

# Welcome Letter

## A Call for Integration and Educational Equity

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As we approach the 70th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, we should be celebrating this landmark ruling that found “separate but equal” in education was unconstitutional and required the desegregation of U.S. public schools. But instead of celebrating, there is a pervasive sense of concern.

The truth is that, after some initial progress, we are moving backwards. U.S. schools are more segregated today than they were 30 years ago. There are multiple reasons for this: Many policy-based efforts to better integrate our schools are being successfully challenged in court, and some communities—often ones that are predominantly white—are “seceding” from their public schools and creating their own school districts.

The reality is that the demographics of public schools often reflect the racial and class composition of the local neighborhood—and our neighborhoods are also becoming more segregated. In fact, 80% of our cities are [more segregated](#) today than they were decades ago.

In the largest U.S. metropolitan areas, more than half of the Black and white populations would have to move to another neighborhood to integrate those areas. In fact, in 2020, the average dissimilarity score was 53, meaning 53% of white and Black people would have to move for their city to be integrated. Cities such as Memphis; Baltimore; Washington, DC; and Birmingham have a much higher than average [dissimilarity index](#), and other cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Miami, Jersey City, and Philadelphia, have dissimilarity indices over 70.

Many people believe that the mere passage of time will lead to a less racially segregated society. But racial progress takes work. The United States cannot get on an escalator to being less racist simply because the year is 2023 and not 1963. Segregation is a stain that affects housing prices, policing practices and incarceration, maternal and infant mortality, workforce opportunities, and education trajectories. The inverse of this, which is often less stated, is that integration improves outcomes for everyone. In school settings, integration is [associated with improved test scores](#), college enrollment, critical thinking, access to highly qualified teachers, well-maintained facilities, advanced

placement courses, and school funding. Integrated classrooms help students with collaboration, creativity, and leadership principles. Altogether, integration is an asset.

This is why the essays presented by the AIR Equity Initiative are so significant—they discuss the importance of integration rather than desegregation. Integration is a more active process, driven by assets instead of deficits. Instead of focusing solely on the removal of inequality, the AIR Equity Initiative works to build structures and systems that forge integration and create educational equity. We requested these essays to help direct our investments in improving education.

Edited by Terris Ross, managing director of the AIR Equity Initiative, and Jaspal Bhatia, program officer with the AIR Equity Initiative, these essays surface ideas from the field that can help spark a renewed commitment from funders, policymakers, practitioners, and communities, and advance fresh approaches to school integration and equity. We need to revisit the original rationale to desegregate before, during, and after *Brown v. Board of Education*; examine current conditions and the reality of schools and segregation today; and chart a new path to achieve educational equity through an asset-driven approach to school integration.

We hope you will be inspired by the ideas presented in this collection and will join us in this important work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rashawn Ray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rashawn Ray, PhD  
Vice President and Executive Director of the AIR Equity Initiative  
American Institutes for Research