

Research Brief

School Integration and K-12 Educational Outcomes: A Quick Synthesis of Social Science Evidence

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How do K-12 school diversity initiatives support school reform and contribute to increasing student academic achievement?

Teachers, curricula, and pedagogy are essential components of opportunities to learn, but they are not the only important ones. The social organization of schools and classrooms also contributes to the quality of educational experiences. Whether a school is racially and socioeconomically (SES) diverse or segregated makes a critical difference for K-12 achievement across the curriculum: Students who attend racially and socioeconomically diverse schools are more likely to achieve higher test scores and better grades, to graduate from high school, and to attend and graduate from college compared with their otherwise comparable counterparts who attend schools with high concentrations of low-income and/or disadvantaged minority youth. The preponderance of high quality social science research published since the late 1980s is clear and consistent regarding these effects of school racial and SES composition on K-12 educational outcomes.¹ Other specific findings include:

- Attending a diverse school promotes achievement in mathematics, science, language and reading.

- Achievement benefits accrue to students in all grades, but most markedly those in middle and high schools.
- Students from all racial and SES backgrounds can benefit from diverse schools—including middle-class whites—although low-income disadvantaged youth benefit the most from attending diverse schools.²
- Importantly, there is no evidence that integrated schooling harms any student group.

Moreover, diverse K-12 schools foster other positive outcomes that are integral links in the adult life-course trajectory. In addition to achievement, the positive short-term outcomes of K-12 schooling include:

- A reduction in prejudice and fears.
- increases in cross-racial trust and friendships.
- enhanced capacity for multicultural navigation.

These benefits foster highly desirable long-term outcomes for adults such as:

- greater educational and occupational attainment.
- workplace readiness for the global economy.

1 The results of the literature survey presented here are archived in a searchable database at: <http://sociology.uncc.edu/people/rmickelson/spivackFrameset.html>. This research is supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the American Sociological Association, and the Poverty and Race Research Action Council.

2 The evidence of academic benefits is weakest for Asian and Latino immigrant students who appear to benefit from attending school with their coethnics, most likely because of language issues.

- adult cross-racial friendships.
- choice of integrated neighborhoods;
- democratic values and attitudes.
- avoidance of the criminal justice system.

These long-term outcomes help build civic capacity in communities and are essential building blocks of social cohesion, a quality increasingly vital to a vigorous multiethnic, democratic society.

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For more information on the National Coalition on School Diversity, go to www.school-diversity.org