



Creating a Federal Funding Stream to Help Diversify Public Schools

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A vast body of research on racial and socioeconomic integration¹ has led to a consensus among scholars and researchers: integrated schools are beneficial for all people.² On average, students in socioeconomically and racially diverse schools—regardless of a student’s own economic status—have stronger academic outcomes than students who attend racially isolated schools with concentrated poverty. They have higher test scores, are less likely to drop out of school, and are more likely to enroll in college.

Importantly, research has shown that all students, not just disadvantaged students, benefit from attending integrated schools, in ways that go beyond test scores. Racially and socioeconomically diverse classrooms can help reduce racial bias and counter stereotypes, improve students’ critical thinking and problem solving skills, and encourage students to seek out integrated settings later in life. As privatization schemes are on the rise, diverse schools also play a vital role in strengthening the health of our democracy and bolstering the future of public education by increasing civic engagement and spreading the message that we are all political equals.³

But while the benefits of integration and harms of segregation are clear, America’s schools are by many measures more segregated now than they have been in decades. According to a 2016 report from the Government Accountability Office, the percentage of schools in which 75–100 percent of students were low-income and black or Hispanic grew from 9 percent to 16 percent between 2000–01 and 2013–14.⁴

Since 1965, the federal government has acknowledged the need to provide extra support for schools that face the challenge of concentrated poverty through Title I funding, which in fiscal year 2018 amounts to \$15.8 billion, making it the largest federal K–12 spending program. But while Title I plays an important role in helping address the educational needs of low-income students, it has not been enough to close achievement gaps.⁵ On the National Assessment for Educational Progress, race-based achievement gaps have seen only slight narrowing in recent years, and socioeconomic achievement gaps have been stagnant since the mid-1990s.⁶ Low-income students score multiple years of learning behind their higher-income peers. Research finds that money matters in education, but it is insufficient without integration and equity in schools.⁷

While maintaining a commitment to support high-poverty schools, the federal government should do more to address the root problem of segregation and foster efforts to create and sustain integrated public schools.

Congress can encourage state- and locally-led efforts to integrate schools by making the following investments:

- + Fund states to develop programs similar to one in New York State⁸ that identify the most segregated districts in their state and offer those districts (and charter school operators within the districts) funding and professional development to support the creation and implementation

of integration strategies such as controlled choice enrollment plans or attendance zone changes.⁹

+ Create a new grant program for consortia of districts or charter schools to develop and implement interdistrict integration efforts, along the lines of the Strength in Diversity Act introduced by Senator Chris Murphy and Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge.¹⁰

+ Double federal funding for magnet schools and strengthen the federal Magnet School Assistance Program requirements regarding desegregation. Magnet schools can advance integration by drawing students from across geographic areas, factoring diversity into their admissions lotteries, and selecting themes to appeal to a broad range of families.

At a time when American democratic values and public education are threatened, it is important to lift up and strengthen public schools that are serving our democracy well. Some communities¹¹ have already begun work to integrate their schools.¹² TCF has identified 100 districts and charter schools that are taking conscious steps to promote racial and socioeconomic diversity.¹³ But significant political and legal impediments stand in the way of achieving integrated schooling. Federal support is needed to maintain this momentum and accelerate local and state work across the country.

Notes

1 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/>.

2 "The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms," The Century Foundation, February 10, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/facts/the-benefits-of-socioeconomically-and-racially-integrated-schools-and-classrooms/>.

3 Richard D. Kahlenberg and Clifford Janey, "Putting Democracy Back into Public Education," The Century Foundation, November 10, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/putting-democracy-back-public-education/>.

4 "K-12 Education: Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination," U.S. Government Accountability Office, April 21, 2016, <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-345>.

5 Andrew Ujifusa, "See the New Federal Education Budget Signed Into Law by Donald Trump," Education Week, October 1, 2018, <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/10/donald-trump-education-spending-increase-second-straight-year.html>.

6 Michael Hansen, Elizabeth Levesque, Jon Valant, and Diana Quintero, "2018 Brown Center Report on American Education: Trends in NAEP math, reading, and civics scores," Brookings Institution, June 27, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/2018-brown-center-report-on-american-education-trends-in-naep-math-reading-and-civics-scores/>.

7 Heather Schwartz, "Housing Policy Is School Policy," The Century Foundation, October 16, 2010, <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/housing-policy-is-school-policy/>.

8 "New York State Education Department Announces \$1.4 Million in Grants Available to Support School Integration Efforts," New York State Education Department, January 10, 2018, <http://www.nysed.gov/news/2018/new-york-state-education-department-announces-14-million-grants-available-support-school>.

9 Kimberly Quick, "How to Achieve Socioeconomic Integration in Schools," The Century Foundation, April 15, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/facts/achieve-socioeconomic-integration-schools/>.

10 "Murphy, Fudge Introduce Legislation to Increase Diversity in Schools," Office of Senator Chris Murphy, September 6, 2018, <https://www.murphy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/murphy-fudge-introduce-legislation-to-increase-diversity-in-schools>.

11 Richard D. Kahlenberg, "School Integration in Practice: Lessons from Nine Districts," The Century Foundation, October 14, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/school-integration-practice-lessons-nine-districts/>.