School Segregation in New Jersey

A pandemic of inequality & lost opportunity

Friday, September 24 • 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

The Conference Center at Mercer
Segregation is Sin

• It thwarts opportunity, harms our economy, divides our politics, & cuts short lives.

• Integration is simply the absence of segregation – absence of a structure of “external containment”.

• It is rooted in discrimination, subjugation, oppression & exploitation.

• It is not a choice made by the segregated. It is a set of immoral laws & polices upheld by the powerful that limit opportunity & life outcomes for the powerless.

• But immoral laws & policies can be changed by moral courage, a determined people & organized power.
Framework for a Legislative Approach to Ending School Segregation in New Jersey in Our Time
1. Must Involve Everyone

- *All districts bear some responsibility. All have a role to play.*
  - Shut off all doors to “flight”
  - Small scale pilot projects will not work.
  - Must engage whole regions
  - Must be implemented statewide.
2. Set Achievable, Fair Goals for Inclusion & Integration

The state’s aim should be
• to support, incentivize & push all districts, all schools, all faculty & all classrooms
• to better reflect the diversity of their regions & the state.

New Jersey Public School Students in 2020
- Asian: 3%
- Black: 10%
- Hispanic: 14%
- White: 43%
- Other: 30%
The following maps show how school districts compare to the state demographics

**Note** districts that most closely mirror the state’s diversity:

- **Trenton area** - Hamilton & Lawrence Twp.
- **Camden area** - Black Horse Pike (Gloucester Twp.) & Deptford
- **Atlantic City area** - Egg Harbor & Greater Egg Harbor (Galloway Twp.).
- **Newark area** - Montclair, South Orange-Maplewood, Morristown, Woodbridge

An effective plan will help *all* districts look more like these diverse places *AND* help the diverse districts do a better job with integration & inclusion.
NEWARK- NORTH NEW JERSEY AREA
Race of Public School Students by School Districts in 2019-2020

Legend
Share of Students:
Statewide Average:
White
Black
Hispanic
Asian
Other

Enrollment Size:
13,000
3,600
80

Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics.
3. Goals must be based on *Opportunity* as well as race.

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

Next map: *Opportunity* factors by school district

**Green & Blue** are *Highest Opportunity districts*

- Fewest low-income students
- Best test scores
- Highest Ratable Tax Base

- *These districts should have the greatest obligation to meet regional inclusion & integration goals.*
4. Have a Combined Approach.

Using a **Diversity and Opportunity** analysis, the state can employ multiple policy tools for meeting inclusion goals for every district, school & classroom.

*Most already exist in NJ law. But need reform:*

- Strengthen school funding formula
- Reform intra-district choice program
- Pro-integration magnet & county school program
- District & classroom level strategies and best practices
- Use Fair Housing goals & obligations
- Reform School Consolidation bill
- Strengthen the Civil Rights capacity of the DOE
This system (when fully funded) does much to incentivize diversity & inclusion.

But it can do more.

- State aid should prioritize & advantage diverse districts.
- Funding should support strategies that foster inclusion within districts, schools & classrooms.
- High poverty districts should not be penalized.
- Funding should only support high opportunity districts as they diversify.
This program, in its current form, does **NOT** promote integration.

**But it can** if it is reformed.

- Make it mandatory for *high opportunity* districts that fall short of regional integration goals.

- Spaces in these districts can be *prioritized* for students from the most segregated, high poverty districts.
County technical, trade & vocational schools often already serve as regional, more integrated, alternatives.

- *Should require regional goals for economic & racial balance.*

- Enact legislation to create & support pro-integration regional magnet schools in urban areas.

- Legislation must require charters to also meet regional integration goals.
The new school consolidation bill must be amended to:

- prohibit withdrawal, separation or dissolution as a part of any proposed consolidation plan.
- Require an affirmative obligation to create racially & socioeconomically integrated districts.
Fair Housing is part of the answer

• Include Affordable Housing in goals for school & classroom integration.

• Strengthen the Fair Housing Act to better promote inclusive schools.

• Affluent districts who think they are too “far flung” to integrate can be required to deepen their affordable housing obligation.
None of these measures can succeed without a strong state mandate & resources directed toward the achievement of integration goals

- Enact legislation to strengthen the Department of Education’s Civil Rights capacity & enforcement so it is charged with & capable of carrying out school desegregation goals.

- DOE must have the capacity to conduct an *Opportunity Analysis* to develop inclusion goals for each district.
Caveats

1. **Avoid Short-Term Quick-Fixes**  
   Especially ones that settle for costly expenditures instead of true inclusion.

2. **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 be asked to bear the burden of fixing it.

3. **Not all Suburban & Urban Districts are the Same**  
   - Recognize that districts in New Jersey are more than just white or black; rich or poor; urban or suburban.

4. **Do No Harm**  
   - The best intentions often bring unintended but harmful consequences.
     
   - **County consolidation** will not capture a diverse enough area to stop white flight.
     
   - Simply **removing district boundaries** would accelerate white flight & deepen segregation.
     
   - **Magnet & vocational schools** should not create a new layer of exclusivity & exclusion.
     
   - **Magnets**, as well as **charters**, must meet meaningful goals for reflecting the economic & racial mix of their **region**.
School Integration Will Not Fix All Problems

• School Integration is not a substitute for ending residential segregation, economic inequality & racial discrimination

But it is a part of the problem & a part we can do something about.
This is a beginning framework.

A starting point for advancing a policy agenda in the next legislative session.

We call on our members, allies & policy makers to join us in turning these ideas into bold & transformative legislation that will promote and sustain racial & economic opportunity for all families, children & communities.
• **Opportunity Analysis.**
  – A desegregation plan must be based on a thorough analysis of racial as well as economic & social factors that define opportunity.
  – Develop integration & inclusion goals based on opportunity & diversity.

• **Legislation is needed**
  – To reform & strengthen the Department of Education’s civil rights capacity & enforcement.
  – Strengthen state funding formula to advantage & incentivize diverse & integrated schools.
  – Direct and increase funding to local integration & desegregation best practices where diversity already exists.
  – Reform *Interdistrict Public School Choice* program to advance integration within regions based on opportunity analysis.
  – Reform legislation to require charters to advance integration - not promote segregation.
  – Support pro-integration magnet schools in urban areas and for county schools.
  – Amend school consolidation bill to prohibit secession and Require affirmative obligation to create integrated districts.
  – Increase & enforce *Mount Laurel* obligations on “far flung” high opportunity communities with exclusionary schools.