

NSBA Center for Public Education Study Finds Diversity Benefits Students

Alexandria, Va., (February 6, 2017) -- More than six decades after *Brown v. Board of Education*, far too many schoolchildren still attend segregated schools. A new report from the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) Center for Public Education (CPE), "School Segregation Then & Now," finds that integrated schools hold greater potential for helping all students succeed both academically and socially.

According to CPE's study, the composition of our school communities matters^{3/4}for improving outcomes for students and their communities, and the long-term stability and prosperity of our nation. The positive effects of diversity shouldn't be overlooked, rather, education policymakers can and should advance their efforts to purposefully increase diversity.

"We know integrated schools are the best environment for learning academics and the social skills students need to prosper in a diverse society," says NSBA Executive Director and CEO Thomas J. Gentzel. "That's a powerful argument to continue working diligently to ease the racial and socioeconomic isolation of students in our public education system."

In its examination of school segregation across the nation, CPE found:

- Shifting demographics have changed how often students of different races attend the same schools.
- Despite progress, many students are still racially isolated. About 15 percent of black and Latino students attend schools that are less than one percent white.
- Low-income black and Latino students are far more likely to attend schools of concentrated poverty than low-income white students.
- Due to demographic patterns and legal precedents, efforts to integrate schools are often limited within district boundaries.

"Segregation mostly occurs because of demographic differences between states and between school districts within states, which can limit the options for diversifying locally," explained CPE Director Patte Barth. "Yet there are communities that have found solutions."

Although efforts to diversify schools confront significant obstacles, tools school leaders have at their disposal include:

- Creative school choice;
- Carefully drawn school attendance boundaries; and
- Inter-district partnerships on students' school assignments.

Serious efforts to address this issue must include community input, the study emphasizes. Any policy that addresses students' school assignments is controversial, as the school busing plans of the 1970s and 1980s made clear. Providing families with some level of choice may also aid in the success of new school assignment plans.

“Our message is that local, state, and federal policymakers, as well as local community members, cannot accept that segregated schools are inevitable or the norm,” says Gentzel. “It’s true that, for some communities, the obstacles to integration can seem daunting. But, for the vast majority, if a community has the determination to improve the diversity of its schools, progress can be made. Given the potential impact on students and our nation, they need to act.”

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The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is the leading advocate for public education and supports equity and excellence in public education through school board leadership. NSBA believes education is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people, and all children should have equal access to an education that maximizes his or her individual potential. The association represents state school boards associations and their more than 90,000 local school board members throughout the U.S.

The Center for Public Education (CPE) is a national resource for credible and practical information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation. CPE provides up-to-date research, data, and analysis on current education issues and explores ways to improve student achievement and engage public support for public schools. CPE is an initiative of the National School Boards Association.

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