

## How Colleges and Universities Can Promote K-12 Diversity: A Modest Proposal

by Julius Chambers, John Charles Boger, and William Tobin

Today, court-supervised desegregation at the K-12 level is encountering an array of serious impediments. Indeed, some 50 years after *Brown*, very few legal or compulsory means remain to ensure that our nation's schools remain racially and economically diverse. Unless school boards can be shown to be acting intentionally to promote segregation by race, federal courts have no constitutional tools to compel school authorities to provide racially diverse educational environments. Freed from judicial oversight, many local school boards and districts

are currently opting for student assignment policies that lead inexorably to racial and economic isolation. And while the portion of the Supreme Court's recent majority opinion in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* authored by Justice Kennedy suggests that challenging racial and economic isolation at the K-12 level may constitute a compelling interest, the Court's closely divided ruling likely will discourage most school districts from using race and ethnicity in current and future student assignment programs.

The developing consequences of these new legal and institutional patterns are clear: According to a report by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, in 2006 51% of all African-American students in the Northeast, 46% in Border states, 42% in the Midwest and 30% in the South now attend schools that are 90-100% minority. Ironically, in districts like Jefferson County, Kentucky and Seattle, Washington, where school boards opted for integrated public schools, disgruntled white parents have alleged that these choices designed to maintain public school integration violate the Fourteenth Amendment.

In this environment, it is not surprising that parents of school-age children are increasingly raising questions

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about the benefits of integrated public schools at the K-12 level. Many parents whose prime concern is helping their children gain admission to our nation's best colleges have made secondary school choices largely on the basis of what they perceive these colleges want. Convinced that colleges and universities are primarily concerned about high academic achievement and that diversity and high academic standards are incompatible, many families have spurned diverse high schools. Parents who appreciate the value of diversity would gladly send their children to an inclusive high school if they believed their child's access to the college of their choice would be "protected." Many African-American parents find themselves in a different kind of dilemma: Their children are frequently trapped in grossly inferior segregated schools. In most cases, high-achieving schools that are racially and economically diverse are simply not available for their children.

## An Opportunity for Elite Colleges and Universities

As interest in integration has waned within our federal courts, few voices in American civil society have emerged to champion the cause of in-

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tegrated public schools. In the *Grutter* and *Gratz* cases in 2003, however, the nation's elite colleges and universities came forward in numerous friend-of-the Court briefs to assert their ongoing interest in racially diverse learning environments. We are convinced that these schools have not only the knowledge, but the tools, the self-interest and the moral authority to help ensure that America's public secondary schools remain economically and racially integrated.

Our selective universities have an extraordinary, implicit power, in their

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### **America's elite colleges and universities have a unique opportunity to re-order parental priorities.**

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own admissions policies, to influence the kinds of educational choices parents demand for their children. For the past two years, we have been working with college administrators, scholars, university general counsels and higher-education organizations to explore the viability and promise of awarding an admissions advantage to academically qualified college applicants who have attended a high school with demonstrated capacity to prepare a racially inclusive student body for college *and* who have personally demonstrated the ability to compete, cooperate in this diverse educational setting. Over the long term, we believe that providing an admissions advantage to such high schools and students can critically shift the current calculus of millions of parents, and can encourage the creation of more high schools that are both inclusive and academically rigorous high schools capable of producing graduates who may be thought of as agents of diversity, first in our college communities and later in our nation's communities.

The higher-education community knows well that diversity and excellence can co-exist. Indeed, the *amici curiae* briefs submitted by colleges and universities in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the

University of Michigan case, indicate that diversity is an appropriate goal in the field of higher education. The Supreme Court's decision in *Grutter* illustrates how authoritative the higher-education community can be on questions of diversity. Justice O'Connor explained in her majority decision in *Grutter* that the university's "educational judgment that such diversity is essential to its educational mission is one to which we defer."

Colleges and universities can help parents appreciate the value of individual accomplishments achieved in an environment that mirrors and does not elide the diverse character of our society. For parents who wish to send their children to diverse high schools, but are afraid that racially mixed schools might have lower statewide testing results, colleges and universities can help address these fears by making it clear that they too attach great value to schools that reflect the make-up of present-day America. For parents in failing schools that are racially and economically segregated, colleges and universities can send the message that their children have not been forgotten. If those parents who acquiesce in racially isolated public schools are motivated largely by their desire to improve the chances of their children to attend the colleges of their choice, and if they now believe that a homogeneous secondary education is likely to be more rigorous and/or safe for their children, America's elite colleges and universities have a unique opportunity, by acting upon their own deepest values, to abate those tensions and re-order parental priorities.

## Our Approach

We have used Justice Powell's holding in *Bakke*—which the *Grutter* Court recognized as the "touchstone for constitutional analysis of race admissions policies"—as a starting point for our efforts to move this initiative forward. Powell wrote that "race or ethnic background may be deemed a 'plus' factor in the context of a flex-  
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ible and individualized consideration of each college applicant.” Looking to the future, Powell urged adoption of admissions criteria that are “often individual qualities or experiences not dependent on race, but sometimes associated with it.”

Our approach emphasizes collaboration. In an era in which top-down, judicially-mandated desegregation at the K-12 level is largely over, we are convinced that the greatest challenge—even for attorneys—is to develop voluntary and creative ways to ensure racial and economic integration at that level. Our first challenge was to devise a collaborative strategy that would energize and mobilize the higher-education community. We grappled with the challenge of building a social movement within the higher-education community and how best to bring about institutional change, both within individual institutions and across the higher-education community at large. While we realized that the participation of college presidents and chancellors would be critical, we also recognized that much preliminary work and relationship-building would be required before we approached these leaders. So we began close to home. We first talked with administrative officials at Duke University and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill—universities with which we are affiliated.

These conversations persuaded us that we should pursue a strategy that is simultaneously “bottom up” and “top down.” We should first build relationships with middle-level actors within universities, including undergraduate deans of arts and sciences, chief university diversity officers, university general counsels, education scholars and, of course, admissions directors. We believed these actors would have an institutional interest in this initiative, would be able to advocate for it within their institutions, and would ultimately be responsible for its implementation. Second, we focused on engaging university presidents/chancellors who—we hoped—would

## Nobel Peace Prize for Pete Seeger?

A petition campaign is under way to nominate folksinger/activist Pete Seeger for the Nobel Peace Prize. Individual and organizational signatures are being solicited—see <http://nobelprize4Pete.org> or contact Eleanor Walden (Eleanor@nobelprize4pete.org, 2951 Derby St., #140, Berkeley, CA 94705). Seeger’s lifelong (he will shortly be 90) activism on behalf of civil rights, peace and the environment are legendary. A 93-minute documentary, *Pete Seeger: The Power of Song*, recently opened in NYC. The laudatory *NY Times* review was illustrated with a 1957 photo of Seeger, standing with Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and Ralph David Abernathy in front of the Highlander Library (and the editor of *P&R* cannot resist noting that several years earlier, as part of summer project sponsored by the Unitarian-Universalist Assn., he helped build that library).

The April 17, 2006 *New Yorker* had a first-rate profile of Seeger—“The Protest Singer,” by Alex Wilkinson.

then publicly explore the viability of this initiative. We further believed that there would be productive synergy between these two approaches.

### Four Related Trajectories

We began to implement this strategy in September of 2006 when Julius Chambers formally introduced the initiative at the Politics of Inclusion Conference, a national gathering of college and university administrators held in Chapel Hill. We built on the momentum of his address by forging in-

***The greatest challenge is to develop voluntary, creative ways to ensure K-12 racial and economic integration.***

dividual relationships with admissions directors, diversity officers, general counsels, deans and provosts from colleges across the country. From these conversations we learned that (in addition to the moral appeal we were making) it was critical to emphasize how the presence of high school students with diverse experiences would directly benefit colleges and universities. In addition, these conversations convinced us that our strategy would be most effective if we targeted four

communities within the university world: admissions officials, who would implement this initiative; scholars—who could test the empirical assumptions that animate the initiative; university general counsels and other relevant attorneys—to consider the initiative’s legal viability and the limits of race-neutral programs; and, most importantly, presidents/chancellors, who would commit their institutions to this idea. Over the past months, we have coalesced four related and ongoing trajectories involving these groups. For this article, we focus on our work with college and university admissions directors across the country and, more briefly, efforts to engage college leaders.

### New Ideas in Undergraduate Admissions

After discussions with more than a dozen admissions directors in the Fall of 2006, in January of 2007 we convened a group of seven admissions directors representing selective private and public institutions to discuss the viability of our initiative. Soon after this meeting, the College Board—best known for the SAT, but which also sponsors meetings and colloquia that attract college officials throughout the country—expressed interest in co-sponsoring (with the UNC Center for Civil Rights) a meeting that would fur-

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ther develop the concept. More than 20 admissions officials from around the country—including those representing large public universities that are grappling with new state laws that limit the use of race in the admissions process—met in June of 2007.

Together, these meetings helped us refine our original idea, which was an “admissions plus” for simply attending a racially and economically diverse high school. The admissions officials encouraged us to focus on identifying: 1) qualities that would enable students to adeptly negotiate and enrich an inclusive educational setting, and 2) the characteristics of the environments where students would likely acquire these qualities—in most, but not all cases, high schools.

These insights led us to develop the concept of “diversity capital.” Diversity capital is an alternative way to conceptualize diversity in both high school and college settings. Diversity capital is analogous to “human capital” or “cultural capital.” It denotes the qualities, skills and life experiences that enable a student to communicate, cooperate, compete and achieve in a truly inclusive setting. While diversity capital is an attribute of individuals, it is experientially acquired, not ascriptively given. Students develop diversity capital. Put differently, diversity capital might be considered one form of cultural competence necessary to be successful in our contemporary democracy and globalized world.

From a social scientific perspective we would anticipate clear benefits of

diversity capital at both the individual and collective levels. Individual students who possess diversity capital and the qualities associated with it may display a range of improved outcomes both within and outside the classroom. Students with diversity capital might be expected to do better in a range of areas, both in high school and college. And the presence of a critical mass of students who possess this capital may advance the general educational mission of our colleges by serving as agents of engagement and inclusion. These, of course, are merely assumptions. We are now in the process of testing these assumptions with relevant national data.

There are a number of advantages to this focus on diversity capital. First,

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***Our plan is to create an “admissions plus” for simply attending a racially and economically diverse high school.***

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unlike many other admissions criteria—legacy status, for example—the ability to work cooperatively in an inclusive educational setting is a skill that is directly transferable to the college setting. Second, unlike athletic prowess, diversity capital would be an admissions criterion that would be relevant to all applicants. Potentially, all applicants could develop diversity capital. (Of course, the development of bridge-building skills—like the development of special music skills—would not be a *requirement* for all applicants in the type of individualized,

holistic review that most of our selective colleges now undertake.) Third, a focus on diversity capital would make this initiative race-neutral, even as its introduction would be undertaken with the knowledge that at present few white students who apply to our selective colleges and universities attend diverse high schools. Indeed, while the language is certainly race-neutral, the intent is also race-neutral. Conversations with a broad range of attorneys have convinced us that the knowledge that at present historically under-represented minority students are more likely to have these qualities—precisely because they are more likely to have attended a diverse school—does not make this merely a “proxy for race” and, thus, a policy requiring strict scrutiny by the courts. Finally, diversity capital might be used to complement quantitative data collected at the individual, school and, increasingly, at the neighborhood level—i.e., GPA, class rank and quantitative measures of the socio-economic make-up of the neighborhoods and high schools from which applicants are drawn.

How would diversity capital actually operate in the undergraduate admissions process? At one of our national meetings, an admissions director provided one vision of how this concept *might* be operationalized. He began by noting that every admissions initiative his college had designed to attract students who could enrich an inclusive educational environment on his campus had been “gamed”—mostly by parents, advisors and personal coaches. Typically, the family’s week-long vacation to the Dominican Republic, or Costa Rica, or Mexico had enabled the applicant to develop at once an appreciation for and familiarity with difference. He said that the idea of diversity capital would create a different set of incentives. Indeed, he went on to say that his college was prepared to give an admissions advantage—“a thumb on the scale”—to that student who: 1) attended a high-performing, inclusive diverse secondary school—a school, for example, in which the demographic profile of the college track resembled the profile of

## Thank\$

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the overall student body, and 2) demonstrated leadership or bridge-building qualities—one form of diversity capital. Under this policy, “gaming the system” would both produce more of the kinds of applicants this college desired as it challenged the increasing racial and economic isolation in our country. Indeed, according to another admissions director, our challenge is to proceed in a manner that links individual private gain with long-term public good.

## Engaging University Leaders

A related trajectory centers on our efforts to involve university leaders in our work. This past April, Chancellor James Moeser at UNC-Chapel Hill led a discussion at the American Association of Universities that focused on this initiative. He began the conversation by asking his fellow presidents and chancellors if our nation’s finest universities had a collective—as distinct from an institutional—responsibility to challenge increasing racial and economic isolation at the K-12 level.

### Resources

[www.law.unc.edu/centers/civilrights](http://www.law.unc.edu/centers/civilrights) (for more information on this initiative.)

[www.admission.umich.edu/process/index.html](http://www.admission.umich.edu/process/index.html) (The University of Michigan’s Admissions website—redeveloped in the wake of that state’s Proposition 2—is a model of transparency)

[www.collegeboard.com/diversitycollaborative](http://www.collegeboard.com/diversitycollaborative) (A wealth of information on admissions and the law in the wake of *Grutter* and *Gratz*.)

Lani Guinier, “Admissions Rituals as Political Acts: Guardians at the Gates of Our Democratic Institutions,” *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 117 (2003), 114-224.

Douglas Massey, et al., *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America’s Selective Colleges and Universities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. (A systematic study of college preparation, access and success for different racial and ethnic groups.)

## New on PRRAC’s Website

Two “shadow reports” to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:

*Unequal Health Outcomes in the United States* (submitted by a coalition of 25 health, civil rights and environmental organizations, and supported by leading public health researchers)

*Residential Segregation and Housing Discrimination in the United States* (prepared for PRRAC by volunteer lawyers at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson on behalf of a coalition of 16 housing and civil rights organizations and 28 academic researchers)

Both reports are available at [www.prrac.org/projects/CERD.php](http://www.prrac.org/projects/CERD.php)

The conversation that followed was far-ranging and passionate. Four critical points emerged. First, there was general agreement that this issue was directly relevant to the mission of our greatest public and private universities. The assembled presidents assumed that at a meeting of university presidents it was important to talk about racial and economic isolation at the K-12 level. Second, there was great pessimism about the future of integrated schooling, not only at K-12—and this was before the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Jefferson County and Seattle cases—but also at the higher-education level. One president predicted that “in the very near term the only integrated schools left will be the private academies that are very intentional in their admissions policies.” He was convinced that “we have lost integration altogether in the public schools.” Several presidents who are also law school graduates believed that the Supreme Court would soon reverse *Grutter*, given how quickly they are reversing elements of the *Roe* decision. Third, many of the assembled presidents stressed the necessity of developing new ideas. “We are losing affirmative action,” one Ivy League president noted. He continued: “It is soon going to be completely shut down in this country, either by the Supreme Court in a reversal of *Grutter*, or through a series of state-wide initiatives. We have to figure out how to work in a totally new environment.” Fourth, several presidents believed that an admissions “plus” for simply attending

a diverse high school was not a sufficiently nuanced instrument to address this problem. This reaction (along with our conversations with admissions officials) led to our present focus on individual qualities and school characteristics and development of the concept of diversity capital. We are actively engaged in finding ways to continue this conversation among the leaders of the higher-education community.

## Next Steps

In addition to continuing work on these trajectories, we intend to focus on extending this conversation to the K-12 sector. We began this work trying to gauge the interest of the higher-education community in our concept. We are now convinced that there is ample evidence of such interest. We now seek to engage leaders at the K-12 level. Indeed, the project cannot move forward without the active participation of these leaders. Specifically, in the coming months we seek to explore how to define a genuinely inclusive and high-performing high school; what individual qualities—and these presumably would vary depending on the mission, geography and make-up of the school—should be privileged; and how the relationship between school characteristics and individual qualities should be conceptualized.

We would welcome the suggestions and comments of *P&R* readers. □

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# Promoting School Diversity Commentaries

*The lead article in the Jan./Feb. 2008 P&R, by Julius Chambers, John Charles Boger and William Tobin, put forward a fascinating, imaginative and highly do-able proposal for creating incentives to make K-12 schools more diverse by convincing elite colleges to announce that applicants' prior education at a diverse school would count as an admissions plus. We asked a group of education experts to offer their comments on the proposal.*

## It Might Actually Work

by Pedro Noguera

Since the Supreme Court's ruling in *Parents v. Seattle Schools*, I have heard little more than anguish and frustration about this decision and its long-term implications. In fact, most of the legal analysis I have read describes it as the death knell for serious efforts to promote racial integration in our nation's schools. In an attempt at positive spin, one colleague at NYU Law School suggested that the conservative majority on the Supreme Court view matters pertaining to race in a manner that is not dissimilar to their stance on gays in the military: As long as districts don't say they are using race as a factor in school enrollment, the courts will not intervene. Such a strategy is hardly encouraging, given that the forces in opposition to affirmative action and school desegregation (i.e., Ward Connerly and the Pacific Legal Foundation, to cite just two of the better known opponents) appear to be closely monitoring the actions and policies of schools and universities on matters pertaining to racial inclusion.

It is against the backdrop of growing pessimism that I read and became genuinely excited about the strategy described by Chambers, Boger and Tobin. The article offers one of the few creative ideas on how to bring

about racial diversity in higher education that I have encountered in recent years. What sets their proposal apart from the others is that it might actually work. As the authors point out, several leaders in higher education (and in many elite prep schools) filed amici curiae briefs in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, and, unlike many public universities, most have not allowed the number of minority students they enroll to drop. Pushing them to go a step further by sending a clear signal to secondary schools (and to parents of high school seniors) that they not only value diversity but will give extra credit in the admissions process to students who attended diverse high schools may actually result in greater willingness to support racial inclusion in secondary schools. We know from past trends that the admissions policies of colleges and universities have had a trickle-down effect on high schools in other areas (e.g., AP enrollment, service learning, advanced math enrollment, etc.) Now the question is, can a similar approach be taken to further efforts to promote diversity in secondary schools? I think there is reason to believe it can.

Even before affirmative action policies and practices were challenged by the courts, and in some cases state propositions, colleges and universities across the country were faced with declining minority enrollments due to a "pipeline crisis." For several years, the number of high-achieving minority students eligible for admission to top universities has been decreasing. Many factors have contributed to this

decline, but perhaps the most important is the fact that African-American and Latino students are disproportionately concentrated in the lowest-performing schools. In many cases, such schools serve the poorest students with the greatest needs, and typically lack the resources (i.e., books, technology, certified teachers, advanced placement courses, etc.) to prepare these students adequately for college. In the absence of a plan to address gross inequity and de facto segregation in many of our nation's secondary schools, there is little hope that the trend toward declining minority enrollments will be reversed.

This is why the ideas put forward by Chambers, Boger and Tobin are so appealing. In the absence of legal mandates that protect the rights of school districts to promote racial inclusion, it may be that the only recourse available is to rely upon the leadership of elite universities to assert that greater diversity is a public good that should be valued and recognized in the admissions process. Of course, the main weakness with this idea is that it relies almost exclusively upon the goodwill and commitment of university and college presidents to remain supportive of efforts to retain some degree of diversity among their student populations. That may not comfort those who want more—legal mandates, bussing orders, consent decrees, etc. However, it doesn't seem likely that these strategies will return any time soon. In the meantime the kind of creativity captured in the Chambers et al. proposal may be our best bet. □

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# Some Possible Changes, Critics and Cautions

by john powell

The effort of Julius Chambers, Dean Jack Boger and William Tobin should be applauded. They are looking for a creative way to change the trajectory that has pointed toward both restricting diversity in higher education and increased racial isolation in K-12. Their effort should be engaged and experimented with on several fronts. I would like to use this response to suggest some possible changes, critics and cautions. There is some conflating of ideas in the article that is not useful. The article talks about diversity, integration and inclusion interchangeably. These concepts have related but important differences at a conceptual level and a pedagogical level. The article too quickly acquiesces to the most narrow view of where the country is and where it is going on issues of racial inclusion and integration. For example, their concept of diversity capital attempts to be race-neutral both in word and content in order to shield it from attacks by the Court and other detractors. As far as the Court is concerned, their effort is to adopt a plan that will not be subject to strict scrutiny. There are a number of problems with this approach, as the Court made clear in *Bakke* and reaffirmed with greater clarity and strength in *Grutter*: Using race can pass constitutional muster under strict scrutiny, acceptable under *Grutter*.

It is not clear than why there should be an effort to avoid race. In *Parents Involved...*, Justice Kennedy in his controlling opinion was clear that there is a compelling government interest in addressing racial isolation. In supporting these race-conscious approaches, Kennedy noted that in many efforts where racial goals are the aim, that does not automatically trigger strict scrutiny. He went on to say that,

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when not using the individual race of the student, "Executive and legislative branches...should be permitted to employ them with candor and with confidence that a constitutional violation does not occur whenever a decisionmaker considers the impact a given approach might have on students of different races."

In their effort to come up with a safe alternative, the authors concede too much too quickly. Of course, they could be right as to where the Court and the country are headed, but it is not clear. Remember that democratically-elected school boards in Seattle and Louisville opted for integration.

Diversity is important, but it does not do the same work as integration. The authors will need to be clear about when the goal is diversity and when it is integration or inclusion. The authors at times refer to the importance of democracy, as Justice O'Connor did in *Grutter* and Chief Justice Warren did in *Brown*. I would like to see some version of what they are suggesting more closely tied to democracy and the role of colleges. This does not detract from the importance of diversity, but, again, it is a related but different valence. Finally, the role of the university in its relationship to the general public is not just individualistic. When the authors speak of doing something from the bottom up, tied to the mission of universities, I expected something about the public good and the

community to show up in their work.

The country is both very conflicted and at times confused about the role of race and the importance of concepts like diversity, inclusion and integration. I believe it would help to clarify the use of these concepts, tying them to both our vision of our democracy and the mission of the university. Their admissions policies should be informed by their respective missions. The country may continue to retreat on the commitment to racial integration and inclusion. Four members of the Supreme Court clearly would restrict not only the use of race but also its consideration. However, there also are four members of the Court who would not only embrace the use of race but also tie it strongly to the value of inclusion and our democratic ideals. Justice Kennedy embraces aspects of both the more narrow plurality and the more expansive dissent, and there is reason to believe he is transition. There is also reason to believe that as a society we are in transition. How these important alternatives that the authors suggest are put forth, debated and hopefully adopted will have implications not just for the schools and the students but also which way the Court and the country are likely to break. The idea of creating incentives to support diversity, and, by suggestion, democracy, should be explored. I welcome the conversation started by the authors. □

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## An Important Step

by William L. Taylor

Out of the promising ferment about national policy emerging from the current presidential campaign, there may come a couple of ideas that will be useful in advancing the goal of a diverse and racially inclusive society. One such is the Chambers/Boger/Tobin proposal to make attendance at diverse high schools a plus factor in college

admissions.

Paradoxically, the most recent Supreme Court decisions in the Seattle and Louisville cases leave less room for voluntary race-conscious admissions policies at the K-12 level than the earlier University of Michigan decisions did at the university level—a difference largely due to the Court's

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change in membership, The Chambers et al. proposal will give colleges the discretion to adopt policies that recognize the value of diversity at earlier stages in education and will encourage the voluntary adoption of diver-

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sity policies in elementary and high schools.

The proposed policy should draw the support of the college presidents, business leaders and military officials who argued forcefully as friends of the Court in the Michigan case that an increasingly diverse society requires well-prepared, diverse leadership. It should help persuade advantaged parents that enrollment at diverse schools will not penalize their children in their quest for an elite education.

As the lawyer for schoolchildren in St. Louis who helped develop the largest and most successful inter-district desegregation program in the nation more than 20 years ago, I have seen how the experience helps youngsters of all races not only in their academic performance but in developing those non-cognitive skills that prepare them for leadership and effective citizenship. The Chambers et al. proposal could take another important step in this direction. □

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## A More Than Modest Proposal

by Wendy D. Puriefoy

As far as we may believe we have come since the *Brown v Board of Education* decision regarding racial justice in public education, the sad truth is that too many of our schools remain racially segregated. (In the Northeast, for example, 51% of African-American students attend schools that are composed of 90-100% minority students.) And the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to reject voluntary public school assignment plans based on race in Seattle and Jefferson County, Kentucky marked another sad point in our democracy's history.

Still, in the more than 50 years that have passed since *Brown*, we have seen countless benefits accrue to generations of children as a result of conscious racial diversity policies. Racially diverse educational settings provide sound environments for children of all races to achieve academically, develop socially, and live and work on a diverse planet. Most Americans believe in racial diversity in their public schools, K-12 as well as colleges and universities.

The ideas put forth by Chambers, Boger and Tobin in their "modest proposal" for colleges and universities to promote K-12 diversity are more than

modest. They are brilliant. "Diversity capital" should rank in the same leagues as human or financial capital. Institutions of higher education pre-

pare people for the world, a world that becomes more diverse every day. As such, we must promote further diversity in these institutions. □

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## An Excellent Idea

by Richard D. Kahlenberg

Chambers, Boger and Tobin have offered an important and constructive proposal, exploiting the competition for selective colleges to promote more equitable K-12 schooling. The authors are right to emphasize high school diversity by both race and class. Racial integration is important for building social cohesion and tolerance, while economic integration is important for promoting academic achievement. And the authors are right to seek "bridge builders." Higher education needs integration (seeking common ground) as much as diversity (emphasizing difference).

In further defining the proposal, the authors should encourage colleges to set clear parameters of what constitutes a diverse high school (percentage free

or reduced lunch, and racial and ethnic makeup). If left ambiguous, upper-middle-class parents may not take the perceived "risk" of sending their child to an economically and racially diverse school. Likewise, more research should explore the extent to which the Texas 10% plan—providing automatic admissions to the Univ. of Texas-Austin for those in the top 10% of every high school class—encouraged more affluent families to relocate. The Texas plan is an important precedent worth studying. □

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# Rewarding Students by Nudging Adults

by Jenice L. View

Professors Chambers, Boger and Tobin propose the fascinating idea that colleges and universities can promote K-12 racial/ethnic diversity by privileging those college applicants who demonstrate significant amounts of “diversity capital”—life experiences, behaviors and perspectives gained from attending a high-performing, inclusive, diverse secondary school. This is a noble goal, given the recent legal and political reversals that create a greater number of segregated public schools. We have come to understand that enforced racial isolation does not serve our children well in a world where global consciousness is a highly valued commodity.

The authors concede that the concept of diversity capital requires refinement. Indeed, the core idea assumes that schools with a high degree of racial/ethnic diversity will offer experiences and conditions that generate diversity capital among students. However, racial/ethnic integration in a school (let’s say one with at least 30-40% students of color) is only as good as the educational opportunities offered to all students within the high-performing, inclusive school. But we need to ask: Is there academic tracking? What is the proportional representation of students of color and poor students in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and honors courses? What is the rate of suspension/expulsion of students of color? Are student athletes expected to perform at a high academic level? If the secondary schools can claim that there is diversity in their body count but the social pyramid replicates the inequities of the larger society, then it is questionable whether students will accrue diversity capital simply by breathing the air.

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The authors indicate that “at present few white students who apply to our selective colleges and universities attend diverse high schools.” So, too, for students of color. As stated at the outset of their article, increasing numbers of students of color attend schools that are 90-100% minority. So, those students would not be credited with diversity capital. A more likely scenario is that students of color at “diverse schools” are in the numeric minority at predominantly white schools. Yet, this does not equate to having experienced an “inclusive school.” The experiences of these students may be sufficiently negative that they would bring to college anxieties (or “liabilities”) that are contrary to the concept of diversity capital. Viewed from another angle, the diversity capital that a successful and eager student of color brings to college—having been a numeric minority in a predominantly white school—may be very similar to the characteristics and perspectives that currently make such students attractive to selective colleges and universities. In other words, there might not be a

net gain in the number of students of color with diversity capital.

The white student with genuine diversity capital (as opposed to the student whose family vacation to Latin America is presented as cultural exchange/community service/diversity awareness) might demonstrate school-based experiences as an anti-racist ally with people of color. This is very different from saying, “Some of my best friends from high school are.” Let’s assume that such exemplary secondary schools exist where students can gain this experience and perspective. Are they more likely to be in urban areas on the east and west coasts? If so, there may be implications for geographic diversity in current college admissions.

Again, the authors propose a very interesting idea that may well shape the composition and tenor of college classrooms in 2028. For colleges and universities to take the leadership in rewarding talented students from schools and school districts that invest in racial equity—this can only be regarded as a social good. □

## Thank\$

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