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Resegregation: What's the Answer?

Jonathan Kozol, Beverly Daniel Tatum, Susan Eaton and Patricia Gándara

In "Integrated Schools: Finding a New Path," Gary Orfield, Erica Frankenberg, and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley document the alarming rise of resegregation in schools and offer some ideas to mitigate this serious problem. *Educational Leadership* asked four noted educators to give us their views.

No Half Steps, No Equivocation

Jonathan Kozol

The dramatically resurgent segregation of our public schools, now at its highest level since the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, is the dirty little secret of urban education that President Obama has not dared to challenge in forthright and compelling terms. Where the pattern cannot be reversed within the borders of an urban district, regional solutions need to be pursued.

The White House should lead this effort by creating an irresistibly enticing package of incentives to encourage wealthy suburban schools to admit inner-city children whose parents elect to send them there. These incentives might include additional per-pupil funding for each transfer student, construction funds to make more space available, funds to recruit and employ on-site advocates and mentors to ensure the social comfort and the pedagogic progress of these students, and funds to underwrite their transportation by the same convenient means that wealthy people use to transport their children to private schools—not by circuitous and exhausting bus routes, but rather by point-to-point travel, typically in small vans, from one specific urban neighborhood to one specific school or district. Most essential, a federal stipulation should require that those urban students in the greatest need (those with lower achievement scores and those attending the most troubled and most crowded schools) receive priority.

In Boston, more than 30 suburbs participate in a program similar to this, although without federal help. One-third of all black and Hispanic students in the city's deeply segregated system are on the waiting list to get into this program to attend the same successful schools that doctors' kids and lawyers' kids traditionally enjoy. Ninety percent or more of those who cross these lines of class and race graduate from high school, and almost all of them go on to higher education.

I had the privilege of teaching in this program for two years and observing closely how children (and families) from vastly different backgrounds, after their initial shyness, soon developed friendships with one another—friendships that frequently endured well into adulthood. I believe I was witness to something quite remarkable in this divided nation.

Do minority parents still believe in integration? In the face of the bombastic rhetoric we sometimes hear from self-appointed separatists, almost every poll that has been taken indicates that the vast majority of black and Hispanic parents are convinced their children will receive a better education in integrated classrooms. They also agree with Dr. King and with the judgment of the Warren Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that separate schools will always be inherently unequal.

People who devote their lives to tinkering with clever ways to close the race gap by "demanding more" of children and their principals and teachers within segregated settings are, knowingly or not, upholding the same failed and tainted promises given to people in the United States more than a century ago by *Plessy v. Ferguson*. They are ripping to shreds the legacy of *Brown* and Dr. King. Only those oblivious to history would dare deceive us in this shameful manner.

What, then, should be done?

In the short run, we must bring vast pressure to bear on the U.S. president to implement a system of incentives like the one that I've described, or any other strategy he may contrive, to give the children of the inner-city poor the same full opportunity for first-rate integrated schooling that he himself enjoyed and is now providing his own children.

Charter schools, favored by the White House, are even more profoundly segregated than most other public schools. Magnet schools, with a few exceptions, have failed for more than 40 years to achieve more than a pittance of

diversity. Principals especially should rise above the token gestures of the past and speak out on this issue with the nobility and the transcendent passion that dignify the crucial role they fill in our society.

In the longer run, we need to battle zoning laws, racial steering, and the other practices that perpetuate residential segregation and consign the black and brown and poor to isolated neighborhoods in which they are intentionally sequestered so that they cannot contaminate the lives and education of the privileged. This, however, is a goal that may take another century to meet. The short-term measures I've proposed could take effect within a year.

It would take tremendous courage in the president to lead the charge. But, if he wants to earn more than a racially symbolic place in history, this is his chance to do it.

Insist on Excellence for All

Beverly Daniel Tatum

When African American parents pressed for an end to legalized school segregation in the years leading up to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, it was not the companionship of white children they were seeking for their children: It was access to educational resources. The schools white children attended had better facilities, better equipment and supplies, more curricular options, and often (although not always) more highly trained teachers than those serving black children. Black parents believed that equal access to those publicly funded resources was their children's birthright. Attending the same schools that white children did seemed the most likely means to achieve it.

Yet after years of progress toward school desegregation, largely achieved through busing and other court-ordered remedies, the combination of white flight from urban public school districts and a series of Supreme Court decisions limiting the use of desegregation strategies have resulted in a widespread pattern of resegregation.

Because of segregated housing patterns, neighborhood schools are most often segregated schools. Not much can be done about that without housing policy that encourages the development of racially integrated neighborhoods. But that does not mean that schools serving children of color cannot be the beacons of educational opportunity for which previous generations struggled. The presence of white children should not be required to ensure students have adequate facilities, a challenging curriculum, well-qualified teachers, and a learning atmosphere conducive to success.

There are examples, past and present, of schools where children of color, regardless of family income, have achieved at high levels. The key to that success is in the constant drumbeat of high expectations conveyed by teachers and administrators working in partnership with engaged parents. Three key messages are at the heart of school success: This is important, you can do it, and we will not give up on you. These messages, are especially important for children from groups who too often have received, directly or indirectly, the messages, "You can't do it" and "We have already given up on you."

In an ideal multiracial society, the important skill of learning to interact with others different from oneself would be achieved along with learning to read, write, and reason quantitatively. But racially mixed environments do not guarantee that skill. Unless the learning environment is one where all children are expected to perform at a high level, the lesson that white children and children of color learn is too often a reinforcement of racial hierarchies and ideology about assumed inferiority and superiority. We cannot afford to keep teaching that old lesson. We must invest in the potential of all our children if we are to compete globally. That means investing in high-quality education no matter who is sitting in the classroom.

Connect Students to Society

Susan Eaton

Educators in segregated, high-poverty school districts don't usually have time to reflect on the causes and consequences of growing racial and economic isolation. Their concerns are immediate and often urgent: maintaining adequate budgets, retaining teachers, nudging up test scores. Urging "desegregation" might seem futile in places where 90 percent of students are African American or Latino and where government-enforced boundary lines determine the demographics of schools. But segregation is not immutable. And it is harmful.

Concerned educators can begin by contributing their insights and public support to the National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD), a network of national civil rights organizations and others (my own organization is a member) advocating a greater commitment to racial and economic diversity in federal policy and funding. NCSD urges federal government officials to increase funding for voluntary, public magnet schools that enroll a diverse student body. We ask that the government issue official guidance on how local school boards can legally achieve racial diversity. We advocate for funding to allow students in segregated metro politan areas to cross district lines to attend school. At other levels of government, educators can advocate for fair and affordable housing in suburban communities and for creation of regional magnet schools that enroll students from a variety of municipalities.

As we work to change laws, regulations, and funding, we must also strive to counteract the negative effects of segregation. Segregation is not merely physical apartness. It cuts students off from the so-called "mainstream"

society they must learn to navigate. Therefore, we must deliberately connect students to the society beyond their schools. Vague, rhetorical quests for "excellence" and unrelenting drilling for standardized tests will not prepare young people for full membership in society. Providing children in high-poverty segregated schools with opportunities middle-class kids take for granted will begin to close the gap. A caring school culture is vital. So are healthy food, music lessons, art programs, safe recreational space, travel opportunities, and access to mental health counseling—as well as any experience providing first-hand knowledge of life and expectations at colleges and universities and in professional settings. These opportunities are all necessary and, sadly, are not present in the lives of hundreds of kids I've known whose zip codes force them to attend schools that cannot provide adequate training for life, learning, and work.

Address Housing Equity

Patricia Gándara

Segregation of low-income and ethnic minority students makes closing achievement gaps virtually impossible. Separate is not equal, and never has been. In addition, this segregation is harmful to *all* children who will need the skills and experiences to live and work in a multicultural nation.

Two factors are driving school resegregation today. One is a political climate that has fostered acceptance of school segregation. The populace has been made to believe that there is something un-American about reassigning students to schools for the purposes of integrating education. Yet hundreds of thousands of students board school buses daily to arrive at the school of their choice.

The second factor is housing policies that support segregated neighborhoods. Increasing immigration and rising housing costs have created concentrations of single ethnic groups in inner cities where they can find affordable housing. Placing low-income and subsidized housing in integrated and suburban areas would create natural desegregation of schools, but such policies have hardly been pursued in the United States in the last several decades. We have far less subsidized housing than most modern nations, and what we do provide suffers from the NIMBY—"not in my backyard"—syndrome.

Districts must also create more magnet and dual-immersion schools in which students receive instruction in two languages. Dual-immersion schools naturally desegregate students, and middle-class parents wait in line overnight to get their children into strong programs that will enable their children to become multilingual. Mayors and educators also need to talk about how to place attractive new schools in gentrifying inner cities where the new middle class can send its children. It would be good for cities, good for business, and good for the social fabric of the nation.

To change the situation over the long run, we must (1) increase subsidized housing; (2) locate it in places that will give children access to strong integrated schools; and (3) reassign students to schools that will integrate them racially, socioeconomically, and linguistically. These recommendations will no doubt require legislative action, but educators should also organize around these issues. It's time to stand up and be counted on integration—something that is absolutely crucial to the future of public education.

Jonathan Kozol is a widely read education writer. Among his many books are *The Shame of the Nation* (Three Rivers Press, 2006), *Savage Inequalities* (Harper, 1992), and *Death at an Early Age* (Plume, 1985); JonathanKozol@gmail.com. **Beverly Daniel Tatum** is president of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and the author of *Can We Talk About Race? And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation* (Beacon Press, 2008); BTatum@spelman.edu. **Susan Eaton** is research director at the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School; www.charleshamiltonhouston.org; seaton@law.harvard.edu. Her most recent book is *The Children in Room E4: American Education on Trial* (Algonquin Books, 2009). **Patricia Gándara** is professor of education and codirector of the Civil Rights Project at the University of California, Los Angeles; pcGandara@gmail.com.

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