

Integration, Desegregation and the Minneapolis Public Schools

The Case for Integrated Schools

Substantial research demonstrates the benefits to students of color of attending integrated schools, improving both academic and life outcomes.¹ Some have argued that integration is the single best investment that can be made to improve outcomes for students of color and students in poverty.² Perhaps equally important, ALL students benefit significantly from attending integrated schools as they will continue to live in a multicultural, multilingual, multiracial world. Students learn to “see,” work and learn from one another as part of integrated communities.³ But even with all the positive outcomes, an integrated public education seems more and more remote for many children both in Minneapolis and across the country. Let’s try to understand why.

Challenges to Integrated Schools

Housing:

Housing in Minneapolis and its suburbs is substantially segregated by neighborhood and municipality. Student attendance flows in part from these residential patterns, resulting in segregated schools. Where there are integrated neighborhoods, there are more integrated schools. But, because of residential segregation, system-wide integrated schools would only be possible if students were bused on a regional scale. In the past, the burden of desegregation by busing has fallen primarily on students of color. There is currently little appetite in communities of color for the scope of regional busing (urban/suburban) that would be required to create truly integrated schools.

Demographics:

The student population in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) is currently 65% students of color (SOC) and 70% students living in poverty. Moreover, the residential segregation in Minneapolis has resulted in several “hyper-segregated” schools, with a population that is 90% students of color and students in poverty.

Even if the district were to reflect a 65%/35% racial mix in all areas, the outcome would not be considered “integrated” under most legal definitions.

Unless the district attracts more middle-class families of all races back to its schools, demographic realities can undermine integration.

¹ “The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms”, The Century Foundation, February 10, 2016.

² “Making Schools Work”, David Kirp, New York Times, May 19, 2012.

³ “How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students”, The Century Foundation, February 9, 2016.

Over the past 40 years there has been a substantial out-migration of white families and middle-class families of all races from Minneapolis schools. White and middle-class flight from our schools is a real issue. Families are sending their children to private schools and certain charter schools, or they moving to the suburbs where there are fewer students of color and less poverty. Finally, within the borders of Minneapolis many white families are concentrated in neighborhoods that are not integrated. The result is the population of several Minneapolis schools is more than 70% white in a district that is 35% white.

One final demographic note: historically integration has been seen through a black/white lens. With immigration and other changes, there is no longer a majority ethnic group in Minneapolis. The question, then, is whether a new paradigm of integration can be developed to recognize the true diversity of the city and the district.

Charter Schools:

Virtually all charter schools operating in Minneapolis could be considered segregated in that their enrollment is predominantly from a single ethnic/racial group (African-American; Native American; East African; Hispanic; Hmong). Families often choose charters because they offer a culturally-specific program.

Minnesota places a high value on school choice which empowers families to control the education of their children.

So, if a school is open to all and enrollment is based on choice, a court would not likely find them to be a violation of the federal Constitution.

Moreover, students in some predominantly single-ethnic charter schools are outperforming students of color who attend integrated schools. As a result, families of color are not convinced that

integration is essential to the academic success of their children. The reality is that outcomes at charters vary widely, with some outperforming MPS schools and others not, but where there are strong outcomes, families of color are gravitating to those schools.

Neighborhood Schools/Limited Resources:

Some argue that it is better to spend funds on strategies to increase student achievement rather than on ensuring integrated school environments, though most agree the ideal would be linking the two. That was the decision at the Minnesota Legislature when it made major changes to integration funding in 2013.

Some also maintain that neighborhood schools, even in segregated neighborhoods, contribute to family involvement in school and positive student achievement. Minneapolis Public Schools has found that families across the city want neighborhood schools as long as there is some measure of choice and those schools provide a quality education.

Integrated School Communities are Hard Work

Many families living in Minneapolis from all ethnic and racial backgrounds want their children to attend integrated and culturally-diverse schools because they value diversity and know that it the future of our city. Families in more integrated schools know that it is challenging to build a truly welcoming school community that values and empowers all voices, that meets the needs of every student and that distributes power so that all people feel part of decision-making, planning and celebrations of success.

Where there is true integration of students and families, wonderful things can result.

A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF MINNEAPOLIS SCHOOL DESEGREGATION/INTEGRATION

1954

The Supreme Court decision **Brown v. Board of Education** ruled for the first time that segregated education was an inherently unequal education. This ruling began the six-decade long journey concerning integration and segregation in our public schools.

1972

In 1972 in **Booker v. Special School Dist. No. 1**, the Court ruled that Minneapolis School District was in violation of the 14th Amendment by segregating its schools. At the time, minority enrollment in the district was under 10%, yet minority enrollment in three schools was more than 70%. The Court ruled that no school could be more than 35% minority, a number that increased over the years. This legal decision began a district-wide integration plan that evolved over the decade. In 1983, MPS was released from court supervision due to “good faith compliance.”

During this time, magnet schools were created in MPS, both to attract white students to predominantly minority schools and to encourage minority students to move to schools in white neighborhoods. In addition, the West Metro Educational Program (WMEP) was established as a regional collaborative between Minneapolis and western suburbs to promote inter-district school desegregation.

1995

The NAACP sued the State of Minnesota, arguing that because it allowed poor and minority kids to become segregated into inferior schools in Minneapolis, the State failed to provide the “adequate education” mandated by the state constitution. In 2000, that lawsuit was settled with the creation of the Choice is Yours program, allowing children from Minneapolis to be transported to neighboring suburban districts.

2005

Districts voluntarily agreed to continue the Choice is Yours after expiration of settlement. Nearly, two thousand students attend suburban districts annually through this program. Early research did not demonstrate that students performed better academically, although parent satisfaction is consistently high.

1970

The Minneapolis School District undertook its first voluntary integration effort when Hale School (in a predominantly white neighborhood) was paired with Field School (in a predominantly black neighborhood). These two schools are paired to this day, though some would not consider the school “integrated” under districtwide demographics. Currently, Hale and Field are about 75% white.

1983

Nearly two-thirds of the MPS student body was white, but by 1989 demographics had shifted and children of color became the majority. Since then the number of white students has remained at roughly a third of the district. Moreover, over the last 35 years the district changed from a predominantly black/white district to one of many racial and ethnic groups (Latino, Asian, Native, African American and increasingly African immigrants). As former mayor RT Rybak said, “our diversity is really diverse.”

1995

After more than a year of community conversations initiated by Superintendent Carol Johnson, Minneapolis Public Schools began to return to a community schools model, while keeping some magnets. This move was driven by the cost of intra-district transportation, the intransigence of housing segregation across the city, the shift to a majority student of color population and the difficulty of incentivizing white parents to participate in voluntary integration in predominantly minority schools.

1990s

From the 1990s forward, Minneapolis saw the rise of culturally-specific charter schools, addressing the desire on the part of parents of color to find schools that honored, respected and taught a curriculum specific to the needs of their students and communities. MPS also responded to this demand with the creation of culturally-focused magnet programs.

2015

A new lawsuit was filed. In **Cruz-Guzman filed**. This suit echoes the claims of the 1995 litigation, adding claims involving St. Paul and East Metro & Charter Schools. The suit was dismissed at the Court of Appeals but may be reinstated by the Minnesota Supreme Court.