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.
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.
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.
NEW JERSEY
Opportunity Types of School Districts in 2020

Legend
- Central Cities (7)
- Minimum Opportunity (72)
- Low Opportunity (63)
- Medium Opportunity (77)
- High Opportunity (78)
- Maximum Opportunity (74)
- No Data (15)

Camden Area

Newark-Jersey City Area

Trenton Area

Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics, New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.
4. Have a Combined Approach.

Using a Diversity and Opportunity analysis, the state can create “assignment plans” for all districts and 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.
Bolster/Reform Department of Education’s Civil Rights Capacity

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.
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.