

# PRRAC

## *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*

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### Testimony of Philip Tegeler

U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
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### **“The Spirit of *Brown*: Steps Congress Must Take to Address Segregation and Improve Equity of Opportunity in K-12 Public Schools”**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on steps that Congress can take to increase school integration and improve equity of opportunity. This is not a hypothetical exercise: the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies has just voted out a 2017 draft budget bill that includes no funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, the key funding vehicle for school integration in the ESEA, and no funding for Obama Administration’s innovative competitive grants program for school integration, known as “Stronger Together.” Funding these and other school integration programs are among the most important steps that Congress can take, as I will discuss below.

My organization, the Poverty & Race Research Action Council, works on both housing and school integration policy. Our education policy work supports the research and advocacy of the National Coalition on School Diversity, a growing coalition of civil rights advocates, educators, organizers, and researchers ([www.school-diversity.org](http://www.school-diversity.org)). Our housing policy work focuses on the continuing role of federal housing programs in perpetuating and even increasing levels of metropolitan segregation by race and income. These housing policies are often overlaid on a fragmented metropolitan governmental landscape with multiple jurisdictions with separate school districts, and separate land use, zoning, police, and property tax authority. One thing we have learned is that you have to work on housing and school policy at the same time if you want to make meaningful progress on educational equity.

#### **Economic and racial segregation is increasing for African American and Latino students**

At the same time as overall racial and ethnic diversity has increased in our society, the proportion of Black and Latino children in racially and economically concentrated schools has increased (Orfield, 2012). This trend parallels an increase in the number and proportion of Black and Latino families living in concentrated poverty neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 2015).

A GAO report issued in May found that in 2013-14, 16% of our nation's K-12 public schools served student populations comprised of 75% or more Black and Latino students and 75% or more students eligible for free or reduced lunch (FRL) (up from 9% in 2000-01). Even more concerning, fully 30% of students attending high-poverty schools are Black, and 48% are Latino. (GAO, 2016). The students highlighted in the GAO report suffer from what the UCLA Civil Rights Project describes as “double segregation,” segregation by both race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Orfield, 2012).

During this same time period, the number of families living in concentrated poverty (greater than 40% poverty) neighborhoods has increased from 7.2 million in 2000 to 13.8 million in 2013, an increase of 91%. One quarter of all African American families now live in concentrated poverty neighborhoods (Jargowsky, 2015).

Similarly, analysis by the UCLA Civil Rights Project released in May shows that the percentage of schools with 90-100% non-white enrollment has increased from 5.7% of all schools in 1988 to 18.6% of all schools in 2013. As many as 40-65% of Black and Latino students attend these highly segregated schools in our largest states (Civil Rights Project, 2016).

Simply put, school and housing segregation are both increasing for America's most disadvantaged families. It will not suffice to simply put more resources into our most segregated schools and neighborhoods, although this is important. We need to work at the same time to reverse the policies that continue to drive these patterns of segregation.

### **Educational disparities are correlated with and related to school segregation**

Attendance in racially and economically isolated schools is linked to a wide range of negative educational outcomes, including lower student achievement results, higher dropout rates, lower college completion rates, less qualified teachers, high rates of teacher turnover, less challenging curriculum, and higher rates of student discipline (Harris, 2006; Mickelson, 2003; Orfield, 2012).

This longstanding research was amplified this week by the GAO report on school segregation, which found that students in predominately poor, predominately minority schools had less access to Advanced Placement classes and gifted and talented programs, were exposed to elevated discipline rates, and were suspended and expelled at disproportionately higher rates than students at all other schools. (GAO, 2016).

### **Benefits of school integration**

Conversely, racial and economic school integration is associated with a broad range of positive educational outcomes, including increased achievement in math, science, language and reading (Mickelson, 2015). School integration benefits accrue to students in all grades, and students from all racial and socioeconomic groups - although low income and disadvantaged youth show the greatest benefit (Mickelson, 2015). These conclusions are based on decades of research, but the most dramatic evidence comes from two more recent studies.

In one study, Rand researcher Heather Schwartz looked at achievement outcomes for randomly assigned children in a scattered site public housing program in Montgomery County Maryland. The assignment of families to public housing in different neighborhoods provided a natural “experimental design” to compare outcomes for children in low poverty vs. high poverty schools. The results were dramatic: low income children in low poverty schools had significantly increased achievement over time, while children in high poverty schools in the same district had flat or declining achievement levels, in spite of the additional resources provided to these higher poverty schools by the county (Schwartz, 2010).

In another important study, UC-Berkeley economist Rucker Johnson demonstrated that our greatest progress in closing the achievement gap between whites and Blacks in America coincided with and was attributable to the period of greatest desegregation in our schools, in the 1970s and 80s, when more children of both races were attending integrated schools. But as our schools have become increasingly segregated, following the dismantling of desegregation by the Supreme Court in the early 1990s, the achievement gap has grown (Johnson, 2014).

Racially and economically diverse schools confer long term benefits to all children, beyond achievement gains, including reductions in racial prejudice and fear, increases in cross-racial trust and friendships, and enhanced capacity for multicultural interactions. These benefits extend into adulthood, as adults who attended integrated schools have more adult cross-racial friendships, and are more likely to live in integrated neighborhoods and send their children to integrated schools (Mickelson, 2015).

#### **Four simple steps that the next Congress could take**

1. Congress can provide strong financial incentives for school integration - like the President’s “Stronger Together” proposal, embodied in the House and Senate authorizing bills released today. In the past, political will to achieve school integration has often come through the courts. But strong financial incentives can also catalyze change at the state and local level - as we saw six years ago with the educational reforms generated by the “Race to the Top” funding competition. The Administration’s 2017 budget proposal included \$120 million for the Stronger Together program, to support both existing integration programs and integration planning by local districts.

2. Congress can expand and strengthen the Magnet Schools Assistance Act: Today there are approximately 3,800 magnet schools with 2.6 million students nationwide. These schools offer high quality themed education with a goal of promoting racial and economic integration, and are routinely recognized for their high academic standards (for example, in last year’s U.S. News and World Report High School Rankings, magnet schools made up 25 percent of the top 100 high schools). The federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program provides a crucial supplement to state and local funding for magnet schools, and the program continues to set high quality standards for magnet schools across the country. We strongly support the emphasis on interdistrict magnet programs in the Every Student Succeeds Act, and the continuing emphasis on inclusive lottery-based magnet schools that are open to all students (as opposed to those magnets that require entrance exams or other admission criteria). The MSAP program should be expanded

and focused on programs that are leading socioeconomic and racial integration in their regions. The Administration's 2017 budget proposal includes an \$18 million dollar annual budget increase to the program, to \$115 million. As I noted earlier, the House Appropriations Subcommittee has recommended zero funding for this crucial program.

3. Congress can demand accountability in reporting school segregation trends in every state and school district - and tie funding to measurable progress. The ESSA statute permits, but does not require states to assess school segregation trends within and across districts. Racial and economic segregation trends should be part of routine state self-assessment. Congress should also demand routine assessments of the racial segregation impacts of major education policy decisions taken by states and local districts - like new school construction, redistricting, and changes in school funding formulas.

4. Congress can do more to require coordinated housing and school policies in support of integration. In spite of the reciprocal relationship between housing and school policy, government housing and education agencies have rarely collaborated to promote racial and economic integration (National Coalition on School Diversity, 2015). The problem starts at the federal government level, with separate executive agencies and separate Congressional committees governing housing and school policy, and is mirrored at the state and local level, with separate housing and education departments in every state, and school districts functionally separate from local housing agencies and planning and zoning boards. We do not routinely ask questions like "how will a new low income housing development affect the racial and economic balance of the neighborhood school," and "what is the optimal location of a new elementary school to ensure an integrated student body," and "how can we work together to ensure that this community remains successfully integrated?"

The federal government took an important step in this direction last month, with a joint letter from the Secretaries of Housing, Education, and Transportation to state and local housing, education, and transportation agencies, urging cooperation to promote socioeconomic and racial integration in schools and communities. This builds on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2015 "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" rule, which asks local jurisdictions to consider the impact of housing decisions on local schools as part of the Consolidated Planning process.

For this new approach to be effective, however, federal spending needs to be aligned across departments. For example, jurisdictions with effective fair housing plans should be prioritized for increased school and infrastructure funding. This is a step that only Congress can take.

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