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...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 choice, opportunity & life outcomes for the powerless.

• But immoral laws & policies can be changed by moral courage, a determined people & organized power.
A Framework for a Legislative Approach to Ending School Segregation in NJ 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 or pilot projects will not work.
    - Must engage whole regions & be implemented statewide.
2. Set achievable & fair goals for inclusion & integration

- The aim should be to support, incentivize & require all districts, school buildings, & classrooms to better reflect the diversity of their regions & the state.
Following Maps Show where Some of our School Districts Compare to the State Demographics

- Trenton Region
- Atlantic City Region
- Camden Region
- Newark Region

Notice the districts that mirror the state’s diversity.

• An effective plan would help more districts look like more these places & help those places do a better job with integration & inclusion.
TRENTON, 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.
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY AREA
Race of Public School Students by School Districts in 2019-2020

Legend
Share of Students:
Statewide Average:
Enrollment Size:

Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics.
CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY AREA
Race of Public School Students by School Districts in 2019-2020

Legend
Share of Students:
Statewide Average:

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:
- Number of low income students
- Test scores
- Per Pupil Tax Capacity

- The next map shows these *opportunity* factors by school district.

Green & Blue are *highest opportunity districts* - few low-income students, best scores, highest ratable base.

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

With a **diversity & 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:**

- A strengthened school funding formula
- A reformed intra-district choice program
- A pro-integration magnet & county school program
- District & classroom level strategies & best practices
- Use fair housing goals & obligations
- A reformed School Consolidation bill
- Strengthen the Civil Rights capacity of the DOE
The School Funding Reform Act of 2008

- 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
  – If it is made 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 School System & Magnet Schools

- County technical, trade & vocational schools often already serve as regional, more integrated, alternatives.

- *Regional goals for economic & racial balance should be required.*

- Legislation can be enacted to create & support **pro-integration regional magnet schools** in urban areas.

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

- not allow withdrawals, separations or dissolutions as a part of any proposed consolidation plan.

- Require an affirmative obligation to create a racially & socioeconomically integrated consolidated district.
Mount Laurel & New Jersey’s Fair Housing Act

• Affordable housing should be included in goals for school & classroom integration.
  – Affluent districts who think they are too “far flung” to integrate can be required deepen their affordable housing obligation.
Bolster & Reform the Department of Education’s Civil Rights Capacity

None of these measures can be made real without a strong state mandate & resources directed toward the achievement of integration goals.

- Legislation is needed to strengthen the Department of Education’s civil rights capacity & enforcement requirements so that it is *charged* with & *capable of* carrying out school desegregation goals.

- It must have the capacity to conduct an *Opportunity Analysis* & 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 impact segregation patterns.
   - 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

- It’s 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 developing 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 racial & economic opportunity for all families, children & communities.
• Legislation is needed to reform & strengthen the Department of Education’s civil rights capacity & enforcement requirements so that it is both charged with & able to carry out school desegregation goals.

• Conduct an 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.

• Strengthen state funding formula to advantage & incentivize diverse & integrated schools.

• Direct more funding to local integration & desegregation best practices where diversity already exists.

• Reform the Interdistrict Public School Choice program to advance integration within regions based on opportunity analysis.

• Provide for & incentivizing integrated regional & consolidated schools.

• Support pro-integration magnet schools in urban areas & for county schools.

• Reform legislation to require charters to advance integration not promote segregation.

• Increase & enforce Mount Laurel obligations on “far flung” high opportunity communities with exclusionary schools.