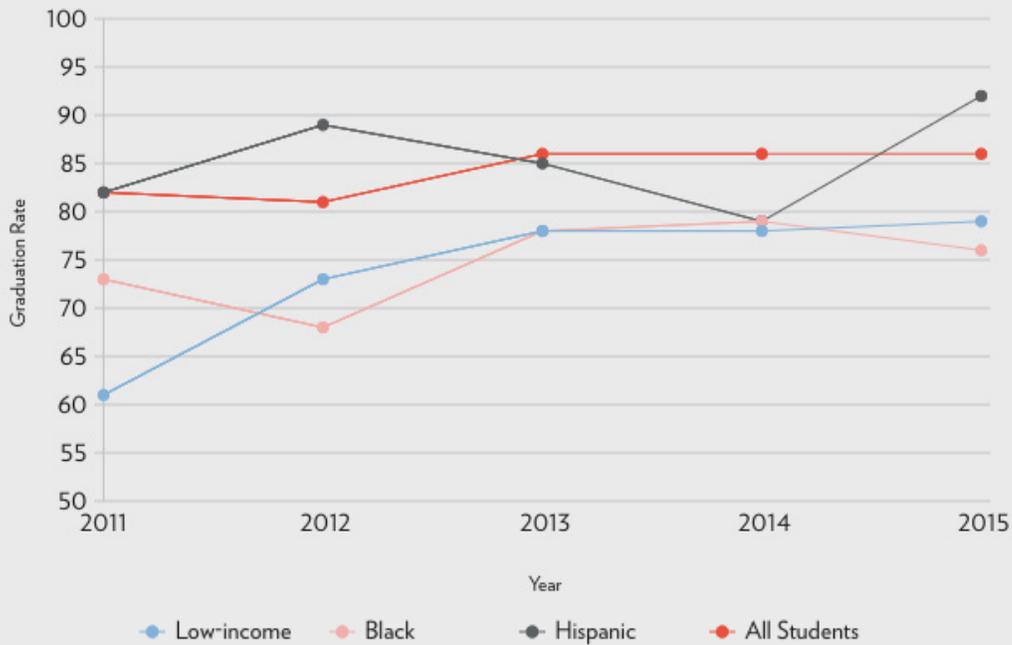
FIGURE 3. ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN STATE TEST SCORES, CHAMPAIGN SCHOOLS VS. ILLINOIS



Note: Achievement gap is calculated as the difference in the percentage of students in the two demographic subgroups with scores in level 4 (“met expectations”) or above on the PARCC assessment, combining results for reading and math tests.

Source: 2015 PARCC assessment data, Illinois Report Card 2014-2015, <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

FIGURE 4. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES FOR BLACK, HISPANIC, AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS IN CHAMPAIGN SCHOOLS



Source: Education, Equity, Excellence Committee, “Data Presentation,” Champaign Unit School District #4, August 25, 2016, emailed to Halley Potter by Susan Zola, August 29, 2016, p. 29.

of Hispanic students, and 43 percent of low-income students are enrolled in honors classes, compared to 74 percent of their white peers and 89 percent of their Asian peers.<sup>25</sup> And in high schools, while 27 percent of white students and 40 percent of Asian students take AP courses, only 5 percent of black students, 9 percent of Hispanic students, and 7 percent of low-income students do.<sup>26</sup>

### *Academic Achievement*

White, Asian, and non-low-income students in Champaign all perform above the state average on standardized tests; however, low-income students and black students in Champaign perform significantly below the state average, while Hispanic and Pacific Islander students also perform slightly below state average (see Figure 2). As a result, Champaign has large achievement gaps based on race and socioeconomic status. In 2015, across all tested grades, the achievement gaps between low-income students and non-low-income students, as well as between white and black students, were greater than the state average. However, these gaps do generally narrow somewhat and become closer to the state average in later grades (see Figure 3). While these achievement gaps remain a great concern, the district has made some progress in recent years with graduation rates. Since 2011, Champaign has seen increased graduation rates for low-income, black, and Hispanic students (see Figure 4).

### **Next Steps**

Reducing academic achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color are central concerns for Champaign, and the district has instituted some new strategies to address this persistent problem. The district recently decided to build specific goals for academic growth of black students and special education students into principal evaluations. They are also working with outside experts to develop staff training around culturally responsive work and developing a positive growth mindset. “When you look at the needs of African-American students, you have to look at the adults who are working with them, and make sure they have a mindset that these students can be successful,

that they have the skills within their professional craft,” Zola explained.<sup>27</sup>

The district has also begun work incorporating elements of trauma-informed care in their schools, working with administrators, teachers, social workers, and psychologists to target the needs of students who have suffered various forms of trauma.<sup>28</sup> Ryan Cowell, principal of Booker T. Washington STEM Academy, one of the elementary schools that received grant funding in recent years, described this as a central challenge and goal moving forward: “We... have a lot of students with incredible needs, including many who have experienced various forms of trauma that impact them tremendously. We are working hard to build our expertise in creating a therapeutic environment to best support all of our students.”<sup>29</sup>

District administrators are also taking a hard look at suspension data for the district. While only 35 percent of Champaign’s students are black, 76 percent of suspensions are assigned to black students.<sup>30</sup> Champaign has instituted new programs to provide additional supports for students with repeat suspensions, including the Lead4Life Identity Project, which guides middle and high school students through projects tied to personal growth, and Operation Hope, Jr., an alternative summer school program for middle school students that includes helping students find “an advocate” in the district—a teacher or administrator who can stand up for them.<sup>31</sup>

One of the areas which the district has not yet addressed is teacher and staff diversity. Although concern about the lack of black teachers was raised by the black community in Champaign already in the 1990s, the district has made little progress in the past decade in diversifying its teaching staff.<sup>32</sup> From 2006 to 2015, the percentage of white teachers in the district has stayed constant at 84 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage of black teachers has fallen from 11 percent to 8 percent. (The percentage of Hispanic and Asian teachers grew slightly.)<sup>33</sup> Increasing the diversity of the teaching force in Champaign—and working with teachers of all races to address implicit bias—could help more students of color

in the district find teachers who provide them with strong academic and social support.

Another cause for concern is that the black and white communities in Champaign also report quite different perceptions of school climate. School climate surveys conducted in 2000 and 2009 indicate that black educators, students, and parents consistently had more negative perceptions of school climate than their white peers, and that their perceptions of school climate did not change much over that period of time.<sup>34</sup>

While Champaign's commitment to continuing school integration has created relatively diverse schools in the district, chronic differences in the opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for students of different backgrounds have not been addressed. In addition to the work that it is already pursuing related to school discipline, growth mindset, and trauma-informed care, Champaign will likely need to focus on these issues of staff diversity and school climate in order to provide more equitable outcomes for students of color and low-income students in the district.

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# Chicago Public Schools: Ensuring Diversity in Selective Enrollment and Magnet Schools

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – KIMBERLY QUICK

Affectionately known as “The Second City,” Chicago remains a popular center for commerce, arts, and law. According to U.S. Census data, the diverse city is home to over 2.7 million people, about 22.7 percent of whom live at or under the federal poverty line. Approximately a quarter of the city’s residents are under the age of eighteen. Racially, about 32 percent of the city’s population is white, 33 percent is black, 29 percent is Hispanic, and 5.5 percent identifies as Asian.<sup>1</sup>

The city’s public school system, however, is decidedly less diverse and less affluent than the city that hosts it. As of the current academic year, enrollment in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is at 392,285 students. Of those, 80.74 percent are eligible for federal meal programs. Less than 10 percent of enrolled CPS students are white, while 39 percent are black and 46 percent are Hispanic. Despite the resources of the city, Chicago Public Schools is a high-poverty, racially isolated district, with around 17 percent English language learners.<sup>2</sup>

In order to combat racial and socioeconomic segregation within the district, and to encourage greater diversity and opportunity for the district’s most competitive and popular programs, CPS designed an innovative system of

admissions for its magnet and selective enrollment schools. This system, modified from an earlier consent decree with the Justice Department, uses nuanced measures of privilege and disadvantage in order to ensure that the talents and potential of marginalized students will not be overlooked in a competitive admissions process. It also helps ensure that the most popular and challenging programs provide diverse and inclusive learning environments, rather than act as environments where the already advantaged might isolate themselves.

## A History of School Integration Efforts in Chicago

By 1960, neighborhood and geographic segregation in the city became undeniable. African Americans comprised around one quarter of Chicago’s population, many of whom lived in the South and West sides of the city, in densely populated, low-income areas. To address the overcrowding in black schools, then-Superintendent Bill Willis used portable buildings, commonly referred to as “Willis Wagons,” to serve as additional classroom space rather than enrolling black students in nearby white schools.<sup>3</sup> Upon his resignation six years later, new Superintendent James Redmond faced fierce opposition when he attempted to comply with laws

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/chicago-public-schools/>

that compelled school integration.<sup>4</sup> Between 1970 and 1980, the white population of Chicago Public Schools fell by 60 percent, as many white families of means fled into the suburbs or enrolled their children in private schools to avoid integration. During the following decade, the white population would fall another 50 percent.<sup>5</sup>

By the spring of 1979, the federal government accused the city of supporting segregation in its schools, and announced its intention to file suit if there was no timely remedy. In 1980, CPS and the federal government entered into a Consent Decree with the United States Department of Justice, with four basic objectives: (1) desegregate schools, (2) provide compensatory programming for any schools remaining segregated, (3) maximize the student populations that will experience integration, and (4) do not arbitrarily impose the burdens of desegregation on any racial or ethnic group. Admissions to Chicago’s magnet and selective enrollment schools likewise became governed by this agreement.<sup>6</sup>

In 2001, when the United States and CPS revisited the plan, the court determined that CPS had not yet reached full compliance in several areas, including magnet schools and selective enrollment schools. In 2004, the resulting Modified Consent Decree acknowledged the demographic challenges of creating a fully integrated district, but compelled CPS to “use a variety of strategies to assign students to schools.” The resulting race conscious plan set forth specific goals for the racial composition of every district school, classifying students as either “white” or “minority.” The plan defined an integrated school as have no fewer than 15 percent but no greater than 35 percent white students. The consent decree also did not make any racial or ethnic distinctions within the minority category—black, Hispanic, Asian, and multiracial students were all grouped together to determine minority enrollment.<sup>7</sup> While Chicago struggled to develop an adequate plan for meeting the racial integration goals for most schools, enrollment in magnet and selective schools was one area in which the district was able to create more racially integrated schools through specific consideration of race in admissions.

In September 2009, a federal judge scrapped the desegregation agreement that had been in place for nearly thirty years, worrying advocates for school integration and diversity. However, CPS hinted at its dedication prior to the lifting of court supervision when it announced that it was considering the use of socioeconomic status (SES) as an admissions factor in magnet and selective enrollment schools.<sup>8</sup> The district followed through on its word. On December 16, 2009, Chicago Public Schools’ Board of Education adopted a one-year policy which introduced a new diversity model for magnet and selective enrollment schools based primarily on socioeconomic status. Less than one year later, the board adopted a modified policy that governed applications for the 2011–2012 school year enrollments. Both times, the policies were subject to public comments and review by a Blue Ribbon Commission appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.<sup>9</sup>

## The Current Plan

The new policy regarding admissions to CPS magnet and selective enrollment programs has a wide-ranging set of objectives. These objectives include: (1) maintaining, to the extent permitted by law, the diversity achieved by CPS prior to the termination of the consent decree, (2) promoting socioeconomic diversity within schools by eliminating, preventing, and reducing economic isolation as measured by a variety of means, (3) providing a unique or specialized curriculum or approach, and (4) improving achievement for all students participating in a magnet or selective enrollment school or program.<sup>10</sup>

Fundamentally, the consideration of socioeconomic factors in selection process is a critical component of maintaining a reasonable level of diversity in Chicago’s most competitive schools. CPS uses several SES factors that relate to the census tract in which an applicant resides at the time of application. These factors include: (1) median family income, (2) adult educational attainment, (3) the percentage of single-family households, (4) home-ownership percentage, (5) percentage of population that speaks a language other

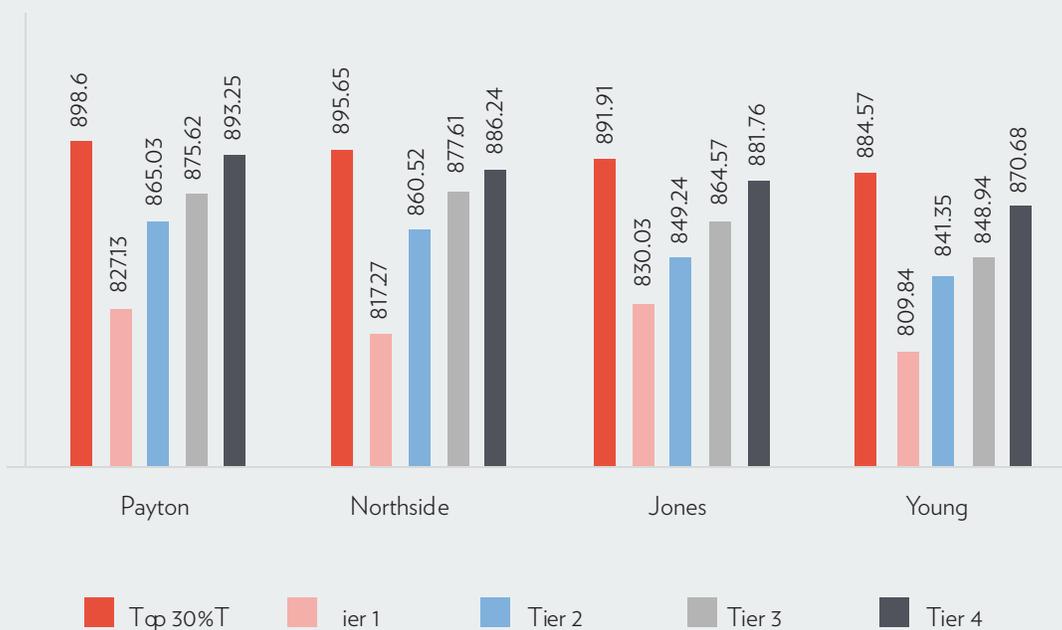
than English, and (6) a school performance variable. After a composite SES score is determined for each tract, CPS will designate an SES tier (one through four) for each census tract in the city.<sup>11</sup>

The specifics of the admissions policies differ according to the type of limited enrollment school. If a student wishes to attend a CPS magnet school, they will generally be admitted through a controlled lottery-like system. While the district uses non-testing admissions procedures for its magnet schools, a threshold level of previous academic achievement is generally required for eligibility for many high school programs. At both levels, applicants who are siblings of currently enrolled students will be offered seats to the extent that space remains; if there are more siblings than slots, then a lottery will be conducted as necessary. But after placing siblings, SES factors begin the play a role. Some

schools will hold a proximity lottery, which will allocate an additional 40 percent of the seats to students who live close to the school, but they are typically only permitted to do so if the surrounding neighborhoods are themselves racially and economically varied. When there is no proximity lottery, the remaining seats will be allocated to the four-tiered citywide SES lottery process. Students will be ranked within their tier and seats will be divided equally among the four tiers.<sup>12</sup>

A student who wishes to apply to a selective enrollment school will endure a related, but more rigorous process. Selective Enrollment schools and programs include Regional Gifted Centers, Classical Schools, Academic Centers, International Gifted Programs, and Selective Enrollment High Schools and High School IB Programs. All applicants have two opportunities to be chosen for enrollment in one of these programs—the first solely based off of composite score

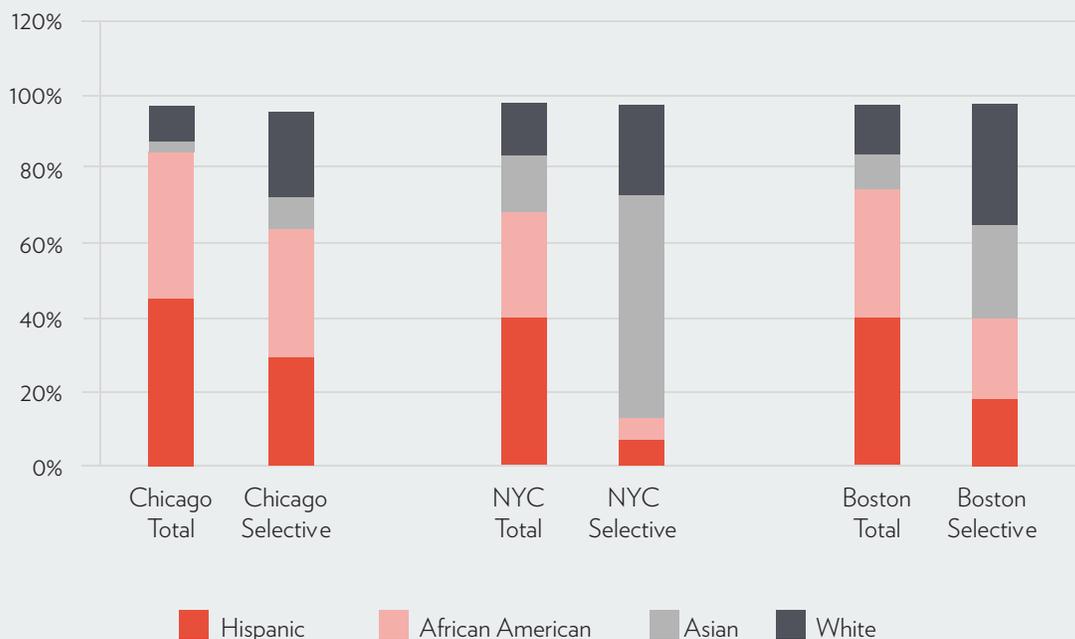
FIGURE 1. COMPOSITE ADMISSIONS SCORES INTO MOST SELECTIVE CPS HIGH SCHOOLS, BY SES TIER



Note: Composite Scores are out of 900 points total, constituting up to 300 points for entrance exam performance, 300 points for 7th grade final grades, and 300 points for 7th grade MAP performance.

Source: Chicago Public Schools, Office of Access and Enrollment, [http://cps.edu/AccessAndEnrollment/Documents/SE\\_Cutoff\\_Scores.pdf](http://cps.edu/AccessAndEnrollment/Documents/SE_Cutoff_Scores.pdf).

FIGURE 2. RACIAL ENROLLMENT OF LARGE URBAN DISTRICTS VS. RACIAL ENROLLMENT AT SELECTIVE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS



Note: Bars might not add to 100 percent due to rounding and small percentages of students who choose not to disclose race.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics Data, Public Schools and District Data, found at <http://nces.ed.gov/datatools/>.

results from testing or other traditional academic criteria, and the second through achieving a high ranking within their assigned SES tier based on those same academic measures. A total of 30 percent of available seats are filled solely using testing/academic criteria from a city-wide pool. The remaining available seats—70 percent—shall be filled in rank order from the lists that rank applicants within each of the four SES tiers, with an even number of students matriculating from each tier. In practice, this means that highly qualified students from more marginalized backgrounds will not be required to earn the same score on standardized tests as their peers in more affluent socioeconomic environments.<sup>13</sup>

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

Chicago’s selective enrollment public schools are far more diverse than comparable programs in other large urban

areas, which too often shut out capable black, Hispanic, and low-income students that comprise the overwhelming majority of their traditional student population.

### *Maintaining Racial Diversity in Schools and Programs*

Across Chicago’s ten selective enrollment public high schools, enrollment demographics continue to meet the racial diversity standards outlined in the original consent decree long after it no longer governs admissions protocol. In the 2013–2014 academic year, about 22 percent of students attending a CPS selective enrollment high school were white; nearly 30 percent were Hispanic, 35 percent black, and almost 9 percent Asian.<sup>14</sup> In the comparable cities with “exam schools” of New York and Boston, white and Asian students were overrepresented much more dramatically. For example, although over 40 percent of schoolchildren in New York City identify as Hispanic, that population represents

only 7.2 percent of enrollment in their public selective high schools; in Boston, selective school enrollment numbers also reveal significant declines in black and Hispanic enrollment and simultaneous overrepresentation of white and Asian students.<sup>15</sup>

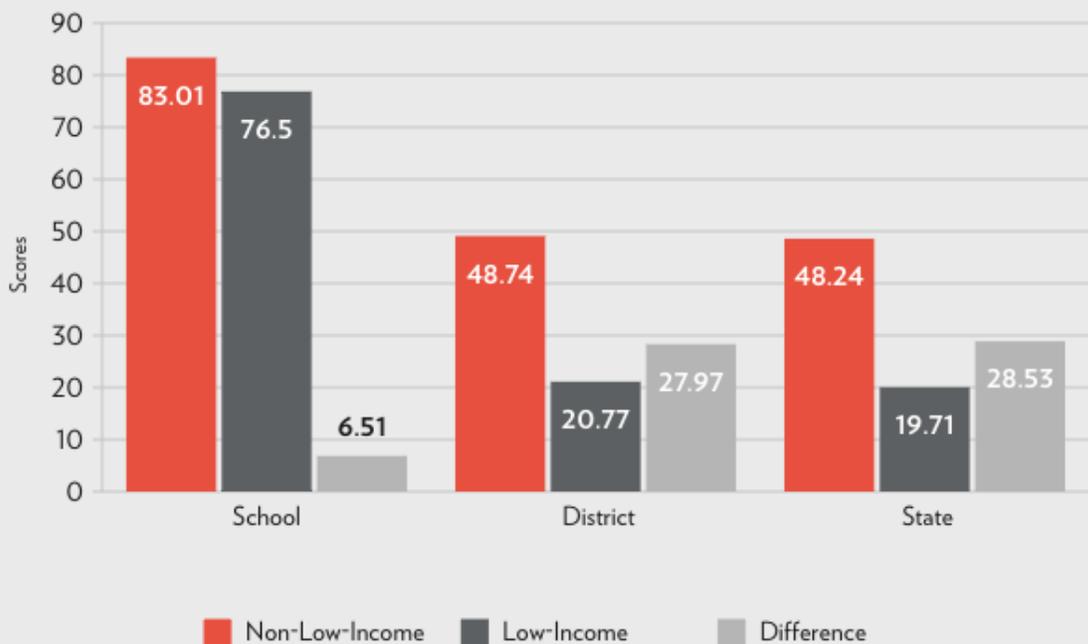
Chicago’s success in maintaining relatively racially balanced schools—despite the removal of race as an explicit selection factor in 2009—is due in large part to the particular measures of socioeconomic diversity used in the admissions plan. The census tract data that compose the SES tiers used by the district contain indicators of disadvantage that are highly racialized, including homeownership rates, use of languages other than English inside of the home, and percentages of single-parent households. These indicators offer a more

complete picture of an applicant than do income-only indicators, such as free and reduced-price lunch eligibility.

### *Academic Success of Low-Income Students in the Selective School Environment*

Under the current admissions system, low-income students who have the opportunity to attend very selective schools have continued to succeed within them. While a narrow achievement gap persists according to state administered test results, that gap is decidedly smaller than both the district-wide and state-wide economic achievement gaps. This same pattern applies to the black-white and Hispanic-white racial achievement gaps. Students admitted out of selection tiers of greater disadvantage not only perform brilliantly on state assessments—doing much better than the

FIGURE 3. INCOME ACHIEVEMENT GAP AT JONES COLLEGE PREP V. DISTRICT AND STATE



Note: Comparison Scores based on percentage of students deemed ready for the next level according to the state-wide PARCC assessment in 2015.

Source: “Illinois Report Card,” Academic Progress. Jones College Prep High School. Excel spreadsheet with specific school, district, and state sub-group data found at <https://illinoisreportcard.com/School.aspx?source=Trends&source2=AchievementGap&Schoolid=150162990250533>.

CPS district average of their more affluent peers—but keep up with students in their schools who are not classified as low-income.<sup>16</sup>

These students also graduate in four years at extremely high rates, indicating that low-income students are fully capable of excelling within these challenging curriculums. Chicago’s selective public schools continue to be the best in the district, and retain their popularity among families in Chicago.

## Next Steps

Chicago’s explicit commitment to socioeconomic and racial diversity within its most competitive schools is unique and commendable. We can observe its effectiveness through the academic successes of its students, the continued popularity of the selective enrollment schools, and the sustained racial diversity of the program as a whole. Moving forward, CPS must address two remaining issues. First, the district ought to explore ways to address the less than ideal racial diversity of certain individual selective schools—namely the most competitive high schools. Secondly, the district should further evaluate ways to attract even higher enrollment of higher-poverty youth into their selective schools.

### *Redistributing Racial Diversity*

While the total minority enrollment across all selective CPS schools appears balanced and promising, minority enrollment in the most selective of those schools remains disproportionately low. Walter Payton, the most selective and most coveted school in the district, is also the least racially representative school. There, white students make up 42.1 percent of the school, black students 17.8 percent, and Hispanic students, 24 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Under the current admissions system, a student can rank several schools on a single application but will only ever receive one offer—presumably the highest ranked school for which their composite scores or tier placement qualifies them. Minimally, CPS needs to determine the numbers of high achieving, minority and low-SES applicants who

rank the most selective schools most highly on their own applications, and employ significant outreach to attempt to increase those numbers.

### *Increasing Individual-Level Socioeconomic Diversity*

The use of census tract data is a nuanced, appropriate, and effective way to reasonably estimate the relative socioeconomic status of an individual applicant, but—like nearly any measure—remains imperfect. As a result, the percentages of low-income students—even when employing the blunt measure of free and reduced-price lunch eligibility—leaves something to be desired. Despite the tier system, meals program eligibility rates at many of the schools do not come close to approaching the high district rate. For example, only 31 percent of students at Walter Payton qualified for the program in 2013–2014; Young Magnet High School did only slightly better at 40.51 percent, and Jones College Prep came in at under 48 percent.<sup>18</sup>

This is possibly because the admissions process, even with the control of the tier system, still attracts the most affluent and privileged families from each census tract. As not every person who lives within a particular neighborhood will fit each of the generalizable characteristics of that neighborhood, many students arriving from tiers that represent lower socioeconomic positions might not actually occupy that status themselves. Officials would do well to rigorously seek to identify talented low-income youth in earlier grade levels and provide them with information and encourage their eventual application to selective schools. The school system also needs to diligently monitor neighborhoods as they change in economics and demographics. As gentrification rapidly increases in cities across America, cities depending on census tract or neighborhood characteristics as primary determinants of SES cannot rely on even slightly old data and expect to have an accurate portrait of the status of a place.

A more substantial intervention might be to either reduce or eliminate the number of students who gain admission

to selective enrollment schools based solely on composite scores, outside of the tier system. While 30 percent of seats are currently allocated to the highest scores, significantly cutting back on that population, which tends to come from more privileged backgrounds, would make more seats available for students of all tiers, thus better balancing schools by socioeconomic status.

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## Notes

1 "QuickFacts: Chicago City, Illinois," United States Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/map/1PE120213/1714000/accessible#footnotes>.

2 "CPS Stats and Facts," Chicago Public Schools Office of Accountability, September 2016, [http://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats\\_and\\_facts.aspx](http://cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats_and_facts.aspx).

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18 National Center for Education Statistics, "Common Core of Data: Chicago," [http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district\\_detail.asp?ID2=1709930](http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?ID2=1709930).

# Dallas Independent School District: Integration as Innovation

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – CAROLE LEARNED-MILLER

Dallas is a large metropolitan area in northern Texas; according to the 2015 Census,<sup>1</sup> it is the ninth most populous city in the country with more than 1,300,000 residents. Dallas is also a diverse city socioeconomically. While the median household income is \$43,359,<sup>2</sup> there is a vast range across Dallas neighborhoods. In the M Street neighborhood of north Dallas, the median income is over \$93,000, while in parts of south Dallas, it is less than \$15,000.<sup>3</sup> This socioeconomic diversity is not present in the schools, however, as 89.6 percent of public school students in Dallas are economically disadvantaged using the federal poverty guidelines based on free and reduced-price lunch eligibility, according to the DISD Office of Institutional Research.<sup>4</sup> In terms of race, 22.6 percent of students are black/African American, 0.3 percent are American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.4 percent are Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 70.4 percent are Hispanic, 4.7 percent are white, and 0.5 percent represent multiple groups.<sup>5</sup>

Given the rich diversity of the city, the Dallas, Texas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) is taking its own unique approach to school integration by designing an innovative school choice pilot. This new program consists of a small number of new or transformed schools designed to enroll students from different backgrounds and attract more middle-class families back to the district.

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/dallas-independent-school-district/>

## History of School Integration Efforts in Dallas

Dallas began the work of desegregation in 1971 when a parent, Sam Tasby, sued and won a district court case, *Tasby vs. Estes*, against the Dallas ISD. Tasby's class action lawsuit claimed that the city's schools were segregated and that the schools children of color attended did not receive equitable funding and resources. As a result, a federal desegregation order was placed on the schools. Under the court order, students were bussed around the city to ensure equal access to a quality education. However, when the district was deemed unitary in 2003, students again began to attend their neighborhood schools.<sup>6</sup> As Dallas's housing has long been segregated by race and socioeconomic level, and given that the school attendance boundaries are once again based on zip code, the majority of Dallas children now attend segregated schools.<sup>7</sup>

## The Current Plan

In the past couple of years, Dallas has devoted new energy to addressing the problem of segregation through its work on public school choice. In 2014, Dallas ISD developed a new incubator called the Office of Transformation and

Innovation (OTI), which focuses on, among other pilot projects, expanding choice options in the district. While school integration is not explicitly part of the office's charge, Mike Koprowski, the district's chief of transformation and innovation, sees diversity as essential to achieving their goal of boosting achievement through innovative programs. While Koprowski began his career in the Air Force, he later earned a master's degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and decided his calling was, in his words, "working on education because it is the civil rights issue of our time."<sup>8</sup> Koprowski was concerned by the re-segregation of Dallas schools and made school integration a priority for the Office of Transformation and Innovation.

Koprowski started by surveying the community to determine what types of schools parents would be eager to choose. They received almost 3,700 responses. The most popular school themes were early college, international baccalaureate (IB), Montessori, and advanced placement (AP). They were also encouraged to find that a majority—with 58 percent replying "definitely" and 26 percent replying "probably"—would choose a school in their attendance zone, if they were offered one of their top four choices of school as well as transportation. Additionally, 68 percent said they would "definitely" or "probably" attend one of their choice schools even outside of their attendance zone, if transportation was provided.<sup>9</sup>

After collecting this survey data, Koprowski and his team began piloting a variety of new ideas, but two of them—the creation of "choice schools" as well as the development of better measures for student disadvantage—address educational equity head-on.

### *Creation of New "Choice Schools"*

Dallas ISD has long had selective magnet schools with academic or performance admissions requirements, but the district has begun creating new "choice schools" that serve a different role. Similar to magnet schools, these choice schools offer specialized themes such as Montessori and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM), but they do not have the admissions requirements found at the magnet schools. Unlike the traditional public schools in the

district, choice schools are open to children living anywhere in the district, regardless of academic ability.<sup>10</sup>

Koprowski and his five-person team developed two kinds of choice schools. First, there are "transformation schools," which are brand-new schools that have open enrollment across the district. Second, there are "Innovation Schools," which are existing neighborhood schools being reimagined by the current teachers and leadership. In order to become a choice school, applicants go through an intensive, competitive proposal process.<sup>11</sup> If selected, the schools receive funding, technical support, and additional autonomies—which traditional Dallas schools do not have—such as the ability to roll money over from year to year or redefine staff positions. The goals of these choice schools are to offer high quality programming for all children in the city; to offer options to middle class families who have left the district or who are considering leaving the district; and to create more integrated schools that provide high quality education to students from all socioeconomic levels.<sup>12</sup>

Research<sup>13</sup> has long shown us that students achieve at higher levels when they learn in socioeconomically and racially diverse school environments. Choice schools aim to offer more of these integrated learning environments to Dallas's children.

### *Developing Better Measures of Student Disadvantage*

Another innovation out of the Office of Transformation and Innovation is a new take on understanding the poverty level of Dallas students. Koprowski explained that the "binary" measure of free and reduced lunch, the standard measure of poverty used by the federal government, did not offer a lot of useful information given that nearly 90 percent of the students were receiving this benefit. Based on work done in Chicago to tier neighborhoods by level of poverty,<sup>14</sup> the Office of Transformation and Innovation developed four different types of "blocks" across the city based on four factors: median household income, parents level of education, single parent status and home ownership. The team developed a map showing the levels of poverty in far more detail for all neighborhoods across the city with Block 1

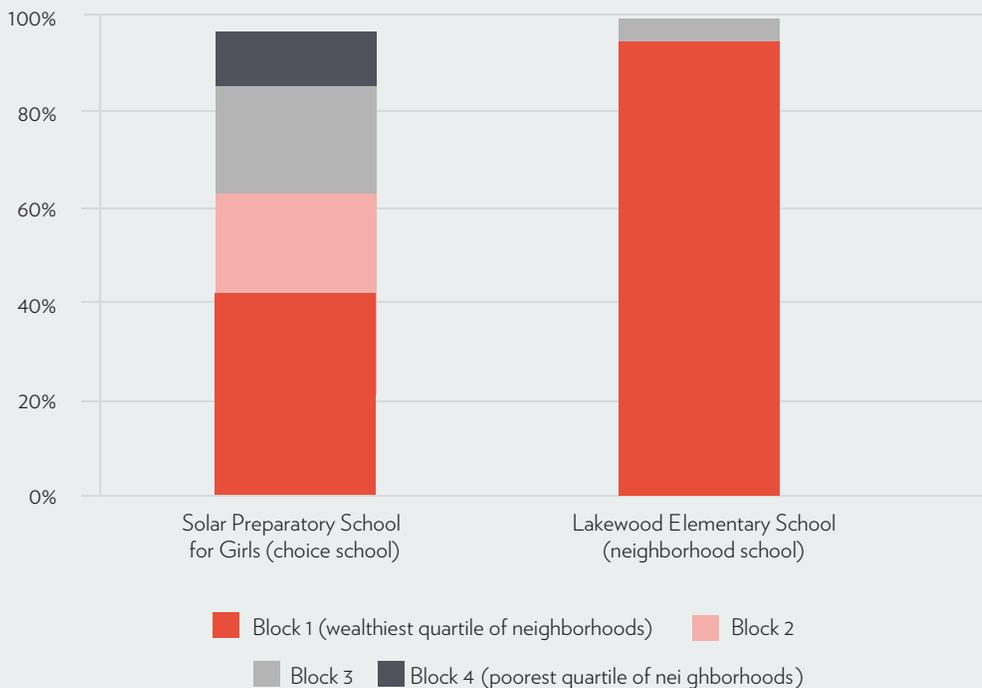
representing the quarter of neighborhoods that are wealthiest and Block 4 representing the 25 percent of neighborhoods that are most impoverished. Now that this map is developed, Koprowski’s team is using the information to conduct “equity audits” on the new Transformation Schools to ensure that equitable numbers of children from each of the “blocks” are chosen for the schools.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, given that one of the first transformation schools, Solar Preparatory School for Girls at James Bonham, has socioeconomic balance as one of its tenets, the team can use the equity audit to choose students off the waitlist in order to balance the school socioeconomically.

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

It is too early to tell what effect Dallas’s socioeconomically

and racially integrated schools will have on student achievement. However, based on early numbers, Solar Prep is seeing results in its enrollment. The team was able to balance the school with half the children eligible for free and reduced lunch and half of them ineligible. Additionally, students from all four blocks are represented with the school projected to have 42 percent of children representing Block 1 (the wealthiest quartile of neighborhoods), 21 percent of children representing Block 2, 22 percent of children representing Block 3 and 12 percent of children representing Block 4 (the poorest quartile of neighborhoods). In contrast, nearby neighborhood schools, which have traditional attendance boundaries, have much more segregated school populations. For example, Lakewood Elementary School has 95 percent of children representing Block 1, 0 percent from Block 2, 4 percent from Block 3 and 0 percent from Block 4.<sup>16</sup> (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1. ENROLLMENT BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF STUDENTS’ HOME NEIGHBORHOODS IN TWO DALLAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS



Source: Data for fall 2016 enrollment provided by Mike Koprowski, Chief of Transformation and Innovation, Dallas Independent School District.

While the focus is on socioeconomic balance, further analysis by the Office of Transformation and Innovation showed that Solar Prep’s projected enrollment is racially diverse as well with roughly 45 percent Hispanic children, 25 percent black children, 25 percent white children and 5 percent Asian and multi-race children. While the city as a whole is diverse, with 28.8 percent white residents, 25.0 percent black residents, 2.9 percent Asian residents, 42.4 percent Hispanic or Latino residents, and 2.6 percent two or more races,<sup>17</sup> this level of racial diversity in one school is rare in the Dallas ISD. While this is an early pilot, Koprowski is hopeful that opening more choice schools will increase their market share of middle class students in the Dallas area and simultaneously create enriching, integrated schools for all children.

Early evidence of this pilot’s ability to increase the market share of middle class families was seen in this last application cycle. According to data from the Office of Transformation and Innovation, a total of 668 applications came from students not currently attending a Dallas ISD school. While some of those children are just entering kindergarten, many are also coming from private schools and charter schools in the area. The demand has been high so far, with Transformation Schools averaging three applications for every one seat.<sup>18</sup>

## Lessons for Other Districts

The team at Dallas’s Office of Transformation and Innovation believes they increased their market share of students through intensive communication with all communities within the city. The team spent months sending fliers, placing ads, and knocking on doors across the city to ensure that all families knew about the choice schools. “Diversity requires very intentional recruitment,” Koprowski explained. They also followed the private school timeline. “If you want your schools to be a feasible option for private school parents, you have to have the enrollment process happen just as early,” said Koprowski.

While the office has had many successes, there have been challenges, as well. Office of Transformation and Innovation

Director Mohammed Choudhury explained, “The biggest obstacles to change and reform are within the system itself.” Much of his work has been focused on collaborating with other district offices, such as the finance office, to ensure that the choice schools are given the additional autonomies they have been promised and that a district infrastructure for scaling these projects is developed.<sup>19</sup>

To other districts considering similar policy shifts or pilots, Koprowski shares the following advice. He suggests, “Districts should offer creative enrollment strategies that promote socioeconomic and racial diversity by decoupling residential address and school assignment.” He also suggests making the application process as easy as possible for parents. As an example of this flexibility, Dallas ISD is allowing parents to text a photo of their application rather than deliver it in person.

Another important element is transportation, which Dallas ISD provides for the Transformation Schools. “Choice without transportation really isn’t choice for many families,” explains Koprowski.

## Next Steps

Both Choudhury and Koprowski emphasize how iterative the process of school innovation and integration has to be. The team’s goal is to create thirty-five choice schools by 2020 with ten being Transformation Schools and twenty-five being Innovation. If they are ultimately successful, however, the team believes that the learning that comes from this work will make all of the district’s schools, not just the Choice Schools, more diverse and more enriching for all children.<sup>20</sup>

**Carole Learned-Miller** is a second year doctoral student in the Ed.LD. program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She started her career as a teacher and later worked as a principal and a central office administrator. She also enjoyed training and coaching aspiring principals and teachers. Carole is involved in research and writing related to the development of exceptional teachers and principals as well as the creation of equitable, integrated and enriching

schools for children. Carole received a BA in Education and Psychology from Smith College and a M.Ed. in Educational Administration from Boston College.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Quick Facts: United States,” United States Census Bureau, 2015, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/IPE120214/4819000,00>.

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<sup>4</sup> “Data Packet for 2016–17 Planning,” Office of Institutional Research, <https://mydata.dallasisd.org/docs/CILT2017/DP1000.pdf>

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<sup>6</sup> “Dallas Schools Desegregation Timeline,” *Dallas News*, August 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16, and 20, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16, and 20, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> “Survey Results Show Interest in Public School Choice,” *The Hub*, December 2, 2014, <https://thehub.dallasisd.org/2014/12/02/survey-results-show-interest-in-public-school-choice/>.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16, and 20, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Application,” Dallas Office of Transformation and Innovation, <http://public-schoolchoiceapplication-dallasisd.org/application/>.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16 and 20.

<sup>13</sup> Amy Stuart Wells, Lauren Fox and Diana Cordova-Cobo, “How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students,” *The Century Foundation*, February 9, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>; James S. Coleman, et al, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966); Richard Kahlenberg, *All Together Now: Creating Middle Class Schools through Public School Choice* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> “News and Announcements,” Chicago Public Schools Office of Access and Enrollment, <http://cps.edu/AccessAndEnrollment/Pages/OAE.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16, and 20, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16, and 20, 2016. Note that figures do not total 100 percent due to rounding and a small number of out-of-district students enrolled at the schools.

<sup>17</sup> “QuickFacts: Dallas City, Texas,” United States Census Bureau, 2010, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/4819000,48113>.

<sup>18</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16, and 20, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Mohammed Choudhury, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 12 and August 16, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Mike Koprowski, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 10, 15, 16 and 20; Mohammed Choudhury, telephone interview and follow-up emails, August 12 and August 16, 2016.

# Eden Prairie Public Schools: Adapting to Demographic Change in the Suburbs

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – KIM BRIDGES

Eden Prairie, Minnesota exemplifies many of today's suburbs experiencing rapid demographic shifts. Like many locales around the country, the schools in this suburb of Minneapolis have reflected the move from racial homogeneity to increasing racial, socioeconomic, and cultural diversity. Within a twenty-year time period, the county's percentage of white residents dropped nineteen points—from 94 percent in 1990 to 75 percent in 2010—as the community's attributes and amenities attracted more minority and immigrant families.<sup>1</sup> The attraction has included a highly touted school system. According to the Minnesota Report Card, in the 2015–2016 school year, the public schools in Eden Prairie enrolled nearly 9,000 students, 14.2 percent of whom were Asian, 14.2 percent of whom were black, nearly 7 percent of whom were Hispanic, and 64 percent of whom were white.<sup>2</sup>

The Eden Prairie Public School District (EPPSD) has leveraged its increased diversity with school attendance zones created in 2010 to reduce concentrated poverty and increase student achievement as well as operational efficiency. It has been six years since then-superintendent Melissa Krull and the school board undertook a voluntary elementary school boundary change process that generated national media attention, contentious public meetings, and, ultimately, the resignation of her and several school

leaders as well as the turnover of all but one of seven board members. Though the process was not easy, it offers the opportunity to assess both the effort and the impact of adapting and embracing the dynamics of a changing community by designing an equity- and diversity-focused student assignment policy.

## History of School Integration Efforts in EPPSD

To understand the context of the decision, it's important to go back further in time to understand how the district's priorities shifted as the community and the school system changed. Eden Prairie is one of eleven school districts in the Twin Cities region to participate voluntarily in the Western Metro Education Program (WMEP), which originated from a civil rights lawsuit due to intra-district segregation and inequity.<sup>3</sup> According to the EPPSD's most recent "Achievement and Integration Plan," the district's role in this collaborative was "to assist Minneapolis Public Schools, a racially isolated school district, desegregate their schools."<sup>4</sup> Through this effort, some district students attended the WMEP regional Magnet Schools, while the district received about one hundred students from Minneapolis through a program known as "The Choice is Yours." The plan also

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/eden-prairie-public-schools/>

notes that “Although the program’s qualifying requirement is low income and a southwest Minneapolis location, 95 percent of the students are of color.”<sup>5</sup>

Embracing and expanding upon these integration efforts, the collaborative also offered culturally-responsive professional development. Through the collaborative, the district’s educators implemented a wide variety of new practices to meet the needs of its diversifying student population. However, by the end of the decade many district staff and leaders remained troubled by ongoing achievement gaps and an elementary school assignment plan that funneled an every-increasing and disproportionate number of low income and minority students into one of the four schools.<sup>6</sup> EPPSD leaders realized that the pre-2010 school boundaries were an impediment to continued progress, and projections showed that inaction would only increase the racial and socioeconomic disparity in the years to come. Susan Eaton, who authored a “story from the field” on Eden Prairie as part of the One Nation Indivisible series, noted that the 2010 plan was “intended to reduce glaring and growing disparities in the racial and socioeconomic makeup between one school, where Somali, African American and lower income students were concentrated and three other elementary schools, which overwhelmingly enrolled white, middle class and affluent students.”<sup>7</sup>

## The Current Plan

After the EPPSD board directed the superintendent to generate potential solutions to address the concerns, Dr. Krull convened a working group of school stakeholders and community members.<sup>8</sup> With assistance from the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity (formerly the Institute on Race and Poverty) at the University of Minnesota Law School, the committee’s recommendations centered on moving from a K–4 to a K–6 model and redrawing boundaries to incorporate students from more and less affluent neighborhoods into each elementary school.<sup>9</sup> Although the plan would require a significant number of school transfers in its starting year—with nearly 1,100 Eden Prairie students changing schools—it actually decreased the number of school transitions students

would make during their K–12 experience and reduced the average commute time.<sup>10</sup> The school board approved the plan on a 4-3 vote in December of 2010, and it went into effect for the 2010–2011 school year.<sup>11</sup>

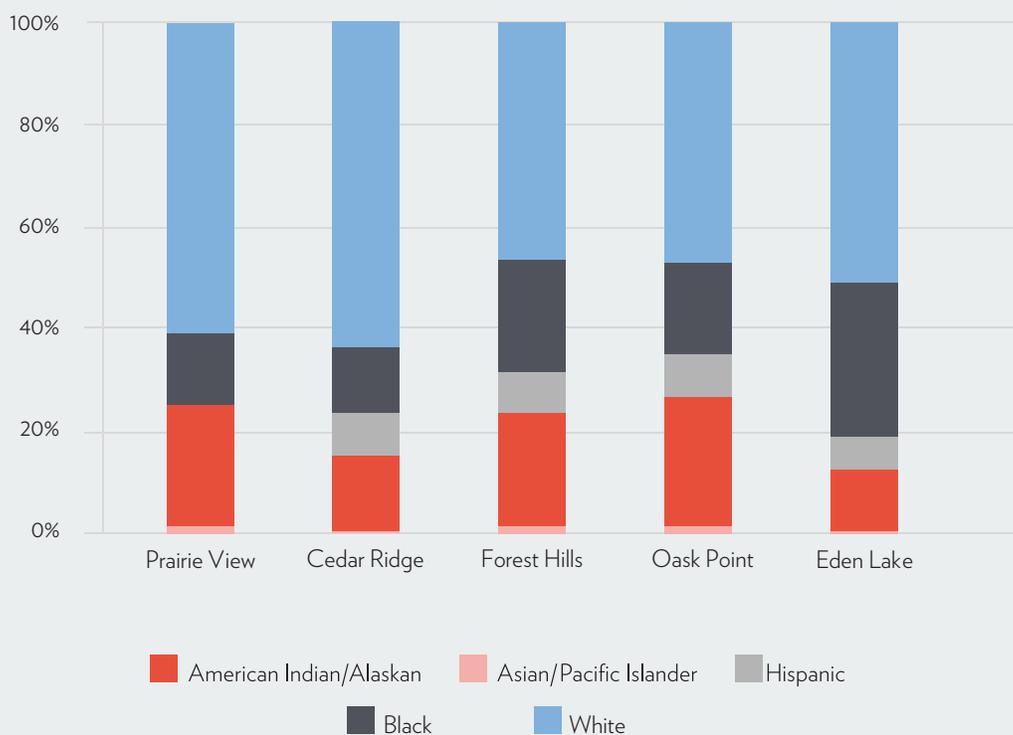
After assessing the plan and the process undertaken, the National Coalition on School Diversity commended the plan and its architects for work “...under immense pressure, implement[ing] a forward-looking plan to achieve equity, efficiency, and high-quality schooling within economically and culturally and racially diverse schools.”<sup>12</sup>

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

As a result of the new attendance boundaries, Eden Prairie’s elementary schools are more socioeconomically and racially integrated today than they were before the plan. In the five years following the new student assignment plan, the wide variation in socioeconomic diversity at its neighborhood elementary schools decreased significantly.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the elementary schools today have more consistent racial diversity from elementary to elementary, with just over a fourteen point variation between the five schools’ populations of white students and less than a sixteen point variation between the populations of black students (see Figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

Tackling the issue of segregation also produced a number of opportunities borne out by research on the benefits of integrated schools. From 2012–2016, district-wide proficiency rates in all grades in math, reading, and science on the Minnesota Report Card have outperformed state averages. In 2013, the Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now (MinnCAN) School and District Report Cards recognized five Eden Prairie schools as “top-performing public schools for Latino and Asian student performance.”<sup>15</sup> Despite these gains, MinnCAN also reported that achievement gaps in EPPSD between white and black students at the secondary level remained well above state averages.<sup>16</sup>

FIGURE 1. RACIAL/ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF EDEN PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS



Source: Minnesota Report Card 2016 data, <http://rc.education.state.mn.us/>.

## Lessons for Other Districts

Today this community—touted before the change process for being a national “best place to live”—appears to have transitioned from a period of resistance by some to a broader acceptance of the student assignment changes.<sup>17</sup> As time has passed and protests have begun to recede into memory, parent attitudes about the school system are positive. For example, in a random sample of 250 Eden Prairie parents conducted in 2015, “94 percent of respondents reported favorably that they ‘felt valued’ the last time they spent time in one of the Eden Prairie Schools to deal with an education issue.”<sup>18</sup> The district also has moved forward with new leaders, a comprehensive strategic plan and broad public support for a 2014 levy.<sup>19</sup> The current board has kept the zones intact despite early concerns that they would not sustain them.<sup>20</sup>

As principal Conn McCartan concluded in a 2014 story on Eden Prairie’s student assignment and demographic changes, “The nice part is to be able to look back on it and say, ‘See, when the dust settles, everybody is OK.’”<sup>21</sup>

For equity-minded educators and community leaders, the Eden Prairie story may show that the path to progress can be challenging, but also that it is worthwhile. The EPPSD story illustrates far-reaching impacts that can help today’s students become tomorrow’s leaders. By designing a student assignment plan to ensure racial and socioeconomic diversity, the district hasn’t just prevented a rise in the concentration of poverty in one school or narrowed achievement gaps for many minority students; it has continued to strengthen its reputation for and commitment to academic excellence. In a 2013 presentation at a conference on school diversity, former

superintendent Melissa Krull expressed this conclusion: “The fight is worth it. The challenge will make us stronger and our convictions deeper.”<sup>22</sup>

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# Hartford Public Schools: Striving for Equity through Interdistrict Programs

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – KIMBERLY QUICK

Hartford, Connecticut, a high-poverty, majority-minority city of over 125,000 residents, is surrounded by several affluent, predominantly white suburbs. While the poverty rate in the city is 34.4 percent, the combined poverty rate of the surrounding counties is only 12.1 percent. Hartford is the fourth poorest city with over 100,000 residents in the country; in contrast, greater Hartford has the nation's seventh highest median income. Hartford's median household income (\$29,313), percentage of owner occupied homes (23.6 percent), and median home value (\$163,600) are each significantly lower than in the surrounding areas; respectively, these county statistics are \$65,499, 65.1 percent, and \$238,600. The unemployment rate in the city is nearly double the rate in the surrounding counties, at a startling 12.2 percent. Demographically, the city is approximately 15.9 percent white, 38.3 percent black, 43.6 percent Hispanic, with a median age of 30. In contrast, the surrounding areas are much whiter and older, with a white population of nearly 65 percent and a median age of 40.<sup>1</sup> About 15 percent of Hartford's residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

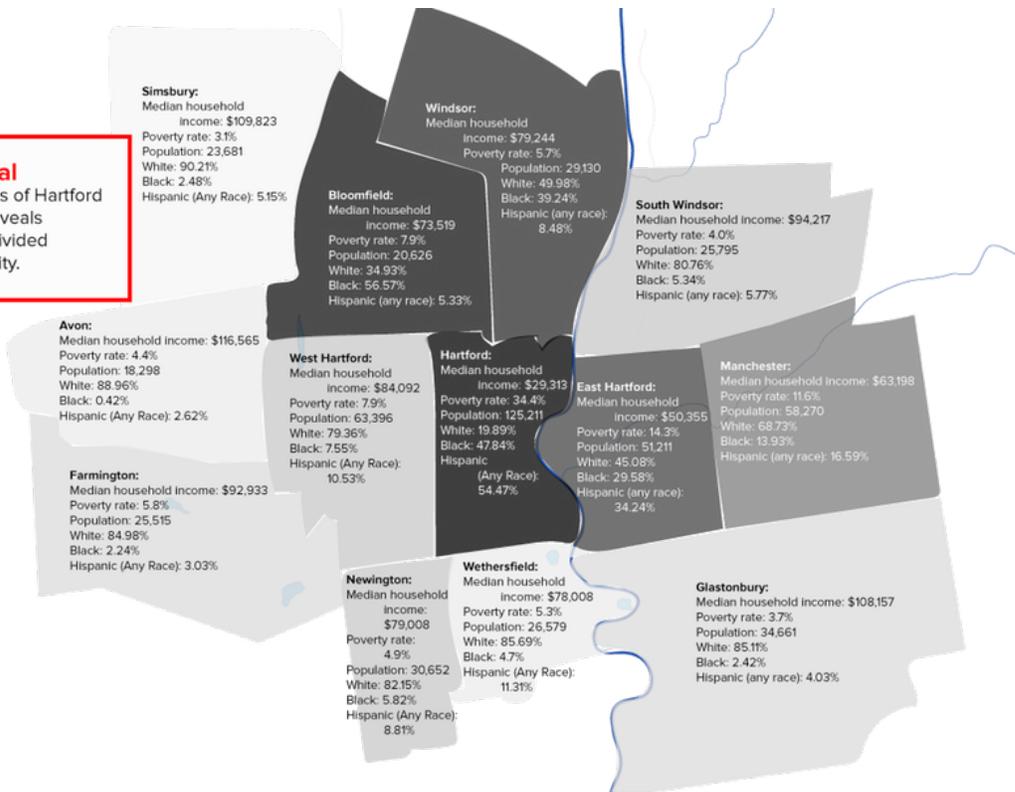
Hartford School District serves students from pre-kindergarten through the twelfth grade in sixty-eight schools. In the 2013–2014 academic year, it enrolled 21,820 students,

with a per pupil expenditure of \$16,735.<sup>2</sup> Like the city itself, the school district is majority black and Hispanic—31.3 percent of its students are black; 49.9 percent, Hispanic. Nearly 85 percent of children attending district schools are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and 16.9 percent of them are English language learners.<sup>3</sup> These statistics include the demographic information of the suburban students who attend public school in the city, meaning that both the poverty rate and rate of racial isolation in Hartford Public Schools would be significantly greater save for its efforts in desegregation.

To help remedy the inequities between the city and surrounding counties, Hartford Public Schools operates an interdistrict magnet program that seeks to provide a wider range of educational opportunities to both Hartford and suburban families. Alongside this interdistrict magnet program that attracts suburban students into the city, Hartford's open choice policy allows city children to attend schools in more than thirty surrounding school districts. This two-way desegregation plan has made Hartford a model for effective school integration in a high-poverty, high-minority district.

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/hartford-public-schools/>

**Separate and Unequal**  
 Comparing the demographics of Hartford to its surrounding suburbs reveals a metropolitan area starkly divided by income and race & ethnicity.



Source: "Hartford: Integrating Schools in a Segregated Place". Teach for America.

## History of Integration Efforts in Hartford

Hartford’s contemporary push for school integration began with the 1996 Connecticut Supreme Court ruling in *Sheff v. O’Neill*. The lead petitioner, a Hartford fourth grader, filed a lawsuit through his parents, calling attention to the vast inequities between Hartford’s underresourced, majority-minority schools, and suburban schools that had predominantly white student populations. Seeking to ensure an equitable and integrated education to both urban and suburban children, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled 4–3 for *Sheff*, determining that separation of suburban and Hartford students violated the education and equal protection clauses of the state constitution. The state was now obligated to remedy that division by finding ways to promote school desegregation.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, while the U.S. Constitution’s prohibits only de jure segregation, the *Sheff* court ruled that the Connecticut constitution also prohibits

de facto segregation—segregation not directly tied to intentional government conduct.

Despite the significance of the ruling, the case did not set specific goals or timetables, and the *Sheff* plaintiffs felt were forced to return to court twice to demand compliance. Both parties reached a legal settlement in 2003, setting a four year timetable and calling initially for at least 30 percent of Hartford minority students to be able to learn in reduced-isolation settings, or schools where minorities constituted less than three-quarters of the student body. This settlement also outlined ways to potentially reduce racial and economic isolation: interdistrict magnet schools, which enroll students from Hartford and suburban districts; and the open choice program, which allows students to transfer to a school in another district. The settlement also helped establish interdistrict cooperative programs such as after-school or summer programs designed to increase achievement

while further reducing isolation. The parties negotiated a second settlement in 2008. The settlement set two new benchmarks. First, at least 80 percent of Hartford minority students wishing to attend reduced isolation schools would be accommodated. Secondly, a percentage of minority students from Hartford would be enrolled in a reduced isolation school; the target goals of the court order placed that number at 41 percent.<sup>5</sup>

In response to the 1996 *Sheff* decision, the state legislature devised a voluntary system of magnet schools and school choice transfer options that would be available options for both Hartford and suburban residents. Today, more than 45 percent of Hartford's Black and Latino K–12 students attend schools in reduced-isolation settings. As recently as 2002, only an estimated 10 percent of black and Latino students could make this claim.<sup>6</sup>

## Current Plan

*Students in the Greater Hartford area can choose to participate in a variety of integration programs, including but not limited to open choice, or reverse choice, in which suburban public school children can apply to attend non-magnets in Hartford.* The region's most substantial option, interdistrict magnet schools—about forty-five in total—offer a specialized theme, focus, or pedagogy within the public school system.<sup>7</sup> These schools are operated by a variety of partners. About half of are operated by Hartford Public Schools, and most of the others are operated by the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), a separate organization that serves thirty-five member districts in the Greater Hartford area. Magnet schools are funded through a combination of state grants, contributions from local boards of education, federal grants, and tuition paid by sending districts and towns. The Regional School Choice Office (RSCO), oversees the system and ensures that both Hartford and suburban families have access to integrated schools through a lottery system for magnet school admissions.<sup>8</sup> Although RSCO seeks to accommodate as many children and families as possible through the magnet program, it cannot guarantee a seat to every pre-K–12 family that wants one. The lottery system is

designed to meet a lofty goal: to have at least 47.5 percent of students enrolled in reduced racial isolation schools (defined as less than 75 percent minority enrollment).<sup>9</sup>

While race or income are not weighted factors in Hartford's "blind," computer-based lottery, the extreme racial and economic stratification of the Greater Hartford area renders the suburban-urban divide a reasonable proxy for creating socioeconomic and racial diversity. Most Sheff magnet schools are 50-50 city-suburban enrollment by design, which helps ensure both racial and economic integration. By recruiting children from the much more affluent areas, the Hartford School Choice Office is typically able to successfully enroll a threshold of non-minority students to the district-run interdistrict magnet schools to remain in compliance with Sheff directives. Conversely, those interdistrict magnet schools located in outlying suburban areas intentionally recruit students from both Hartford and suburban districts. This process of recruitment, however, is targeted, evidence-based, and well-funded. In 2015, the Hartford School Choice Office spent \$350,000 in marketing campaigns alone, not to mention significant time and personnel resources.<sup>10</sup> Interdistrict magnet schools or participating school districts receive state grants if they choose to provide transportation to out-of-district students, and the district where the school is located is obligated to provide transportation to its resident students. According to reporting by the *Connecticut Mirror*, the state has spent around \$1.4 billion to build and renovate magnet schools over the past ten years, and spends about \$150 million to operate these schools each year.<sup>11</sup>

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

Hartford Public Schools, a school district with an extremely disadvantaged student population, provides a greater range of educational opportunities to its students than any other district in their region. Its regional magnet schools offer far more racially and economically integrated student bodies than nearly every other non-magnet school in the region, save one. Several researchers and at least one of the magnet school operators report strong academic outcomes for students enrolled in interdistrict programs.

### *Expansion of Access to Desegregated Schools*

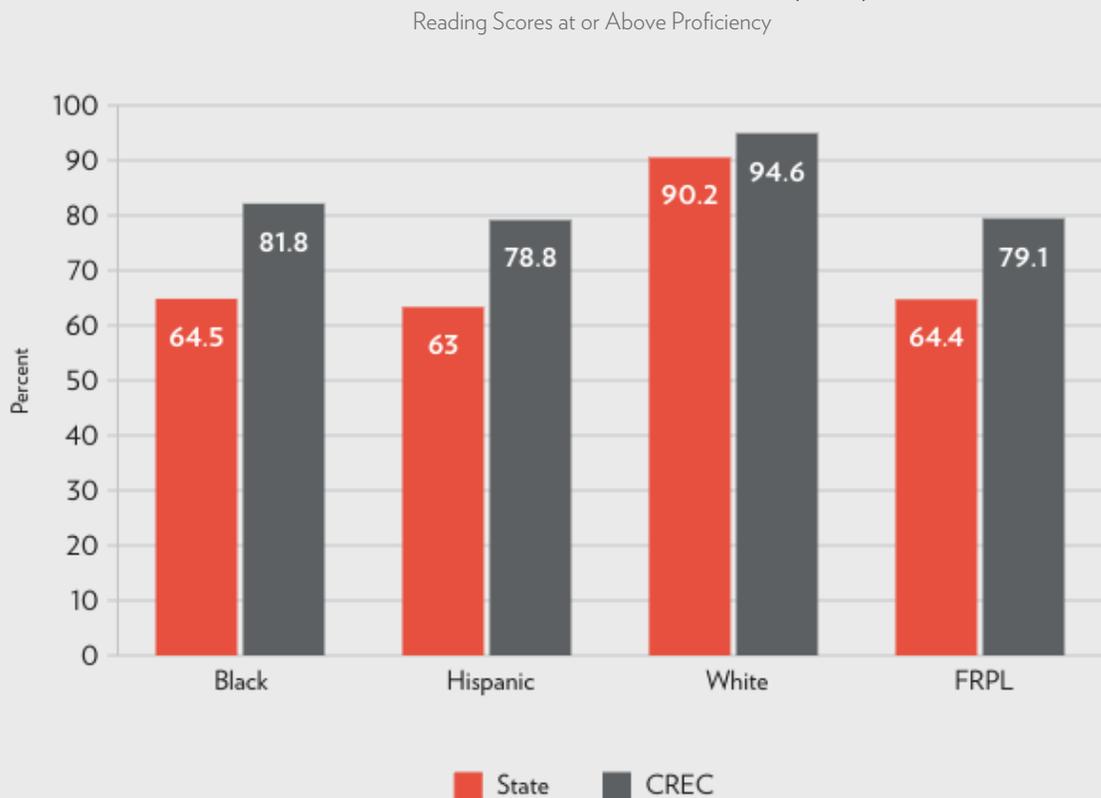
Since most school segregation today happens across—rather than within—school districts, Hartford’s use of interdistrict desegregation programs helps to maximize the proportion of students with access to diverse school buildings. Because of this, the percentages of Hartford students who attend reduced racial isolation schools has increased from only 11 percent prior to the revised Sheff agreement in 2007, to a projected 45.5 percent in 2016.<sup>12</sup> In 2014, 9,558 of Hartford’s 21,458 minority students were able to attend schools in these more integrated settings. More than 17,000 students in the Hartford region attend magnet schools; another 2,000 participate in the open choice program. CREC (an organization that works with member districts to run many of

the Hartford region’s magnet programs) has itself expanded from 3,600 students in 2008, to 6,300 students in 2012. The overall enrollment in their schools is close to one-third white, one-third black, and one-third Latino.

### *Elevated Achievement and Better Social-Emotional Outcomes*

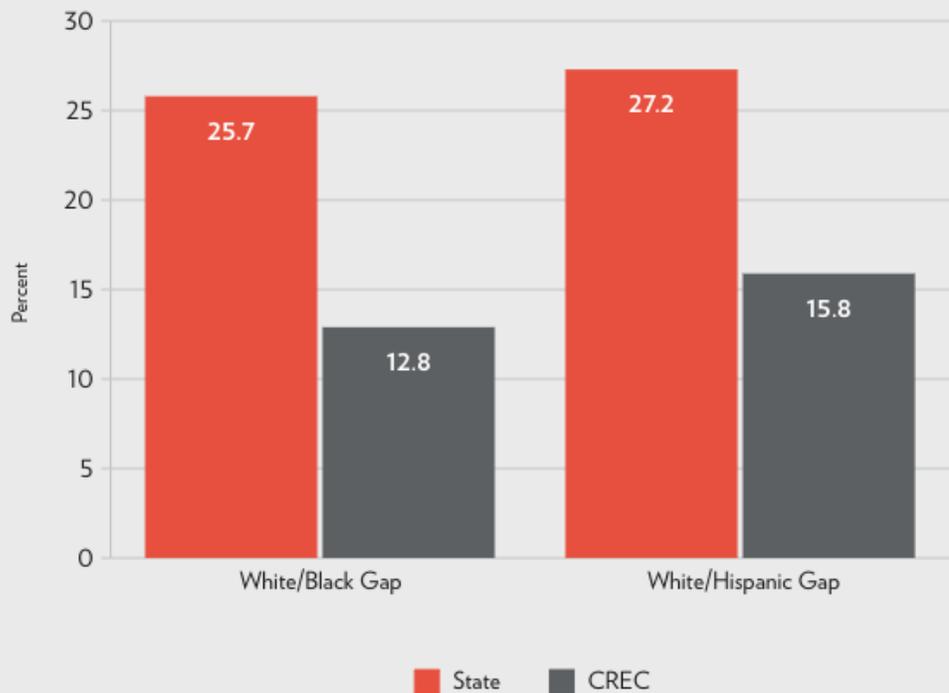
According to researchers at UCLA’s Civil Rights Project, Hartford’s regional magnet schools boast very high levels of achievement and a greatly diminished white-Latino student achievement gap in several subjects and grade levels. Within each racial group, the students from poor backgrounds perform substantially above the statewide average for low-income students, and the longer an individual student

FIGURE 1. COMPARISON OF STATE AND CREC PERFORMANCE ON CONNECTICUT MASTERY TEST (CMT)  
Reading Scores at or Above Proficiency



Source: Sarah S. Ellworth, “CREC Student Achievement Overview 2013,”  
Capitol Region Education Council, [http://www.sheffmovement.org/  
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FIGURE 2. ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN STATEWIDE  
V. CREC MAGNET SCHOOLS CMT READING SCORES, 2012



Source: Sarah S. Ellworth, "CREC Student Achievement Overview 2013," Capitol Region Education Council, <http://www.sheffmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CREC-Student-Achievement-Overview-2013.pdf>.

has remained in magnet schools, the more substantial his or her gains seem to be.<sup>13</sup> For example, while stubborn racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps persist within CREC schools, the achievement of student racial and socioeconomic subgroups far exceed state averages, and the score gaps between those students and their white or more affluent peers are notably more narrow.<sup>14</sup> CREC schools saw these encouraging outcomes even though their schools have a higher percentage of poor students than the state average.

This more recent data bears out the findings in a pair of peer-reviewed 2009 studies from Connecticut that sought to discover both the true integrative effect of magnet schools and their impacts on student achievement. Controlling for the possibility for selection bias, or the concept that

children from families who opt-in to schools of choice are fundamentally different from children from families who do not, researchers looked at magnet school lottery winners and losers and discovered that attendance at a magnet high school had positive math and reading achievement outcomes for central city students.<sup>15</sup>

A second study by the same researchers, again controlling for both selection bias and past educational experiences, revealed a number of positive social-emotional developments for all students in Hartford's interdistrict magnets. Students in these desegregated environments reported greater levels of peer support for academic achievement, more encouragement and support for college attainment, and lower rates of truancy and absenteeism. Both white and minority students were more likely to feel connected to

peers of other races, to report having multiple friends of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to express stronger interests in and understanding of multiculturalism.<sup>16</sup>

## Next Steps

The popularity of Hartford's interdistrict magnet program also presents one of its greatest challenges: figuring out how to simultaneously attract enough affluent suburban families into the program to sustain its integrative effects while maximizing magnet school access to marginalized urban children who are most in need of it.

### *Inclusion of More Hartford Families*

Demand for admission into the Hartford region's interdistrict magnet schools far outpaces supply. Bruce Douglas, former executive director of CREC, told the *Huffington Post* that in this academic year, there were 20,000 applicants for 2,000 seats in CREC schools.<sup>17</sup> This pattern seems to expand throughout the Hartford interdistrict magnet network. Simultaneously, as more black and Latino families begin to move out of city proper into surrounding districts, Hartford officials seeking to find more affluent white families to balance Hartford schools are forced to venture further and further into the county to recruit. All of this leads to a program that—while its intentions and ultimate effects are to help bolster achievement and opportunity for marginalized kids—does so by actively seeking the approval, enthusiasm, and attendance of richer, whiter families.

This situation is not aided by what seems to be wavering political enthusiasm for magnet school funding in a state with budget challenges. While the Connecticut state legislature protected funding for Hartford's magnet schools due to intense demand, it placed a moratorium on all other future magnet school construction in 2009. Recently, however, a bill signed by the governor in July 2016 allocates tens of millions of dollars to magnet school construction projects in the Hartford region.<sup>18</sup> These additional funds will likely help open up seats for more low-income Hartford city students in new schools with improved, state-of-the-art facilities and creative themes or pedagogies. But in order to persist as reduced isolation schools, Hartford and regional school officials must

continue rigorous marketing research and recruitment in the suburbs, while further incentivizing suburban districts to accept greater numbers of Hartford city students through the region's Open Choice program.

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# Jefferson County Public Schools: From Legal Enforcement to Ongoing Commitment

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – KIM BRIDGES

Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) has a large geographic area and a diverse populace to draw upon for system-wide school diversity efforts. The division comprises one-seventh of all students in Kentucky public schools and is the 28th largest school district in the country. Encompassing the city of Louisville and the surrounding county, JCPS today has over 100,000 pre-K–12 students in 166 school sites, with a demographic composition that is 46 percent white, 37 percent African American, and 17 percent other, including a rapidly growing Latino or Hispanic population.<sup>1</sup> Roughly 66 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

These attributes are both a result of, and a contributor to, an extensive history of racial and socioeconomic integration in JCPS that began with legal enforcement but continues as a result of the commitment of district leaders and community members.

## History of School Integration Efforts in JCPS

The very existence of the joint city-county school district is rooted in enforced desegregation decisions, yet today JCPS maintains a voluntary and ongoing commitment to

school diversity. After a desegregation order by the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the once-separate city and county school systems merged and adopted a single desegregation plan in 1974.<sup>2</sup> This mandatory plan continued through 1978 when the courts ended active oversight.

Although the decrease in court supervision of desegregation orders precipitated a period of resegregation in other districts across the nation, JCPS persisted in its integration efforts. Even after mandatory action ended, it maintained support for ensuring racial and economic diversity and employed a zone system with guidelines for a targeted range of African American enrollment in each of its schools.<sup>3</sup>

In 1991, the system adopted “Project Renaissance,” a managed choice plan that emphasized parental choice and racial composition guidelines at each school level. According to a new book focused on the long-term integration efforts of JCPS and other major school systems, “Project Renaissance represented the beginning of extensive controlled choice in the student assignment plan. Controlled choice asked families to rank a set of school choices, with the district making the final assignment decisions in service of creating racially diverse schools.”<sup>4</sup>

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/jefferson-county-public-schools/>

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, the system repeatedly refined its approach to balancing choice with diversity guidelines. The district’s plan evolved in response to a series of lawsuits filed by both black parents and white parents concerned about the racial limits on enrollment. The student assignment plan withstood these challenges with some modifications until a JCPS parent petition merged with a Seattle case to become the U.S. Supreme Court case *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (PICS).<sup>5</sup>

The 2007 PICS decision prompted system leaders to adjust methods once again. According to Dr. Dena Dossett, the JCPS Chief of Data Management, Planning and Program Evaluation, “After PICS, the school board committed to looking at diversity through multiple factors including race, income, and educational attainment.”<sup>6</sup> The revised student assignment plan of 2008 established regional clusters with a minority composition of more than 48 percent and set ranges of school representation from each cluster. This plan once again faced court challenges from 2010–2012 until upheld by the Kentucky Supreme Court.<sup>7</sup> In 2011, the district undertook a revision initiated by the previous superintendent and school board and contracted with Gary Orfield and Erica Frankenberg to help review the plan with a goal of increasing efficiency and effectiveness and reducing “excessive” transportation times while maintaining a diverse system.<sup>8</sup>

## The Current Plan

JCPS’s present-day student assignment plan strives to balance the dual goals of providing family choice among school options with diversity in school enrollment. To do so at the elementary level, the district has categorized every census block within its geographic boundaries based upon that area’s average household income, percentage of white residents, and educational attainment (see Figure 1). Based upon the number of students attending a school from each of those three categories, each school receives a diversity index rating, with a goal to keep each school’s enrollment within an index range from 1.4 to 2.5.

Families of elementary students may choose from schools within a regional cluster or magnet schools that enroll students district-wide. The district then assigns students to schools based upon the family preference ratings and the target school diversity index range. Alana Semuels described the approach in a profile in *The Atlantic* on March 27, 2015, “Parents fill out an application listing their preferences for certain schools in the cluster, and the district assigns students to certain schools in order to achieve diversity goals... Parents can appeal the school assignments, but have no guarantee of getting their top choice. They can also apply for magnet schools and special programs such as Spanish-language immersion.”<sup>9</sup>

Table 1. Jefferson County Public Schools Diversity Index

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
<b>Income</b>	Less than \$42,000	\$42,000-\$62,000	More than \$62,000
<b>Percent White</b>	Less than 73%	73-88%	More than 88%
<b>Education Attainment (6 point scale)</b>	Up to an associate’s degree (Less than 3.5)	College courses beyond an associate’s degree (3.5-3.7)	College courses up to a bachelor’s degree and beyond (More than 3.7)

Note: Each student is classified as a category 1, 2, or 3, based on the category of the block group in which the student resides. A School’s diversity index is calculated as a weighted average of the number of students who attend from each diversity category. The district’s goal is for each school’s diversity index to fall within the range of 1.4 to 2.5.

Source: Dena Dossett, Chief of Data Management, Planning and Program Evaluation, Jefferson County Public Schools.

At the secondary level, students are assigned to a school of residence within regional clusters, which have been drawn to maximize the diversity of those neighborhoods.

Transportation has long been an important component of school integration efforts in the district—one that can prove logistically challenging and expensive; however, the most recent Student Assignment Plan changes have increased transportation efficiency and reduced the average ride time, as well as the numbers of buses and routes (see Figure 2). The current program involves the transportation of 69,000 students on 962 buses.<sup>10</sup>

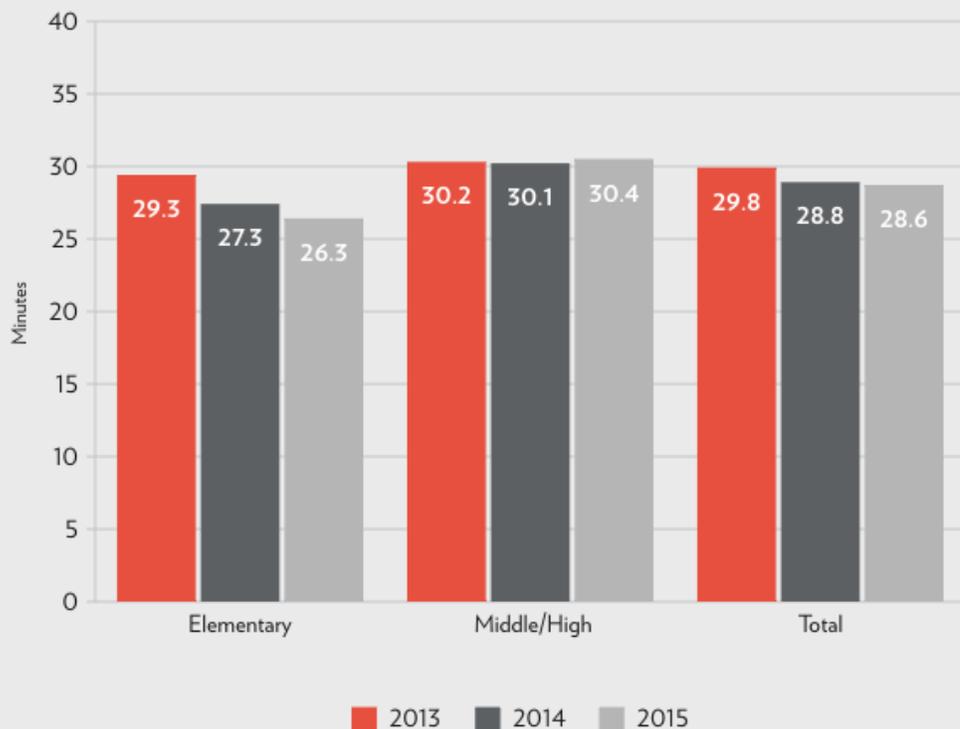
## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

The sustained efforts to support school integration in JCPS have resulted not only in more integrated schools but in high levels of parent satisfaction, and better outcomes for students.

### *More Integrated Schools*

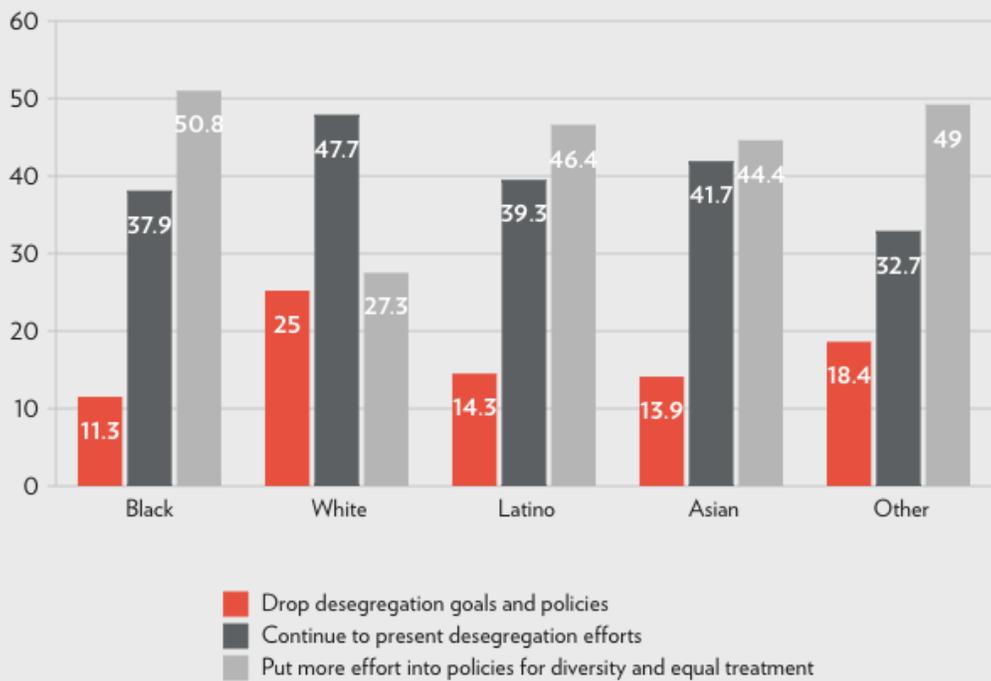
According to Dossett, all but fourteen of its 134 schools (which does not include special/alternative programs with other placement requirements) has a Diversity Index within the district guidelines.

FIGURE 1. AVERAGE RIDE TIME FOR JCPS



Source: Dena Dossett, Chief of Data Management, Planning and Program Evaluation, Jefferson County Public Schools.

FIGURE 1. PARENT SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN JEFFERSON COUNTY



Source: Gary Orfield and Erica Frankenberg, *Experiencing Integration in Louisville: How Parents and Students See the Gains and Challenges*, The Civil Rights Project, University of California-Los Angeles, January 2011.

### Community Support

JCPS has also sustained high levels of support from parents and students while achieving this level of integration. Under the current system, 90 percent of JCPS kindergarten families receive their first choice of schools when they apply during the application period. In a 2011 survey, more than 80 percent of students supported continuing with some form of school integration plan (see Figure 3). Among parents, support for continuing integration efforts into the future far outweighed support for ending the policies. In addition, most expressed satisfaction with the existing approach, with 69 percent indicating they were satisfied with their child’s school assignment, 87 percent indicating they were satisfied with the quality of their child’s education, and more than 90 percent of parents agreeing that diverse schools provide educational benefits for their children.<sup>11</sup>

### Student Outcomes

JCPS’s academic results show steady progress over the four years since the most recent student assignment policy changes. From 2012 to 2015, the district has seen increases in both the overall percentages of students and the percentages of students in “gap” groups receiving designations of proficient or distinguished on statewide assessments. In addition, the percentages of students deemed “college and career ready” nearly doubled—from 32 percent to 63 percent—from 2011 to 2015.<sup>12</sup>

To determine additional outcomes for students beyond traditional academic measures, one report looked to the students themselves for answers.<sup>13</sup> In 2011, researchers surveyed over 10 percent of the JCPS population of high school juniors, well over 1,000 students who had

experienced the evolution of the system's approach to integration over the course of their K–12 education. Many of these students expressed that their JCPS experience had prepared them for numerous challenges they would face in life after high school, including 64 percent of white students and 68 percent of black students who expressed being “very comfortable” “discussing controversial issues related to race,” and 95 percent who expressed feeling either “very prepared” or “somewhat prepared” “to work and live in diverse settings.” Summarizing these and other findings from the student surveys, researcher Gary Orfield noted, “Perhaps the most encouraging evidence is the way the students see how the schools are preparing them effectively for the kind of (multicultural) society in which they are going to live and work.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Integration as School Turnaround*

The wide-ranging benefits can also be seen at the school level in the opportunities that integration has created to boost enrollment and improve school culture and student performance at struggling schools. Lincoln Performing Arts School in JCPS offers one example of what can be achieved at the school level with district support for diversity, equity, and inclusion. A thriving school with 560 students in grades K–5 in the most recent school year, it's difficult to imagine that it once had more seats than applicants and test scores among the lowest in Kentucky. Located in a commercial part of downtown Louisville without a large neighborhood feeder population, Lincoln now draws students from every zip code and is projected for the 2016–2017 school year to have a population with 68 percent of students receiving Free or Reduced Lunch, 20 percent English Language Learners, and a dozen different home languages represented.<sup>15</sup>

The path to this successful growth and diversity wasn't simple. Susan French-Epps, Lincoln's principal, has been with JCPS for twenty-seven years and principal of Lincoln Performing Arts School since 2011. It took Susan's seventeen previous years of turnaround experience and a combination of additional ingredients to bring the school back from the brink of closure. The district directed resources to the school to create a performing arts magnet with a focus on drama, dance, and music. The principal focused her hiring

efforts on staff members who shared the vision and mission for an integrated arts program. Together, they infused the performing arts into its pedagogy, using the arts not as a supplement to academics but as a vehicle for learning and gaining knowledge.

To leverage the choice system, French-Epps and her assistant principal worked hard to market the revitalized program to parents and community members. They sent out a letter of introduction seeking members for a school advisory council and “hit the pavement and walked the street, handing out the letter and asking for their help,” the principal recalls. “We spent a year on it. We sent letters to existing families, began to market on social media, hosted booths and community events, visited daycares, and met with families. It was exhausting.”<sup>16</sup> But the team's efforts paid off with enrollment as well as partnerships with families, businesses, and arts organizations that have flourished over the past five years.

Getting parents in the door was only part of the success equation. The school strives to have leaders and staff members who are role models reflective of the students' backgrounds. “It's critical for students of color to see successful people who look like them,” the principal says.<sup>17</sup> Amidst challenges in increasing staff diversity through the traditional applicant pipeline, the current staff is committed to ongoing training to meet the needs of all students. A volunteer program for fathers and an “adopt a granny” program also gets diverse stakeholders into the school. Ongoing system-level supports continue, and the principal confirms that it is essential “to have support at the district level and autonomy to make decisions that will work for your school—I have had wonderful district leadership in my corner.”<sup>18</sup>

All of these factors have produced positive results for student achievement, and more. Over the last four years, the school showed an increase in the percentage of students scoring “proficient” or “distinguished” on state assessments in Reading and Math from 21 percent in 2012 to 46 percent in 2015, and it met its Annual Measurable Objectives of No Child Left Behind every year. French-Epps says, “When we began to see the fruits of our labor and saw dramatic

increases in results, we began to gain respect and notoriety... now we have a waiting list of over 300.”

The diverse student body gives the school a diversity index of 1.89, a number that falls within the district’s target range of 1.4 to 2.5. This diversity index thus provides parameters that should prevent enrollment from concentrating students from homogenous social networks or residential areas by pulling in students from neighborhoods of varying income, racial composition, and family educational attainment levels.

## Next Steps

While legal challenges have receded, other challenges require continual planning and consideration.

### *Managing Demographic and Policy Changes*

Family mobility remains an issue which commands the attention of school personnel. “A couple of hundred (students) move in and out of school every day,” notes Dossett.<sup>19</sup> The system also must keep up with steady growth and changing demographics. It is now a “majority minority” district with the total number of students from racial minority categories exceeding the total number of white students. In addition, the system works to ensure equity and quality for rising numbers of low-income students and English Language Learners.

The district also stays attuned to state and local changes, such as a push by the governor for first-time enabling legislation for charter schools. “Introducing a new variable like that into the district certainly would have an impact on a large urban district like ours,” says Dossett.<sup>20</sup>

### *Balancing Interests and Priorities*

Another focus area is the district’s strategic planning process, Vision 2020, which was adopted in December 2015. It centers on six guiding principles, some of which may impact one another. Dossett gives an example: “If we increase from 90 to 95 percent of families getting their first choice of schools, that could mean diversity suffers.” According to Dossett, “it’s

about maintaining a balance between guiding principles.”<sup>21</sup>

This strategic plan, which Dossett deems “more of a revolutionary than evolutionary plan,” developed from a series of community meetings and conversations around how the education system can best develop students for their futures. “It centered on ‘Who do we want our children to be?’ more than just ‘What do we want them to do?’” she explains.<sup>22</sup> Through this process, the system will consider multiple perspectives as it looks at enrollment by school as well as population shifts across the entire geographic area. Dossett notes, “This board was very thoughtful about making sure that access to choice remains a priority.”<sup>23</sup> Several related strategies, such as improving communication and empowering families, also could enhance integrated schools. Dossett explains one innovative example: “We now have a bus, equipped with laptops and Internet access, that travels to neighborhoods to serve families who may need extra help registering for schools.” And the new tool is paying off: “Over the last few years, we have served hundreds of families on the bus.”<sup>24</sup>

Other potential steps for JCPS include adding more magnet schools to its managed choice system, as suggested by consultant Gary Orfield of the Civil Rights Project at UCLA. As a steering committee works through the magnet school recommendations, the group will undertake harder conversations on issues which could impact equity such as whether to establish entrance criteria for the magnets. Dossett isn’t certain where these conversations will lead, but she remains optimistic: “There’s a wide range of beliefs about how to preserve flagship schools and provide equitable access. Not everyone is on the same page about these issues but there is a nice respect for all members having a voice.”<sup>25</sup>

### *Maintaining Support*

District leaders recognize buy-in from school and community stakeholders as a key to the sustainability of the JCPS student assignment plan. Thus, as Dossett says, “we continue to work on educating the public and empowering families around the choice system.”<sup>26</sup> For families, she notes, an important message is that “Kids are different, and what works for one might not work for another.”<sup>27</sup> For

community members, collecting and sharing data increases understanding. “Seventy percent of our residents don’t have school-age kids, so that’s a big number of people not engaged as parents. Their knowledge is often from when they were in school, and things have changed.”<sup>28</sup> For example, when those not involved with the system assert that families only want neighborhood schools, the district relays that close to 48 percent of incoming kindergarten families choose a school outside of their neighborhood.

The JCPS team also keeps up with developments in other locales. They follow the progress of other large systems and keep in touch with leaders working on issues of choice, diversity, and access to quality. JCPS seems to recognize that change just might be the status quo: “A lot of things happening at the same time could have an impact at how we look at diversity in our district, but the hopeful piece is that we’ll be able to balance perspectives and needs.”<sup>29</sup>

In the years since the district merger, national media and scholarly attention continues to shine a light on the long path of school integration in JCPS, illustrating what occurs when school and community leaders remain dedicated to providing its students with the benefits of integrated schools. They do so because: “We see community-wide pride in our integration and diversity plan...we recognize the value in that.”<sup>30</sup> This system’s perseverance leads many to view it as a North star that can guide others through a constellation of issues by balancing choice with equity to ensure diversity. By continuing its trajectory of commitment, the system can remain a bright example of preparing all students in the integrated, equitable, and stimulating learning environments they need and deserve.

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# New York City Public Schools: Small Steps in the Biggest District

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – SUCHI SAXENA

New York City is the largest public school district in the United States, enrolling a socioeconomically and racially diverse student population of more than 1.1 million students in over 1,800 schools<sup>1</sup> across five boroughs and thirty-two geographic school districts. As of 2015, citywide student demographics<sup>2</sup> were 27.1 percent Black, 15.5 percent Asian, 40.5 percent Hispanic, 14.8 percent white, and 2.1 percent identified as “other.” Nearly 77 percent of students were classified as living in poverty,<sup>3</sup> while 12.5 percent were identified as English language learners, and 18.7 percent as students with disabilities. Although New York City as a whole contains a diverse student population, the composition of the NYC schools student body vary significantly across the city’s five boroughs. Within the Bronx, Hispanics make up the biggest proportion of students (61.7 percent), as do students living in poverty (87.9 percent). Among the five boroughs, Manhattan has the second-highest percentage of Hispanic students (45.4 percent) and the second-lowest percentage of students living in poverty (68.8 percent). Queens has the highest representation of Asian students (27.9 percent), Brooklyn has the highest proportion of black students (38.1 percent), and nearly half of Staten Island students are white (47.9 percent).<sup>4</sup>

Given the size and complexities of New York City and its public schools, resolving systemic segregation may defy any single strategy. After years of virtually no movement toward school integration, New York City officials have taken preliminary steps to make diversity a consideration in more of the district’s policies.

## History of School Integration Efforts in New York City

Despite a long history of desegregation advocacy in the post-*Brown v. Board* era, economic and racial segregation have deepened across NYC schools in recent decades.<sup>5</sup> A 2012 analysis highlighted extreme racial isolation in NYC schools, with more than half of schools found to have hyper-segregated black and Hispanic student enrollments of 90 percent or more, and with racial isolation of black students increasing even as residential segregation in the city was declining.<sup>6</sup> In 2014, a report from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA identified New York City as one of the most segregated school systems in the nation.<sup>7</sup> This research highlighted a considerable decline between 1989 and 2010 in white student enrollment rates, a significant increase

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/new-york-city-public-schools/>

in majority-minority schools from less than 50 percent of schools in 1989 to almost two-thirds of schools in 2010, a sharp 70 percent increase in racially hyper-segregated schools, and the compounding of racial and economic segregation.<sup>8</sup> A 2016 New School report revealed that New York City elementary schools have remained segregated even as neighborhoods have diversified.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, the city's elite specialized high schools, the most notable of which are Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science, have disproportionately low and declining black and Hispanic admission rates. Admission to the eight specialized schools is determined by performance on the Specialized High School Admissions Test, a lengthy multiple-choice exam.<sup>10</sup> In 2015, only 4.1 percent of specialized high school admitted students were black and 6.1 percent were Hispanic.<sup>11</sup> In 2012, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education claiming racial bias in the specialized high school admissions process.<sup>12</sup> Rejecting previous efforts to replace the multiple choice exam with a multiple-measures admissions model,<sup>13</sup> state legislators and city officials offered improved test preparation to students from underrepresented middle schools and other modest initiatives to improve access to the specialized high schools in 2015.<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, a number of community advocates have raised awareness of the problem of school segregation and have pushed the New York City Department of Education to enact better policies to encourage school diversity. In October 2015, with support from NYC Councilmen Brad Lander and Ritchie Torres, grassroots activists and advocacy organizations—including IntegrateNYC4me (a Bronx-based student and teacher group), Middle School Parents for Equity, and NY Appleseed—joined with a handful of Community Education Council members and local politicians to present NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña a set of seven recommendations to desegregate NYC schools. These recommendations included formalizing a commitment to diversity, changing school admissions policies and collaborating on new enrollment systems.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this mounting pressure from community organizations and local leaders, Department of Education leadership has largely resisted any commitment to the politically contentious work of systematically revamping neighborhood school zones or the admissions policies that have contributed to citywide school segregation. NYC Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña was criticized in October 2015<sup>16</sup> for declaring, “You don’t need to have diversity within one building,” as well as promoting a pen-pal system between students attending segregated schools as a racial integration remedy.<sup>17</sup> Several months later, Fariña named school diversity as one of her top priorities and said she hoped to see solutions to NYC school segregation develop “organically” and not from central mandates.<sup>18</sup>

## The Current Plan

While systemic progress has been slow, New York City officials, lawmakers, and community leaders have begun to take some smaller steps to support school integration.

- **Pilot Admissions Program.** New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña have promoted a modest set of innovations developed by school and community leaders to support desegregation efforts, including allowing schools to pilot enrollment practices and lottery systems that reserve a specific percentage of seats for incoming students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, are classified as English Language Learners, or are in the child welfare system.<sup>19</sup> This policy experiment, first extended in November 2015 to seven elementary schools whose leadership had advocated for this change, was expanded in Spring 2016 to any NYC school that wished to apply.
- **Rezoning.** The Department of Education also attempted to rezone a handful of elementary schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn as a solution to overcrowding and in promotion of better diversity across schools. While rezoning discussions continue in Manhattan’s District 3, the rezoning proposal for two schools in Brooklyn’s District 13 were approved in early 2016 with mixed results: P.S. 307, which currently enrolls

a student body that is roughly 90 percent black and Latino and 75 percent low-income, stands to become more diverse; but nearby P.S. 8, where two-thirds of students were white or Asian and just 14 percent were low-income, will likely become more affluent and less racially diverse.<sup>20</sup>

- **Controlled Choice Student Assignment Plans.**

In addition, in 2015, New York State awarded eight NYC high-poverty schools federal Socioeconomic Integration Pilot Program grants of \$1.25 million to increase diversity and improve admissions practices.<sup>21</sup> Relatedly, local leadership in Districts 1 and 3 in Manhattan, and District 13 in Brooklyn, have been working to design and propose new controlled-choice student-assignment plans to desegregate schools within each district.<sup>22</sup>

- **Diversity Reporting.** Also in 2015, city lawmakers passed the School Diversity Accountability Act, requiring the department to regularly report out demographic data and progress towards diversity at the school and district levels.<sup>23</sup> The first report issued in December 2015 highlighted modest progress made under multiple strategies, from promoting dual-language programming to removing academic screening at middle schools to setting up homeless student support centers.<sup>24</sup>

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

It is too soon to gauge what impact the new pilot admissions program, and still emerging rezoning and controlled choice student assignment plans, will have on school diversity. However, early evidence indicates that some progress has been made in diversifying the incoming classes at the initial pilot schools.<sup>25</sup> The seven pilot schools met or exceeded almost all of their admissions offer targets.<sup>26</sup> One of those schools, The Academy of Arts and Letters in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, expected a nearly four-fold increase in the percentage of incoming kindergarten students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. The Castle Bridge School in

northern Manhattan fell three points short of its ten percent target for students of incarcerated parents, though school leadership expressed confidence this shortfall would be quickly overcome.<sup>27</sup>

“I’m very pleased with the direction we’re heading in,” said Amanda Wiss, a Brooklyn District 13 resident and Arts & Letters parent. “Building our commitment to diversity, understanding not everyone is like you is really critical to becoming a respectful, caring community. It’s how kids begin to learn about each other, care about each other, it just becomes routine.”

## Next Steps

In a July 2016 interview with Politico New York, Fariña expressed a willingness to address racial inequality in NYC Schools as “the elephant in the room” and pledged that diversity would be a major focus of her leadership over the coming year.<sup>28</sup> In September 2016, Fariña said these efforts would include broader attention to school rezoning and aggressive public engagement. “I get resistance to a lot of things,” the Chancellor stated. “The idea is to have a moral compass and then go out there, and sell it, sell it and sell it.”<sup>29</sup>

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# Stamford Public Schools: From Desegregated Schools to Integrated Classrooms

OCTOBER 14, 2016 – HALLEY POTTER

Located in southwestern Connecticut, about forty miles from New York City, Stamford is a relatively diverse community located in an affluent state and region. Median household income for the city's 129,000 residents is roughly \$77,000—slightly above the state average but only about half that of neighboring Greenwich. Ten percent of the population is living at or below the poverty line. And in a state that is 71 percent white, only 53 percent of Stamford residents are white.<sup>1</sup>

Enrollment in Stamford Public Schools reflects this diversity. In the 2015–16 school year, the district enrolled roughly 16,000 students. Of those, 40 percent were Hispanic, 32 percent white, 18 percent black, 9 percent Asian, and 2 percent two or more races. Just over half (52 percent) of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, 13 percent of students were English language learners, and 12 percent of students had special needs.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast with many northeastern cities, Stamford has shown remarkable success maintaining racially and socioeconomically desegregated schools thanks to strong district policies and state laws that date back to the 1960s and 1970s. Over the past decade, the district has also

committed to integrating classrooms through de-tracking and successfully reduced achievement gaps while increasing overall test scores.

## History of School Integration Efforts in Stamford

Stamford's progress promoting diversity and equity in public schools over the past fifty years is the result of at least three different efforts: a state law that reinforced the goal of racial integration, district policies to desegregate schools in the 1960s and 1970s, and the district's push for de-tracking in the late 2000s.

### *Connecticut's Racial Imbalance Law*

In 1969, Connecticut enacted a law requiring all public schools to be racially balanced, falling within a defined range of district average enrollment of minority students.<sup>3</sup> And after a delay of eleven years, the state issued regulations for implementing the law in 1980.<sup>4</sup> Several other states passed similar laws over the years—including California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania—but Connecticut's law is one of the strongest and is still in place.<sup>5</sup>

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/stamford-public-schools/>

In its current form, the law requires each district in the state to report the racial composition of the teaching staff and the percentage of minority (non-white, non-Hispanic) students and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in each of its schools. Any school in which minority enrollment is more than 25 percentage points above or below the district average for those grade levels is deemed “racially imbalanced,” and schools that fall outside a 15 percentage point range from the district average are cited for “impending racial imbalance.” Districts must submit plans for addressing the imbalance, which are approved and monitored by the state.<sup>6</sup>

While Stamford’s desegregation efforts predate this law and are more robust, the state context further supports and justifies the district’s policies.

### *Desegregating Stamford Schools*

Stamford began voluntarily racially desegregating schools in the early 1960s. In 1962, Stamford’s Board of Education developed a plan to desegregate the district’s two high schools. Then in 1967–1968, the board created a new attendance plan to desegregate middle schools. Finally, in 1972, the board voted unanimously for a new policy to integrate all schools in the district, including elementary schools, by setting a goal of having the percentage of minority students at each school fall within plus or minus 10 percentage points of the district average. The district was to achieve this goal by regularly reviewing and adjusting school attendance zones and creating magnet schools that could draw students from multiple neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

A 1977 report by the Connecticut Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found that the Stamford Board of Education had successfully developed and implemented plans to create racial balance in schools. The report credited the board, school staff, and community members for committing to the goals of integration.<sup>8</sup> While the NAACP’s efforts monitoring school segregation in Stamford helped to spur initial school desegregation efforts, district leaders actively carried this work forward. Perhaps as a result of this strong district leadership, school integration in

Stamford was a relatively smooth political process, with no sizable pattern of white flight from the district.<sup>9</sup>

Stamford’s communities of color, however, were not well represented in these early discussions that shaped desegregation policies. District leaders and school staff in Stamford were largely white, and the district’s efforts to engage the local community in this process focused mostly on white residents.<sup>10</sup> Already in 1977, the Advisory Committee’s report noted that the underrepresentation of minority leadership, staff, and teachers was “one of the most serious problems in the school system” and pointed out ways that students of color were receiving lower-quality instruction than white peers in the same schools.<sup>11</sup> However, it would take until thirty years later for the school district to prioritize engaging communities of color and addressing within-school inequities.

### *De-tracking Classes*

Stamford has a long history of tracking students based on performance into different levels for core academic classes. In the early 1960s, middle schoolers in the district were sorted into fifteen different groups based on ability. When the board passed a plan to desegregate middle schools in the late 1960s, Stamford reduced the number of tracks to four but made no other efforts to address racial or economic stratification within these groups.<sup>12</sup>

Already in the 1970s, experts advised Stamford of the harmful effects of this system. The 1977 Advisory Committee report highlighted academic tracking as an impediment to equity in the district. “Ability grouping as it now operates tends to resegment the school system and reinforce feelings of inadequacy in minority students in the middle and high schools,” the Committee concluded. “To the extent that it is educationally feasible, the school board should take steps to eliminate ability grouping at all educational levels.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, by the time that Joshua Starr became superintendent of Stamford Public Schools in 2005—nearly three decades later—tracking in the district had only grown more entrenched. When Starr arrived in Stamford, middle schools in the district had four or five academic tracks.

Students were assigned to tracks at the beginning of their sixth grade year based on a numerical score derived from a number of different standardized tests. They stayed in that group for all subjects, for the entire year, and usually throughout all of middle school. Students who had been in lower tracks in middle school typically ended up in lower-level courses in high school. Some elementary schools had also begun separating students out by reading group levels starting in third grade.<sup>14</sup>

Starr made de-tracking the central policy goal of his tenure. “I knew that the major issue facing the district was the tracking of students,” he reflected. “I knew from day one that that was the work, and I started laying the groundwork for it.”<sup>15</sup> Starr began highlighting student achievement data that clearly showed black and Hispanic students in the district were not receiving the same quality education as their white and Asian peers. He framed de-tracking as part of a bigger effort to improve teaching and learning. “It was about whether all kids were getting the instruction they needed to be prepared for the 21st century.”<sup>16</sup> During the first few years of Starr’s leadership, the district began a major teacher training initiative to improve instruction in core subjects and equip teachers with the tools to differentiate their lessons, reaching students with different skill levels.<sup>17</sup>

Whereas communities of color were often missing from the school desegregation discussions of the 1960s and 1970s, Starr made a concerted effort to reach out to the black and Latino community. Many parents and community members who had never come to school board meetings before showed up to listen to and participate in the discussions about de-tracking. At one school board meeting, several Stamford teachers who had also been students in Stamford talked about how they had been tracked, how terrible it was for them as students, and how much they hated it as teachers.<sup>18</sup>

By 2009, the district had created the instructional capacity, and Starr had built the political support, needed to tackle the issue. Starr recalls that during his fourth year with the district, when he announced in his opening day speech, “We

are going to eliminate tracking this year,” that “people stood up and applauded, which had never happened before.”<sup>19</sup> Stamford began reducing the number of academic tracks and creating pathways to move more students into high-level courses.<sup>20</sup> In 2010, the GE Foundation gave Stamford a grant of \$10.5 million dollars, adding to an earlier award of \$15.3 million, with continuing de-tracking efforts as one of the specific projects to be funded.<sup>21</sup>

## The Current Plan

As a result of these efforts spanning five decades, Stamford currently has a robust policy to desegregate schools and a number of efforts in place to integrate classrooms by reducing academic tracking.

### *Integrating Schools*

In 2007, in response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools*, which limited school districts’ ability to consider students’ individual race in school assignments, Stamford revised its integration policy to be based on educational need rather than race.<sup>22</sup> Under the current policy, Stamford sets a goal for all schools in the district to fall within plus or minus 10 percentage points of the district average enrollment of disadvantaged students (defined as students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, English language learners, and students living in income-restricted housing).<sup>23</sup> The district achieves this goal by frequently reexamining attendance boundaries for neighborhood schools and weighting magnet school lotteries by both educational disadvantage (balancing the percentage of disadvantaged students at each school) and geographic zone (allowing preference for students from certain zones where neighborhood schools are overenrolled or imbalanced).<sup>24</sup>

### *Integrating Classrooms*

Under Starr’s leadership, Stamford eliminated ability grouping in elementary school classes; replaced the middle school system of five rigid tracks with a system of two flexible levels, allowing students to enroll in different levels for different subjects and move into the higher level mid-year;

and created open access to honors and AP classes in high school.<sup>25</sup> The district is continuing to work on moving more middle and high school students into higher level classes.<sup>26</sup>

## Impact on Integration and Student Outcomes

Stamford has met its integration goal for a majority of its schools and has also succeeded in increasing representation of minority students in high-level classes, boosting overall academic achievement, and reducing achievement gaps.

### *Diversity in Schools and Classrooms*

In the 2015–2016 school year, eighteen of Stamford’s twenty schools fell within the 10 percentage point goal for enrollment of disadvantaged students (with 54 percent of students qualifying as disadvantaged district-wide).<sup>27</sup> The two schools that missed the goal were each 14 percentage points below the district average, and one of those schools made progress compared to the previous year in getting closer to the district average.<sup>28</sup> All Stamford schools also met the state desegregation standard for enrolling minority students in 2015–2016. Statewide that year, five schools were cited for racial imbalance and twenty-six schools were cited for impending racial imbalance.<sup>29</sup>

Stamford has also seen an increase in racial diversity in high-level courses as a result of de-tracking efforts. From 2010 to 2014, the percentage of Stamford’s black and Hispanic students taking AP courses doubled, from 11 percent of black students and 22 percent of Hispanic students taking AP course in 2010 to 29 percent of black students and 43 percent of Hispanic students in 2014 (see Figure 1). (While encouraging, these rates still lag far behind white and Asian students.)

### *Academic Achievement*

Stamford has also shown strong academic achievement while meeting its integration goals. As of fall 2015, Stamford had the highest overall academic performance out of the five largest school districts in Connecticut, and low-income students in the district performed above the state average.<sup>30</sup>

Most notably, since Stamford began work on de-tracking and curricular reform, achievement gaps between student subgroups have decreased at the same time that achievement across all groups has increased. Between 2006 and 2013, the percentage of white and Asian students passing state math, reading, and writing exams in grades 3–8 grew by a few percentage points, while the percentage of black and Hispanic students passing state tests rose dramatically. Accordingly, the achievement gap for grades 3–8 between the highest achieving racial subgroup (Asian students) and lowest-achieving racial subgroup (black students) fell by one-third in reading and math, with a modest decrease in writing as well (see Figure 2). Similarly, both low-income students and middle-class students were more likely to pass the state eighth grade math, reading, and writing tests in 2013 than in 2006, while the gap in achievement between the two groups also fell across all three subjects (see Figure 3).

Stamford also saw an increase in graduation rates for all student subgroups by race/ethnicity and by free and reduced-price lunch eligibility from 2010 to 2013. Over that period of time, the gap in graduation rates between the racial/ethnic group with the highest rate (Asian students in 2010, and white students in 2013) and the group with the lowest rate (Hispanic students) fell from 22 percentage points to 14 percentage points. Likewise, the gap in the graduation rates of students eligible for free lunch versus non-eligible students fell from 12 percentage points to 9 percentage points.<sup>31</sup>

While these gaps in student performance are still sizable, Stamford is making progress in closing them.

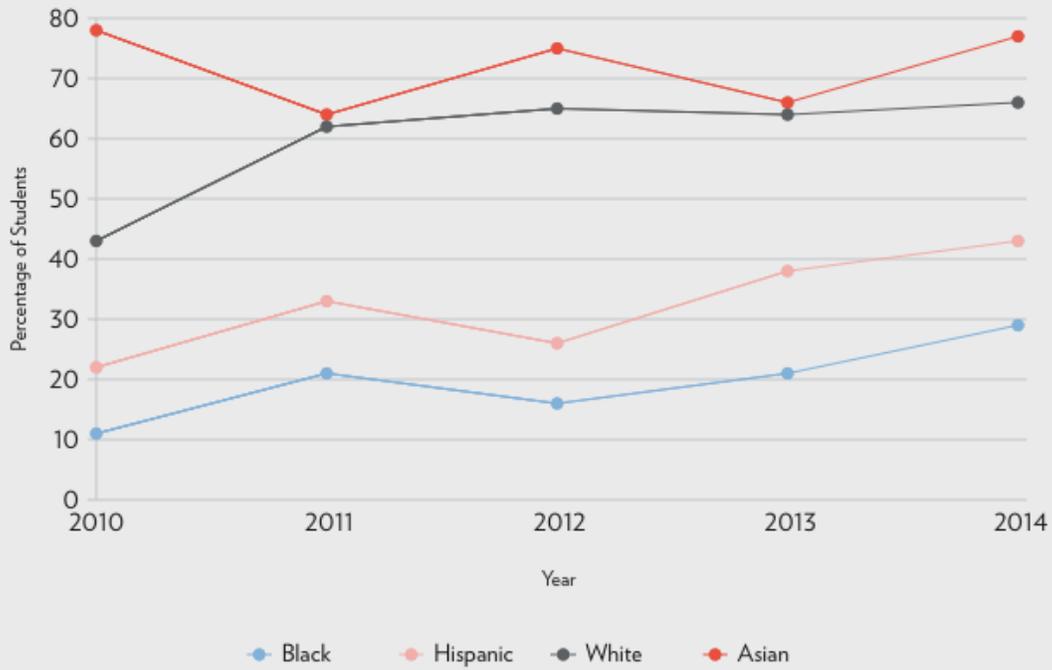
## Lessons for Other Districts

Stamford’s efforts to desegregate schools and integrate classrooms point to several lessons for other school districts and state policymakers.

### *Having a Measurable Goal for Integration Is Powerful.*

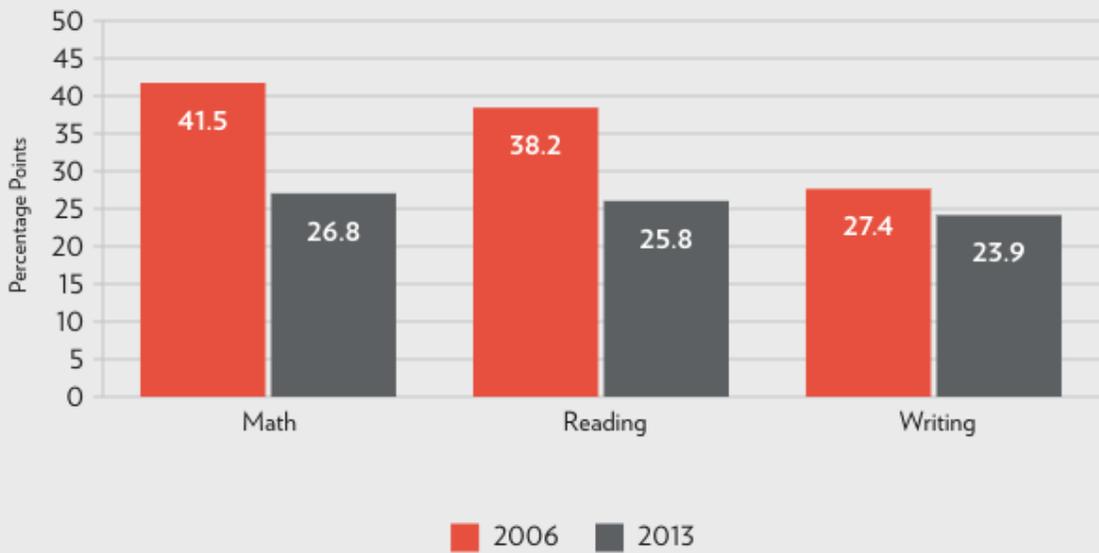
Stamford’s policy of having all schools fall within 10

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF STAMFORD PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS TAKING AP COURSES



Source: Michael Fernandes, "Upward Bound and POD Presentation," Stamford Public Schools, September 9, 2015, [http://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/sites/stamfordps/files/uploads/upward\\_bound\\_and\\_pod\\_presentation\\_9-11-15.pdf](http://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/sites/stamfordps/files/uploads/upward_bound_and_pod_presentation_9-11-15.pdf), p. 9.

FIGURE 2. SIZE OF RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN STAMFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
Grades 3-8

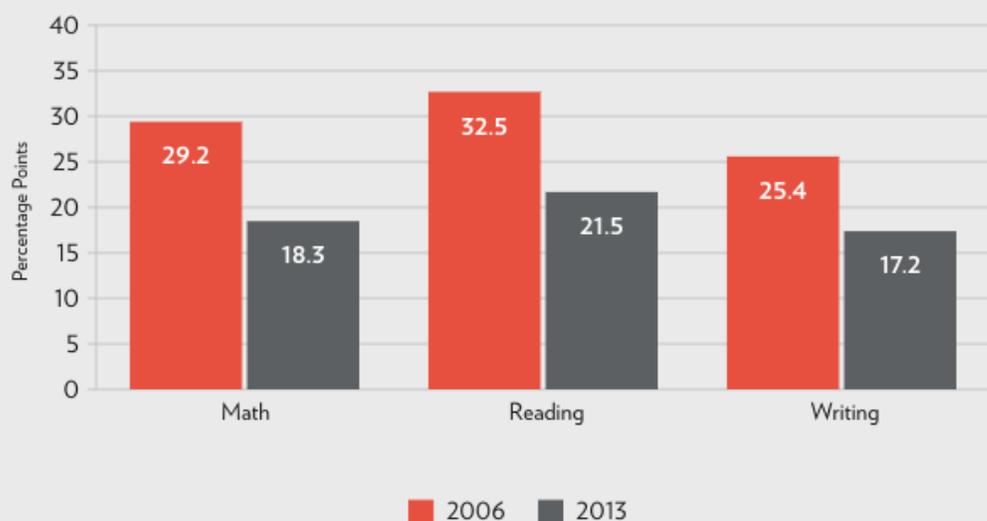


Note: The racial achievement gap is calculated as the percentage point difference in the proportion of students scoring proficient or above on state standardized tests in the highest-scoring racial group (Asian students) versus the lowest-scoring racial group (black students).

Source: Winifred Hamilton, "Presentation to Senior Men's Association of Stamford," Stamford Public Schools, June 20, 2014, [http://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/sites/stamfordps/files/uploads/062014\\_senior\\_mens\\_assoc\\_of\\_stamford.pdf](http://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/sites/stamfordps/files/uploads/062014_senior_mens_assoc_of_stamford.pdf), p. 8-13.

FIGURE 3. SIZE OF ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN STAMFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Grade 8



Note: The economic achievement gap is calculated as the percentage point difference in the proportion of students scoring proficient or above on state standardized tests among non-eligible (middle-class) students versus students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (low-income students).

Source: Connecticut CMT and CAPT Online Reports, Public Summary Performance Reports, Connecticut Master Test, 4th Generation, <http://ctreports.com/>.

percentage points of the district average for enrollment of disadvantaged students (and earlier, minority students) helped ensure that district leaders and the school board would push forward the enrollment policies needed to create more integrated schools. “Having that hard and fast rule was really powerful,” Starr reflected. The 10 percent rule not only kept the district accountable for enrollment policies but also served as a broader statement of the district’s commitment to equity that Starr leveraged to promote within-school integration. “It enabled us to push on tracking in ways that I might not have been able to if I didn’t have that 10 percent rule.”<sup>32</sup>

### *De-tracking Classes Is an Issue of Equity and Quality.*

Stamford’s experience demonstrates that desegregating schools is not enough; equity and excellence require integrating classrooms and ensuring that students of all backgrounds have access to rigorous coursework. The

district approached the work of de-tracking classes as a question of integration but also as an issue of improving instruction across the board, and Stamford’s success in improving performance for all subgroups while reducing achievement gaps reflects that commitment.

### *State Context Matters.*

The success of Stamford’s school integration efforts is part of a bigger trend across the state. A 2015 report from the Civil Rights Project found that Connecticut as a whole has made significant progress integrating schools over the past three decades, in contrast with neighboring New York and Massachusetts.<sup>33</sup>

Connecticut’s Racial Imbalance Law—and enforcement of that law—is one of the tools that has enabled the state to make progress on integrating schools in recent decades. In racially diverse districts like Stamford, the state law provides a lever for making districts work to keep schools

from becoming racially isolated. However, the segregation between Connecticut districts is an even greater problem than the segregation within them, as is the case nationwide.<sup>34</sup> While Stamford has enough diversity within district boundaries to create socioeconomically and racially diverse schools, the demographics of some the neighboring school districts in the metro area surrounding Stamford illustrate this disparity. For example, Bridgeport is a high-poverty district where all students now receive free lunch through the Community Eligibility Provision of the school meals program, whereas New Canaan has not offered the free and reduced-price meals program at all since 2005, after only sixteen of the district's roughly 4,000 students qualified for the program that year.<sup>35</sup>

While the Racial Imbalance Law does not address inter-district segregation, a 1996 Connecticut Supreme Court ruling does. The court found in *Sheff v. O'Neill* that the racial isolation of black and Hispanic students in Hartford Public Schools, in contrast with the mostly white suburban school districts that surrounded the city, was unconstitutional.<sup>36</sup> A subsequent settlement provided an inter-district integration plan for the Hartford region based on voluntary school choice, and some inter-district transfer programs and magnet schools exist in other areas across the state as well.<sup>37</sup> Expanding these inter-district integration efforts across the state is essential for addressing the extreme segregation that remains between many Connecticut school districts. The next step for promoting integration in Stamford is to augment within-district efforts with more inter-district efforts.

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It is difficult to compare performance in these three charter schools to that of Stamford's district schools. Two of these schools have low standardized test scores and graduation rates but specifically serve students who struggled in traditional school environments—Trailblazers Academy in grades 6–8, and Stamford Academy in grades 9–12. The third school, Stamford Charter School for Excellence, is a new school that as of fall 2016 only serves students in grades pre-K through 2, so no standardized test scores are available yet.

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