

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil rights goals have not been accomplished. The country has been going backward toward greater segregation in all parts of the country for more than a decade. Since the end of the Civil rights era, there has been no significant leadership towards the goal of creating a successfully integrated society built on integrated schools and neighborhoods. The last constructive act by Congress on the issue of integrated schools and neighborhoods was the enactment of the federal desegregation aid program in 1972 (repealed by the Reagan Administration in 1981). The Supreme Court began limiting desegregation in key ways in 1974 and actively dismantling existing desegregation in 1991. With the exception of the Carter Administration, there has been no substantial executive branch enforcement of desegregation since the Johnson Administration. Although thousands of school districts (often in the suburbs) are facing new challenges of racially changing neighborhoods and communities, there has been extremely little research or technical assistance available for a third of a century. In the two largest educational innovations of the past two decades—standards-based reform and school choice—the issue of racial segregation and its consequences has been ignored. These trends seem to suggest that policy makers have been assuming one or more of the following three propositions.

- 1) Race does not matter. Separate schools are equal.
- 2) Civil rights goals have been achieved. Integration is a reality and students have equal opportunity.
- 3) Desegregation failed. It was a well-meaning goal that could not be achieved.

None of these propositions is true. Race matters strongly. Racial segregation almost always accompanies segregation by poverty and many forms of related inequality. Levels of competition among students and parent support are much lower in schools with fewer resources. Qualified and experienced teachers often leave such schools.

Desegregation did not fail. In spite of a very brief period of serious enforcement of the law, it persisted and increased for decades. The desegregation era was a period in which minority high school graduates increased sharply and the racial test score gaps narrowed substantially until they began to widen again in the 1990s. Most Americans believe that desegregation has substantial benefits and say that more, not less, should be done to increase integrated education.¹¹¹

The basic policy framework that is needed to increase integration in America's public schools could be built around the following principles:

- 1) Explicit recognition of integrated education as a basic educational goal and judicial recognition that integrated education is a compelling educational interest in a society going through a vast racial transformation.
- 2) A resistance to terminating desegregation plans.

¹¹¹ Gallup Poll Survey, 1999; see introduction above for more opinion data.

- 3) Transformation of the transfer right in No Child Left Behind to a real choice of better integrated schools. The Act gives children in schools judged to be failing the right to transfer, but often there are no transfer opportunities available, for instance in a poor urban system, that offer genuinely better opportunities. Obviously it is cynical to offer only transfers to other failing schools. The program should fund transfers only to schools that are clearly better and in any school, in whatever district, that has space for another student. We hope the Administration will avoid the soft racism of false expectations.
- 4) Prohibition of choice plans--magnets, charters, voluntary transfers, and charters--that increase segregation and a favoring of those that diminish it. Choice schools should be required to recruit students from all racial backgrounds, provide appropriate services for immigrant students, and provide free transportation to students who choose to come.
- 5) As public housing modernization continues with removal of high density housing, displaced families receiving rental subsidy certificates should be counseled about the quality of the schools in areas that they consider moving to and supported if they chose to move into neighborhoods and schools of other races. The great success of the Gautreaux program in Chicago and Moving to Opportunity programs elsewhere in moving poor families to suburban communities with good schools should be replicated on a far larger scale.
- 6) Voluntary city-suburban transfer programs have worked effectively in several metropolitan areas. These will be increasingly necessary as well as inter-district magnet schools, if segments of suburban as well as central cities are to be able to offer real opportunity and help avoid neighborhood transition that is often sped by resegregating neighborhood schools.
- 7) Our recent national study of private school segregation¹¹² shows that private schools are even more segregated than public schools. Since they are not limited by geographic boundary lines and most of them are operated by religious groups committed to equality of opportunity, they should develop recruitment and other plans to increase and support diversity.
- 8) In cases where a school district is forbidden to continue its desegregation plan by a federal court, it is worth giving serious consideration to efforts to keep diversity by social and economic desegregation, which has been adopted by a few school districts. Although race and class are not the same thing, most highly segregated black and Latino schools have concentrated poverty. Ending concentrated poverty is a good educational goal in itself, likely to produce benefits. There has been little research on such plans so far and the record has been mixed, but it is certainly an option deserving systematic investigation.

¹¹² Reardon & Yun, supra note 91.