

A Plan for Ending School Segregation in New Jersey

“Racial segregation must be seen for what it is, & that is an evil system, a new form of slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Principles:

- A school integration plan must involve everyone. All districts bear some responsibility. All have a role to play.
- It must be implemented statewide & must engage entire regions if it is to shut off all doors to “flight”. Small scale pilot projects will not work.
- It must set meaningful, achievable, & fair goals for inclusion & integration. The state’s aim must be to support, incentivize & push all districts, schools, faculty, & classrooms to better reflect the diversity of their regions & the state.
- Goals must be based on “Opportunity” as well as race.[1]

9 Point Legislative Plan for Eradicating School Segregation in New Jersey

1. Reform & strengthen the Department of Education’s civil rights capacity & enforcement so it can develop a desegregation plan & has the power needed to enforce it. Strengthen & pass S820 sponsored by Senator Joe Cryan.
2. End secessions. Ban the termination of regional send-receive arrangements or the dissolution of unified districts. Amend the new School Consolidation Bill to prohibit secessions while requiring an *affirmative* obligation to integrate.
3. A desegregation plan must be based on a thorough analysis of racial as well as economic & social factors that define “opportunity”.
4. Expand & strengthen the state school funding formula to reward & incentivize diverse & integrated schools in cities & New Jersey’s many diverse middle-class suburbs.
5. Direct & increase state school aid to support & incentivize local integration & desegregation best practices where diversity already exists in cities & New Jersey’s many diverse suburbs.
6. Reform the Interdistrict Public School Choice program to be a *mandatory* tool to achieve integration goals within regions[2].
7. Require charter schools to be fully integrated & meet *regional* integration goals.
8. Designate & support pro-integration magnet schools in urban areas & require county schools to meet regional economic & racial integration goals.
9. Strengthen the Fair Housing Act to increase *Mount Laurel* obligations on “far flung” wealthy communities that maintain exclusionary schools. Obligations can be decreased in diverse districts that meet integration goals.

Caveats:

- a) *Avoid Short-Term Quick-Fixes, especially ones that trade costly expenditures in place of true inclusion, because “separate is never equal”*
- b) *Don’t Blame the Victim. NJ’s high poverty, racially isolated districts did not create segregation. Their students did not choose it. They should not bear the burden of fixing it or paying for it.*
- c) *Not all suburban & urban districts are the same; consider the relative diversity & fiscal capacity of all districts.*
- d) *Do No Harm - The best intentions often bring harmful consequences, including well-meaning proposals:*
 - County consolidation in most NJ counties will not capture a diverse enough area to stop white flight. Simply removing district boundaries would only accelerate flight & deepen segregation.
 - Magnet & vocational schools (or charters) should not be allowed to create new layers of exclusion. They must all meet meaningful goals for reflecting the economic & racial mix of their region.

[1] *Opportunity* is defined by social & economic factors such as income, wealth, quality schools, jobs & tax base.

[2] *Regions* are defined as geographical areas large enough to capture both the highest & lowest opportunity type districts within an MSA.