

# PRRAC

## *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*

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### **The nexus between school funding, school segregation, and housing**

Testimony of Philip Tegeler  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Briefing on  
Public Education Funding Inequality in an Era of Increasing  
Concentration of Poverty and Resegregation

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Thank you for the opportunity to address the important and related issues of school funding and school and housing segregation. For too many years, these issues have been treated as severable and unrelated. Opponents of school integration sometimes point to school funding as the sole solution to disparities in resources and achievement for children in high poverty, racially isolated schools. And we often hear housing segregation used as an excuse for not taking stronger steps on school integration, as if these policies were not related and mutually reinforcing.

My organization, the Poverty & Race Research Action Council, works on both housing and school integration policy. Our education policy work supports the research and advocacy of the National Coalition on School Diversity, a growing coalition of civil rights advocates, educators, organizers, and researchers ([www.school-diversity.org](http://www.school-diversity.org)). Our housing policy work focuses on the continuing role of federal housing programs in perpetuating and even increasing levels of metropolitan segregation by race and income. These housing policies are often overlaid on a fragmented metropolitan governmental landscape with multiple jurisdictions with separate school districts, and separate land use, zoning, police, and property tax authority. One thing we have learned is that you have to work on housing and school policy at the same time if you want to make meaningful progress on educational equity.

#### **Economic and racial segregation is increasing for African American and Latino students**

At the same time as overall racial and ethnic diversity has increased in our society, the proportion of Black and Latino children in racially and economically concentrated schools has increased (Orfield, 2012). This trend parallels an increase in the number and proportion of Black and Latino families living in concentrated poverty neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 2015).

A GAO report issued earlier this week found that in 2013-14, 16% of our nation's K-12 public schools served student populations comprised of 75% or more Black and Latino

students and 75% or more students eligible for free or reduced lunch (FRL) (up from 9% in 2000-01). Even more concerning, fully 30% of students attending high-poverty schools are Black, and 48% are Latino. (GAO, 2016).

During this same time period, the number of families living in concentrated poverty (greater than 40% poverty) neighborhoods has increased from 7.2 million in 2000 to 13.8 million in 2013, an increase of 91%. One quarter of all African American families now live in concentrated poverty neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 2015).

Similarly, analysis by the UCLA Civil Rights Project released this week shows that the percentage of schools with 90-100% non-white enrollment has increased from 5.7% of all schools in 1988 to 18.6% of all schools in 2013. As many as 40-65% of Black and Latino students attend these highly segregated schools in our largest states (Civil Rights Project, 2016).

Simply put, school and housing segregation are both increasing for America's most disadvantaged families. It will not suffice to simply put more resources into our most segregated schools and neighborhoods, although this is important. We need to work at the same time to reverse the policies that continue to drive these patterns of segregation.

### **Educational disparities are correlated with and related to school segregation**

Attendance in racially and economically isolated schools is linked to a wide range of negative educational outcomes, including lower student achievement results, higher dropout rates, lower college completion rates, less qualified teachers, high rates of teacher turnover, less challenging curriculum, and higher rates of student discipline (Harris, 2006; Mickelson, 2003; Orfield, 2012).

This longstanding research was amplified this week by the GAO report on school segregation, which found that students in predominately poor, predominately minority schools had less access to Advanced Placement classes and gifted and talented programs, were exposed to elevated discipline rates, and were suspended and expelled at disproportionately higher rates than students at all other schools. (GAO, 2016). Among the specific findings from the GAO report:

- Students at high-poverty/high-minority schools (schools with greater than 75% Black and Latino enrollment and greater than 75% enrollment of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch) make up 7% of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade student population, but 17% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students held back;
- Students at high-poverty/high-minority schools make up 12% of all students, but 22% of students with one or more out-of-school suspension, and 16% of all students expelled;
- Students at high-minority, high-poverty schools are more likely to have less experienced, less credentialed teachers;
- Students at high-minority, high-poverty schools have less access to advanced placement courses and gifted and talented programs than all other students, with only 48% having access to AP, and 59% having access to gifted and talented programs.

The students highlighted in the GAO report suffer from what the UCLA Civil Rights Project describes as “double segregation,” segregation by both race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Orfield, 2012).

### **Benefits of school integration**

Conversely, school integration is associated with a broad range of positive education outcomes, including increased achievement in math, science, language and reading (Mickelson, 2015). School integration benefits accrue to students in all grades, and students from all racial and socioeconomic groups - although low income and disadvantaged youth show the greatest benefit (Mickelson, 2015). These conclusions are based on decades of research, but the most dramatic evidence comes from two more recent studies.

In one study, Rand researcher Heather Schwartz looked at achievement outcomes for randomly assigned children in a scattered site public housing program in Montgomery County Maryland. The assignment of families to public housing in different neighborhoods provided a natural “experimental design” to compare outcomes for children in low poverty vs. high poverty schools. The results were dramatic: low income children in low poverty schools had significantly increased achievement over time, while children in high poverty schools in the same district had flat or declining achievement levels, in spite of the additional resources provided to these higher poverty schools by the county (Schwartz, 2010).

In another important study, UC-Berkeley economist Rucker Johnson demonstrated that our greatest progress in closing the achievement gap between whites and Blacks in America coincided with the period of greatest desegregation in our schools, in the 1970s and 80s, when more children of both races were attending integrated schools. But as our schools have become increasingly segregated, following the dismantling of desegregation by the Supreme Court in the early 1990s, the achievement gap has grown (Johnson, 2014).

Racially and economically diverse schools confer long term benefits to all children, beyond achievement gains, including reductions in racial prejudice and fear, increases in cross-racial trust and friendships, and enhanced capacity for multicultural interactions. These benefits extend into adulthood, as adults who attended integrated schools have more adult cross-racial friendships, and are more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods and send their children to integrated schools (Mickelson, 2015).

### **Coordinating housing and school policy in support of integration**

In spite of the reciprocal relationship between housing and school policy, government housing and education agencies have rarely collaborated to promote racial and economic integration (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2015). The problem starts at the federal government level, with separate executive agencies and separate Congressional committees governing housing and school policy, and is mirrored at the state and local level, with separate housing and education departments in every state, and school districts functionally separate from local housing agencies and planning and zoning boards. We do not routinely ask questions like “how will a new low income housing development

affect the racial and economic balance of the neighborhood school,” and “what is the optimal location of a new elementary school to ensure an integrated student body,” and “how can we work together to ensure that this community remains successfully integrated?”

The federal government is starting to move in this direction, with the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing” rule (HUD, 2015), which asks local jurisdictions to consider the impact of housing decisions on local schools as part of the Consolidated Planning process:

“The geographic relationship of proficient schools to housing, and the policies that govern attendance, are important components of fair housing choice. The quality of schools is often a major factor in deciding where to live and school quality is also a key component of economic mobility. Relevant factors to consider include whether proficient schools are clustered in a portion of the jurisdiction or region, the range of housing opportunities close to proficient schools, and whether the jurisdiction has policies that enable students to attend a school of choice regardless of place of residence. Policies to consider include, but are not limited to: inter-district transfer programs, limits on how many students from other areas a particular school will accept, and enrollment lotteries that do not provide access for the majority of children.” (HUD, 2016)

Similarly, the use of “opportunity mapping,” which ranks neighborhoods across a metropolitan area by poverty, school quality, and other factors, is expanding in a growing number of states - used in the siting of Low Income Housing Tax Credit developments and the placement of families with federal Housing Choice Vouchers (PRRAC, 2015).

These types of connections need to be expanded at all levels of government, and we need to develop a set of routine metrics to assess the impacts of each housing and school decision from the perspective of racial and economic segregation (Tegeler, 2016). We need to ask, every time, will this policy choice lead to an increase or decrease in segregation in our communities and schools? Will we continue down the path of increased poverty concentration, or can we start to reverse that trend?

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