

## **BUILDING MULTI-RACIAL CITY / SUBURBAN GRASSROOTS POWER TO DEFEAT JIM CROW SEGREGATION AND ADVANCE RACIAL INCLUSION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

*Building One New Jersey held a forum on school funding and racial segregation on May 16, 2017 (the eve of the 63rd anniversary of the Brown v. Board decision) with nearly 80 leaders from civil rights, education, faith, labor, business and civic communities. The discussion included background on the history of desegregation struggles in our state and the harmful reversals of recent decades leading to the current crisis of New Jersey being one of the most segregated states in the nation in with a level of fiscal, social, educational and racial inequity largely defined today by school district boundaries. The group agreed to begin to meet regularly and also to issue a statement describing some of the key principles that were presented on May 16. This is that document.*

### **Why is New Jersey Special?**

#### **1. New Jersey's severe level of segregation**

*Segregation levels in New Jersey schools are among the worst seen in the 50 states and America's 50 largest metropolitan areas.*

#### **3. Its legal history including:**

*Its unique constitution that prohibits school segregation by race*

*The Hedgepeth Williams Case*

*The Mount Laurel Decision*

*The SFRA (School Funding Reform Act of 2008)*

#### **3. We have rich history and experience with organizing** - including a recent history of grassroots multi-racial city/suburb organizing for racial justice and economic opportunity.

*Fight for school funding reform*

*RCA abolition*

## How should it be done?

- Take direct action that will highlight and expose both the immorality and hypocrisy of our current system.
  - Identify who is responsible, who benefits, and who is harmed.
  - Don't blame the "segregated" and don't paint all suburbs with the same brush.
  - Engage the self-interest of diverse middle and working class suburbs and school districts.
  - Don't back away from race but don't forget class
  - Challenge the legality of segregated schools in New Jersey.
- **Promote a remedy that will be about "opportunity"**
    - *Opportunity for families and children in segregated districts*
    - *Support and Stability and for inclusive suburbs and school districts*
    - *Economic Growth and Fairness for the regional and state*
  - **Consider COAH districts and *not* counties.**
    - *As a structure for developing a plan for equity and integration - NOT for consolidation of school districts which is not politically realistic nor is it a remedy*
  - **Call for the full funding of the current (yet unrealized) school funding formula (SFRA)**
    - to incentivize inclusion and as a key element of any pro integration strategy
  - **Call for an "opportunity obligation" on the highest capacity, lowest poverty and least diverse districts:**
    - *–an obligation to make "desks" available to low income students from high-poverty segregated schools who choose to seek schools outside of their neighborhood.*
    - *–it should be based on per pupil fiscal capacity and level of racial and economic diversity of the district. The least diverse with the biggest tax base do the most. Not New Jersey School Choice Program which is segregative*
  - **Provide logistical support and counseling**
    - for students and families seeking to attend schools in *opportunity districts*
  - **Call for and support pro-integrative regional magnet schools**
    - in high poverty segregated districts. *Not more charters which are segregative.*

## **Who should do it?**

*Lawyers and lawsuits are important but all successful civil rights struggles involved a combination of litigation and grassroots power*

**Organize:** A multi-racial city / suburb, *self-interest* coalition

**Target:** allies and members from both segregated “urban” as well as increasingly diverse middle class suburban communities:

- **Congregations** – Traditional Black Church, mainline denominations, Pentecostals, Catholics, Jews, Muslims
- **Labor Unions** - public and private sector unions - Teachers as well as Bricklayers
- **Civil Rights** and racial justice organizations - old and new
- **Local Officials** - school boards, superintendents, mayors and local electeds
- **Raise Money:** Mostly from your members and allies

## **Start Organizing**

- Meet monthly to recruit and strategize
- Take action that *lights a spark*