

PART 3:

Community Approaches and Perspectives



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Preface

About AIR and the AIR Equity Initiative

About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health and human services, and the workforce. AIR's work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the United States and abroad. For more information, visit air.org.

About the AIR Equity Initiative

In 2021, AIR launched the AIR Equity Initiative, a 5-year, \$100 million+ investment in behavioral and social science research and technical assistance to address the underlying causes of systemic inequities and to increase opportunities for people and communities. By funding inclusive and collaborative research and technical assistance efforts that engage partners from the beginning, the AIR Equity Initiative aims to foster bolder, strategic, and sustained ways to advance equity, especially in areas where investment is limited. Learn more at www.air.org/equity.

About the AIR Equity Initiative's Improving Educational Experiences Program Area

In an equitable educational system, a student's race and place of residence should not predict their access to the opportunities and resources that promote thriving and academic success. AIR Equity Initiative–funded projects in this program area aim to improve educational experiences and outcomes for students affected by the consequences of segregation. Specifically, these grants support projects that study and develop processes, interventions, and tools, in partnership with school districts and communities, to advance solutions that address the root causes of educational inequity. This work also aims to strengthen and learn from policy and technical assistance efforts to reduce racial segregation in housing and education across communities, districts, schools, and classrooms.

Call For Essays: Process and Perspectives

The AIR Equity Initiative issued a call for essays in August 2022 to inform and guide its work in educational equity and lift up evidence-based insights and ideas from the field. The authors of these essays are experts and practitioners in the field and their thoughts and viewpoints are based on deep knowledge and experience. However, it is important to note that the opinions and viewpoints in these essays are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or viewpoints of AIR, its staff, or its leadership.

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We offer our sincere appreciation to the expert reader panel who dedicated their time and attention to reviewing the ideas brought forth from this open call: Tanya Clay House; Tracy Gray, PhD; Preston Green, PhD; Makeba Jones, PhD; Kim Lane, EdD; Chinh Le; Effie McMillian, EdD; Na'ilah Nasir, PhD; Gary Orfield, PhD; Sonia Park; Arun Ramanathan, PhD; Lakeisha Steele; Zoe Stemm-Calderon, PhD; Adai Tefera, PhD; and Kevin Welner.

Finally, we extend our appreciation to the many researchers, activists, community advocates, professors, practitioners, and other experts who submitted essays. It is an honor to have learned from your work and we are thrilled to offer a sample of the many deserving submissions within this compendium.*

* The black-and-white cover image is from the records of the National Park Service. Youth march for integrated schools, October 25, 1958. National Archives at College Park, MD. <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/integration-youth-march>. Photo licensed under a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/publicdomain/1.0/).

Historically, communities have been at the heart of integration discourse, both in advocacy for integrated schools and pushback against them.

For today's integration efforts to be successful, responsive community engagement that grapples with the root causes of segregation is essential.

Although integration and educational equity will ultimately require contextualized approaches, these approaches should center the experiences of the communities most impacted by the harms of segregation, incorporating principles of equity and racial justice. The essays in this part highlight strategies to foster buy-in for community-responsive school integration approaches that are racially just, equitable, and sustainable.

School Integration Approaches Beyond the White Gaze: Centering Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous Youth

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Introduction

Our coauthored essay imagines a bold school integration project that shifts definitions; measures relational integration outcomes; centers Black, Latin*, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), and Indigenous youth; and describes the historical and sociopolitical context catapulting the project to fruition. Ever since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that desegregation efforts must commence “with all deliberate speed,” state and federally mandated desegregation/integration initiatives have varied in oversight, resource allocation, strategy, equity, and effectiveness.¹ However, the reality is that schools remain highly segregated by race and socioeconomic status.² This necessitates new approaches, definitions, and strategies for a new generation of equitable integration advocates.³ Our coalition seeks to answer the call in innovative and collaborative ways within the promising political and historical context of Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS).

We are a coalition of community members, public school advocates, and scholarly freedom dreamers who understand the importance of reciprocal and pluralistic cultural exchanges in teaching and learning.⁴ The following written words are a product of our essay-prep conversations, discussions with community members, and authentic school integration imaginaries we are committed to materializing. Our conversations identified persistent obstacles in school integration approaches specific to the Minneapolis, Minnesota, community. Minnesota’s school integration initiatives tend to be designed and measured juxtaposed to their proximity to whiteness; this overlooks how Black,

Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth already integrate their spaces. Our approach seeks to imagine beyond white gazes by bolstering MPS youth's existing knowledge co-creation activities.

Historical Context and the White Gaze

School integration policy has historically centered and continues to center on whiteness in several ways. In 1998, Toni Morrison introduced the term “white gaze” to name how Black lives’ value tends to be venerated juxtaposed to its proximity to whiteness. Morrison famously exposed the logic of whiteness proximity upon being critiqued about how her books decenter white perspectives, viewpoints, and characters.⁵ The white gaze covers societal systems, structures, and policies while steeping institutions in white supremacist-created racialized hierarchies. Morrison’s description of the white gaze connects to school integration because the *Brown* arguments and aftermath neglected crucial implementation considerations illuminated by Black communities. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks⁶ shared a childhood desegregation memory after she was forced out of her all-Black school:

We were certainly on the margin, no longer at the center, and it hurt. It was such an unhappy time. I still remember my rage that we had to awaken an hour early so that we could be bussed to school before the white students arrived. We were made to sit in the gymnasium and wait. It was believed that this practice would prevent outbreaks of conflict and hostility since it removed the possibility of social contact before classes began. Yet, once again, the burden of this transition was placed on us. The white school was desegregated, but in the classroom, in the cafeteria, and in most social spaces racial apartheid prevailed (p. 24).

hooks describes how the burdens of desegregating schools were often placed on Black students and families for the comfort of white students and families. hooks’ desegregation memories emulate Black students’ and families’ experiences across the United States. Black students were bused to white schools, forced to leave their all-Black schools, and made to wait.⁷ Moreover, Black educators were dismissed or demoted because white school leaders were uncomfortable with the idea of Black school leaders having authority over white educators.⁸ Any new school integration approaches must illuminate the connections between these historical contexts and modern contexts because school integration approaches must be intentionally designed to reject the

white gaze.⁹ Our coalition will center Black, Brown, and Indigenous students by examining the desegregation/integration history of MPS in its potential to reject policies designed and measured through proximity-to-whiteness frames.

Minneapolis Public Schools and School Integration

MPS community-led coalitions have a well-known history of organizing school integration initiatives beyond the white gaze. In 1971, a coalition of white, Black, and Jewish families organized an initiative called the Hale-Field pairing. The coalition sought to integrate students in Hale Elementary School, which was 98% white, and Field Elementary School, which was 57% Black. At the time, more than 70% of Hale parents opposed integration.¹⁰ Despite pushback from white parents, the coalition worked through Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and at the neighborhood level to authentically integrate schools.

There were several examples of the Hale-Field school integration coalition resisting the white gaze. First, students from both schools would be bused to and from their new schools. This meant that the transportation burden would not be placed solely on Black families. Second, the coalition facilitated coffee parties that took place at the schools and in community members' homes. Parents and students could extend integrated learning beyond the school walls to address biases and learn in genuinely cross-cultural exchanges. Finally, the coalition advocated for a 10% Hale teacher-of-color policy to ensure that Black students had adult advocates at their new school.¹¹ Each of these school integration initiatives strategically and innovatively engaged in school integration approaches that resisted the white gaze.

The outcomes of the Hale-Field pairing reverberate into modern MPS school integration policies. In reflecting on Hale-Field's modern impact and its 50th anniversary, Heidi Adelman, a former Hale-Field pairing fifth grader, points out how Hale and Fields have resegregated to a 75% white student population. The resegregation of schools is a phenomenon undergirded by courts releasing districts from oversight, attacks on busing, and court rulings against race-conscious integration initiatives.¹² Adelman, an advocate of school integration, questions the extent to which MPS youth would describe their modern experiences with school integration practices.¹³ Our coalition takes up this youth-centered question and extends the contributions of past, bold-thinking integration coalitions.

Youth-Led School Integration

Returning to hooks,¹⁴ she provided a launching point for our coalition's thoughts on ambitious school integration initiatives in describing a "transgressive" group of her classmates:

Black and white students who considered ourselves progressive rebelled against the unspoken racial taboos meant to sustain white supremacy and racial apartheid even in the face of desegregation. The white folks never seemed to understand that our parents were no more eager for us to socialize with them than they were to socialize with us. Those of us who wanted to make racial equality a reality in every area of our life were threats to the social order. We were proud of ourselves, proud of our willingness to transgress the rules, proud to be courageous (p. 24).

hooks and her classmates transgressed the era's segregationist social norms through youth-led acts of integration. Youth circumvented the white gaze even when adults counseled otherwise. These transgressive acts led hooks and her classmates to feelings of pride, connection, and courage.

Contemporarily, there are youth-led school integration advocacy spaces that have demonstrated promise in connecting the past and present, and bolstering critical consciousness. Moreover, these youth-involved investigations and community organizing efforts evidence that our approach may hold profound impact. For instance, IntegrateNYC is a youth-led organization that has organized campaigns around challenging the use of standardized tests in admissions decisions. In 2021, IntegrateNYC youth co-created a policy tool to advocate for the communities and neighborhoods hit hardest by systemic racism.¹⁵ Debs et al.¹⁶ found that IntegrateNYC's self-defined school integration policy language improved the citywide capacity to address racialized inequity. In a Midwest context, the organizers of the Michigan Youth Policy Fellows (MYPF) program co-designed space for students to "critically investigate" and act to redress racial segregation.¹⁷ The MYPF youth fellows indicated that their participation led to a firm commitment to equity beyond their participation in the youth-involved education and into their time as college students. The IntegrateNYC and MYPF examples demonstrate crucial outcomes related to mobilizing knowledge co-creation toward educational equity. Still missing is a focus on the cross-racialized, peer-to-peer

relationships youth build while pursuing policy change. Our innovative approach borrows from youth-involved investigation scholarship and narrows the scope to the already-present, authentic, peer-to-peer school integration activities in MPS.

Innovative and bold action on school integration means heeding historical and contemporary lessons from and bolstering MPS's Black, Latin*, APIDA, Indigenous youth's, and their allies' responses to transgressions. Given MPS's diverse student population, many Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth are already engaging in, trailblazing, and imagining new school integration approaches.¹⁸ Now, system-wide coalitions must direct resources to bolster their perspectives and knowledge in decision-making spaces.

Minnesota's Modern School Integration Policy

Understandably, school segregation has been analyzed as a Black-focused issue because of Black Americans' subjugation stemming from white elites' crimes of chattel enslavement. However, modern school integration approaches cannot rely on stringent racialized identification. MPS educates Black students (African American, Ethiopian, Liberian, Nigerian, Somali), Asian/Asian American students (Asian Indian, Burmese, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Karen, Korean, Lao, Vietnamese), American Indian or Alaskan Native students (Dakota/Lakota, Anishinaabe/Ojibwe), and Hispanic or Latin* students (Colombian, Ecuadoran, Guatemalan, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran), and students whose ethnic identities do not fit within the previous list. Thus, we need an innovative school integration approach that reflects the diversity of MPS's student population.

At the state level, school integration is being discussed and encouraged as a central component in the pursuit of educational equity.¹⁹ However, school integration's impact is tightly coupled with standardized assessments. The problem is that standardized tests are viewed as objective measures, and this conceals the white gaze. When the white gaze is not illuminated, policy actors risk perpetuating the harms they seek to redress.²⁰ The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)'s implementation of the Achievement and Integration (A&I) program demonstrates Minnesota's receptiveness to school integration approaches. Simultaneously, A&I shows how the white gaze may be present in school integration policies via the measurement of outcomes via standardized tests.

The A&I program aims to mobilize school integration to attain educational equity by increasing student achievement and reducing academic disparities “based on students’ diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools.”²¹ The emphasis on student achievement is clear in the Achievement and Integration Legislative Report.²² The legislative report was prepared to show whether districts met federally aligned goals to decrease “achievement gaps” or increase “student proficiency by 50 percent” (p. 5). Achievement gap rhetoric and student proficiency has been critiqued as a form of proximity to whiteness logic, and this questions whether school integration approaches should be differently measured.

Test-measured student achievement has serious flaws when used to assess educational equity via school integration. First, tests have been shown to be racially biased and heavily correlated with wealth.²³ This means that standardized tests may measure fluency more effectively in white-dominated monoculturalism as opposed to culturally pluralistic school integration. Second, acknowledging that there are gaps in academic achievement assumes that certain groups are more intelligent/gifted/talented than others.²⁴ There is no gap in achievement between Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and their similarly situated white peers. There are only differences in what forms of achievement are valued in the education system. Finally, school integration’s equitable outcomes may reside in students’ lived experiences that tests cannot capture. Relationship building, empathy, communal caretaking, real-world problem solving, bilingualism, critical self-reflection, and many other school integration outcomes are too complex to be measured by standardized tests.

New school integration approaches must move beyond stringent racial demographic analysis and explore the relational considerations that tests cannot measure. For these reasons, we seek to co-create space to support youth in shifting school integration away from evaluation based solely on traditional measures of achievement and ensure that those who continue to be excluded are at the center.

A Collective Definition of School Integration

Educational equity advocates cannot evaluate school integration practices until there is a collective definition steeped in historical context that is Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous-focused. Our cross-sector coalition, made up of MPS team members and a University of Minnesota faculty member, co-created a school integration definition to

start imagining new, bold, and ambitious solutions. Three pillars define our model of school integration: Culturally Pluralistic; Reciprocal Cultural Exchanges; and Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous student–imagined, –created, and –led.

Culturally Pluralistic

Cultural pluralism is rooted in multicultural perspectives. Specifically, this means that instead of forcing assimilation into one culture, “differences are appreciated, respected and cultivated” (p. 355).²⁵ Modern school integration practices, including MDE’s A&I, may lack a firm commitment to cultural pluralism because of a focus on traditionally defined achievement. Too often assimilation-based or monocultural student achievement evaluative mechanisms treat communal knowledge as deficient. The ways Black, Brown, and Indigenous students and families define achievement are just as valid as, if not more valuable than, state-defined student achievement. Therefore, a culturally pluralistic approach to school integration acknowledges the assets, talents, and gifts of students beyond monocultural evaluation.

Reciprocal Cultural Exchanges

Reciprocal cultural exchanges mean that integration approaches are mindful of mutually beneficial activities. In some high schools, “diversity” experiences tend to be framed as a desirable skill to enter the workforce or access college. Students may engage in community service experiences that are designed to support disadvantaged communities with little critique regarding what their presence means on a structural level.²⁶ Some of these programs reinforce students’ beliefs that disadvantaged communities are broken or damaged and in need of fixing. Although there is a cultural exchange, there is no reciprocity. Reciprocity considers who should, and should not, be leading integration efforts, what has already been imagined, and how disadvantaged communities envision relationship building.

Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous Student–Imagined, –Created, and –Led

Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth must lead in knowledge co-creation to imagine, design, and implement school integration strategies. This may mean protecting and creating spaces beyond the white gaze. Therefore, this definition is fluid and will change based on youth perspectives and investigations. The youth-centered component is the most important; yet it is incomplete. Thus, our proposed school integration approach seeks to be bold and ambitious in bolstering youth-led integration acts and co-investigations.

Our Bold, Ambitious, and Innovative Approach

Our approach plans to examine how MPS youth manifest integration acts in youth-led research projects while youth define what integration means to them,²⁷ critically analyze educational inequity,²⁸ and move knowledge co-creation to action.²⁹ Aldana and Richards-Schuster found that youth-led research can “enable the collective social analysis of the colonial, racist, capitalist structures that shape developmental context and processes to produce liberatory knowledge” (p. 676).³⁰ Their term “collective social analysis” guides our coalition because of our commitment to youth-led research partnerships.

There are two essential components of our coalition’s multifaceted approach. First, our approach will bolster youth voice and knowledge co-creation in preparation for decision-making spaces. Second, adult facilitators will engage in a co-investigation that explores authentic school integration within students’ peer-to-peer interactions and theories of transforming inequity. The coalition may ask how Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth in school integration evaluation projects describe cross-racialized, peer relationships throughout the examination process, or explore how youth describe their theories of change juxtaposed with their relationships to each other. The youth’s projects and the coalition’s co-investigations will co-create knowledge that may be better positioned for transformation, given our coresearcher-practitioner-youth partnership.

This work is not new to MPS. School district–facilitated and youth-led research activities have been used continuously to inform district and school policy. Our project hopes to extend and bolster the youth-led work already happening around the district. MPS has several youth-led/-involved programs that have engaged in investigations intended to inform district and school policy. These programs include Youth Participatory Evaluations (YPE), Dare 2 Be Real, and CityWide Student Leadership Board. The coalition will invite students to select research questions, design studies, collect data, organize findings, and disseminate co-created knowledge. This already-established MPS infrastructure and proposed co-planning ensures that knowledge produced through collective research activities will be sustained and adds unique, localized knowledge specific to undertheorized forms of school integration.

Students may choose to explore student lunchroom interactions, trace local school integration educational policy, illuminate what school integration already looks like for them, explore transgressive acts to resist state integration definitions, capture their classmates' hopes and dreams, or examine underlying structures and systems that create and reinforce existing inequities. Concurrently, the project coalition will co-design an investigation exploring how school integration experiences manifest within youth-led evaluation projects. While youth investigate policy and practical solutions for school segregation and educational inequity, we examine school integration knowledge co-creation in its capacity to be culturally pluralistic, reciprocal, and youth focused. This approach enables us to explore how authentic school integration may necessitate (a) youth-led knowledge creation activities and (b) co-created knowledge production activities among all educational equity advocates.

Conclusion

Our youth-led, authentic school integration approach embeds an important strategy in pursuit of educational equity. We assert that Black, Latin*, APIDA, and Indigenous youth may already be engaging in integration activities that yield solutions to the root causes of educational inequity. Our approach redirects resources to co-create space for youth to mobilize their cross-cultural knowledge to decision-making spaces. Our approach takes a first step in ensuring that youth are supported in their attempts to inform educational policy and practice. Unequivocally, our imagined coresearcher-practitioner-youth coalition is situated to co-strategize how the illumination of existing, youth-studied, authentic school integration activities can be bolstered across the United States, which, in turn, moves us beyond white gazes and informs systems-level transformation.

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Racially Just School Integration: A 21st Century, Student-Led Strategy

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Living With Segregation

They canceled Ruby Bridges.

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

–Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

As I reflect on Dr. King’s wisdom, I can’t help but feel that the arc of justice is bending in the wrong direction. MLK said this in 1968, nearly 15 years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. My father, born in 1954 in Los Angeles, attended segregated schools for his entire childhood; 40 years later, I also went through a similar educational system in Los Angeles while living in equally segregated communities, both as a student and eventually as a public school teacher. Segregation has been part of my life and the lives of many Americans, often without our even being aware of it.

Today, American public schools continue to be plagued by the rotten fruits of segregation.² For the most part, we as a country have decided to shrug our collective shoulders and just live with it. Our political leaders have abandoned the mission of Dr. King and his movement; our educational leaders have done their best to adapt or work around the intersecting harms of segregation; and the general public has become so deeply polarized that we cannot even see the threads of our democracy untangling before our eyes.

Our schools have unfortunately also become a political battleground for a persistent and well-funded right-wing assault³ on public education. This has come in the forms of legislative attacks targeting trans and LGBTQ students, and so-called “divisive concepts” legislation targeting diversity, equity, and social emotional learning—all part of the

backlash to so-called “wokeness” and critical race theory. Books have been banned. Books by Black, Brown, and LGBTQ authors. Books and a movie⁴ about Ruby Bridges. These attacks are not coming out of nowhere. They have occurred in rapidly diversifying districts across the country⁵ and are part of a long history of segregation and white backlash⁶ to racial progress.

We Are All Harmed by Segregation

As we approach 70 years since the Brown decision, and in light of concurrent threats to public education, trans and LGBTQ students, the free speech of educators, and broader attacks on democracy, it is crucial that we renew and reinvigorate our national commitment to truly integrated public schools. Decades of research have proven the compounding and generational harms of educational segregation, and political and racial divides boil over across our country. The current polarization in our country, the racial wealth gap, disproportionate incarceration rates, and disparities in health access and outcomes are all the rotten fruits of segregation.

We know money matters.⁷ We also know that, due to government-engineered residential segregation, Supreme Court cases like *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973),⁸ and the use of local property taxes to determine school funding, American public schools continue to be funded through a Jim Crow model. Schools and districts serving wealthier white children and families receive a higher percentage of the public tax dollars to educate their children.⁹ So well entrenched is this reality that real estate websites often include information about school “performance” (often a proxy for whiteness or assimilation) and student demographics alongside real estate listings.

We can also look beyond the material resource harms of school segregation to the school cultural and curricular practices that have devalued or dehumanized and excluded students of color from their education. Students of color, Black girls in particular, face harsher and more persistent disciplinary policies,¹⁰ feel less connected to curricular choices that reinforce and glorify a Eurocentric view of education,¹¹ and rarely if ever experience the exponential benefits of having teachers who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of their neighborhood or country.¹² We know that public school student populations are reaching a majority of students of color in many places¹³ and that school culture and climate practices must cultivate a sense of belonging for all students

for schools to achieve their goals. Segregation harms our ability to create the truly integrated, culturally responsive, and restorative schools our children deserve.

Why Integration?

As Professor Rucker Johnson chronicles in his 2019 book, *Children of the Dream*, despite an overall abandonment of school integration by the American government, the efforts in the 1970s and '80s led to significant social mobility, life, and health outcomes for students of all races who participated.¹⁴ In a 2016 report, Professor Amy Stuart-Wells, Dr. Diana Cordova-Cabo, and Dr. Lauren Fox found that integrated schools led to increased academic achievement for students of all races, stronger relationships across differences, and decreased bias.¹⁵ Coupled with this is the body of research on the importance of implementing culturally responsive and sustaining educational (CRSE) practices for students of all racial backgrounds.¹⁶ Public schools can be centers of educational justice.

In this essay, I offer strategies for public engagement, a framework and root cause tool for schools and districts, and a proposal to build a national 21st Century Integration Resource Center at the NYU Metro Center.

Talking About Segregation, Desegregation, and Integration

Often used interchangeably, for the purposes of policy and research, the terms “desegregation” and “integration” should be seen as two separate but interrelated functions. It can be beneficial for advocates, policymakers, and researchers to define these terms because they can help form an affirmative public narrative around integration as well as the policy framework that will be used to respond to the problem of segregation.

Desegregation: Uprooting the tools of segregation that facilitate separation. This is done by breaking down structural barriers to access such as exclusionary admissions policies, racist zoning and district lines, and/or contending with the impacts of residential segregation with transportation; and replacing harmful policies with intentional policies designed to support diversity, access, and mobility for all students.

Integration: Integration is about what happens inside the school community. It is about creating the conditions for all students to thrive and reap the benefits of diverse

learning environments. This means we are building culturally responsive, restorative, antiracist, and inclusive educational spaces. Real integration is not just about moving bodies; it is about the movement of resources and opportunity, pedagogy and curriculum, and school cultural practices to meet the needs of a diverse student body. The following conceptual tool describes our theory of action (Table 3.2-1). If the goal is to dismantle and diminish the various impacts of educational segregation, it is important to understand that desegregation and integration must be done concurrently and include a multifaceted approach in order to accomplish the following:

- Dismantle concentrations of privilege and vulnerability through innovative approaches to student assignment.
- Support the creation of inclusive and culturally sustaining spaces.
- Deconstruct discipline practices that disproportionately impact students of color.
- Invest in culturally sustaining hiring practices that ensure equitable representations of faculty and staff.

Table 3.2-1. Conceptual Tool Describing the Theory of Action

Goal	Policy/practice
Desegregation	Equitable student assignment policy Recruit and retain diverse faculty
Integration	Culturally responsive policy, practices, and curriculum Restorative justice and Social Emotional Learning Teacher diversity Building strong multiracial parent/caregiver communities

A 21st Century Framework: The 5 Rs of Real Integration

Designed by New York City high school students from the group IntegrateNYC¹⁷ and channeling the 1976 *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* Supreme Court decision¹⁸ creating “Green Factors,” the 5 Rs is a framework for analyzing the impacts of segregation and a pathway for building truly integrated schools. This framework was used to create the Brooklyn-based D15 Diversity Plan¹⁹ and was adopted by the NYC School Diversity Advisory Group in 2019.²⁰ Through my work at the New York University Metro Center’s Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative, our Integration and Innovation Initiative²¹ has used this framework to support schools and districts of

various sizes from New York City to Salem, Oregon, and Sausalito, California, in designing plans for desegregation and integration. The 5 Rs serve as an effective framework for a root cause analysis that can be used at the school or district level to shape policy decisions (see Table 3.2-2).

Table 3.2-2. The 5 Rs Root Cause Analysis

- **Race, class, and enrollment:** How are the student assignment policies in my school/district dismantling or perpetuating segregation?
- **Resources:** How is the distribution of resources in my school/district dismantling or perpetuating segregation?
- **Relationships:** How is my school/district using culturally responsive and inclusive practices to build inclusive and culturally affirming educational spaces for all students?
- **Representation:** How is my school/district working to recruit and retain a representative and diverse staff? A curriculum that represents the contributions and creativity of historically underrepresented cultures?
- **Restorative justice:** How is my school/district dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline?

It is crucial to couple policy design and public engagement through participatory and interactive community engagement strategies. Using the 5 Rs as a tool for framing and root cause analysis offers multiple entry points for stakeholders to consider the impacts of and solutions to segregation.

The instruments of racial oppression have evolved over the years, and so too must our analysis, tools, and responses to racism. Discussions of the harm of educational segregation must refrain from anti-Black, anti-immigrant, anti-poor, ableist, and other deficit-based framings of the impact of educational segregation. We can articulate the problems of segregation without demonizing, shaming, or humiliating communities of color. We can also frame our solutions to benefit those most marginalized by segregation. Integration must be in service of racial justice. This begins with participatory public engagement.

Culturally Responsive Public Engagement

Public engagement is a core component of building successful equity initiatives. School and district leaders must consider public input in making policy decisions, and they also have a responsibility to make decisions that are rooted in serving all students and families equitably. Historically, public dissent has been leveraged by white communities

and local governments to oppose desegregation,²² and the current racial backlash in schools is fueled by white nationalism. Communities of color, especially Black communities, have legitimately expressed concern, skepticism, and pain when discussions of integration and desegregation arise.²³ Ensuring the public is part of the process of change will result in their continuing and sustained support. We are not only integrating schools; we are integrating communities.

Youth voices should play a significant role in shaping community discussions around integration and equity. We partnered with youth to design the framework of the 5 Rs for this very purpose. Meaningful youth engagement includes their voices inside and outside traditional youth leadership roles and should center students who are most impacted by the policies and practice of segregation. Youth spaces should be student-led and include adult allies with the understanding that they are there to listen and learn. Similarly, engagement focused on parents/caregivers should be linguistically accessible, inclusive, and culturally responsive. Through the use of charrettes, public workshops, block parties, plays, and other culturally competent activities, community members can lend a constructive voice and perspective to the decision-making process, while also building community across differences. Convening representative advisory councils, youth leadership councils, and other groups can help ensure that underrepresented voices have a seat at the table. Public engagement must go beyond the school board meeting.

Finally, school and district leaders have a crucial role to play in holding the intersecting pieces of work together. Public engagement can also come with public education. School and district leaders must articulate a clear vision for equity and integration and a commitment to making the investments needed to be successful. Table 3.2-3 presents suggestions for ensuring culturally responsive public engagement.

Table 3.2-3. Tips for Culturally Responsive Public Engagement

- Communicating the goals and intentions of diversity/desegregation/integration processes
- Identifying a diverse and representative group of stakeholders to serve on a working/advisory group
- Embedding racial equity/literacy training into working group and public engagement activities
- Sharing data in an inclusive and accessible way
- Making meetings linguistically accessible through translated materials and interpretations with bilingual meetings, when possible
- Compensating community members for their time and expertise

Making Data Come to Life

Through our work in New York City and across the country, we have learned the power of using accessible and interactive data to tell the story of segregation. Working with our partners at Territorial Empathy, an urban design firm, and IntegrateNYC, we have helped launch the interactive website Segregation Is Killing Us,²⁴ a participatory and community-based analysis of the impact of segregation and COVID-19 in New York City.

In addition, our Real Integration Hub²⁵ is full of resources, advocacy tools, and interactive data visualizations of the integration movement in New York City. We can leverage data to visualize the patterns of segregation and also elevate efforts to desegregate and integrate schools at the local, state, and national levels. These tools support advocates on the ground, policymakers and bureaucrats seeking to transform the system, and elected and appointed officials charged with building diverse public schools.

21st Century Integration Resource Center at NYU Metro Center: A Model for Others to Consider

As a national research and technical assistance center, the 21st Century Integration Resource Center at NYU Metro Center has the skill, capacity, and experience to work with schools and districts all across the country to dismantle inequitable and segregative policies. As we outline above, this work requires a multifaceted approach that includes public engagement, policy design, research, technical assistance, and professional development. The NYU Metro Center was launched more than 40 years ago as a federal Equity Assistance Center, with the mission of supporting school desegregation. Over time, our work has expanded to support many facets of educational equity but always with the goal of dismantling segregation. As we seek to reestablish our role as a technical assistance center devoted to the mission of school integration, our approach includes building partnerships with five to seven local educational agencies (LEAs) and/or school districts to develop a 3-year plan to address educational segregation. Through the lens of the 5 Rs, we will target three priority areas with LEAs to begin their work and provide strategic support for public engagement, professional training, and technical support, along with funds to pay educators and other staff to participate in the training and implementation.

We will prioritize the development of racially just:

1. **Curriculum and teaching practices:** Building CRSE environments.
2. **School discipline practices:** Building restorative and social-emotional practices.
3. **Student assignment policies:** Building inclusive student assignment policies.

In Table 3.2-4, we provide a general timeline of activities that partner LEAs can expect to participate in.

Table 3.2-4. Timeline of 5 Rs Activities for Local Educational Agency Partners

Year 1: Framing the work: Building public awareness	Year 2: Implementation	Year 3: Progress monitoring and evaluation
<p>Launch project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Root cause analysis • Participatory public engagement/education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Making data come to life – Convene a representative advisory council – Convene youth advisory council 	<p>Professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training/coaching for CRSE practices • Training for restorative practices and addressing disproportionality • Training/community building support for parents/caregivers • Training/community-building support for students 	<p>Ongoing professional development</p>
<p>Share implementation plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Culturally responsive and sustaining educational (CRSE) practices – Admissions – Discipline <p>Action steps/timeline</p>	<p>Public engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing progress monitoring by advisory council 	<p>Public engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing progress monitoring by advisory council • Public review of goals • Continuing the work

Our mission is to support our partners to build sustainable policies and practices and shift actions and mindsets to cultivate integrated and equitable educational spaces for all students. There is no “one size fits all” approach to desegregation and integration. However, there are principles, practices, and frameworks that can help us seek solutions to segregation that are community-centered while repairing racial harm. This means framing the harm and solutions to segregation in a way that does not demonize communities of color and instead considers the compounding and intersectional harms

of segregation (the 5 Rs) and leveraging participatory public engagement strategies and interactive, inclusive data tools to help communities shape solutions that are equitable, inclusive, and reflect the priorities of the people living in these communities. Our 21st Century Integration Resource Center at NYU Metro Center can be a vehicle for continuing the critical work of school integration.

We can build integrated schools. It will not be easy, but for too long schools serving Black and Brown students have had to make do with the crumbs of a segregated school system. Dr. King was right about the arc of moral justice being long, but a year after his assassination, Nina Simone was also right in the song *Mississippi Goddam* when she sang,

“That’s just the trouble, **Too Slow!**

Desegregation! **Too Slow!**

Mass participation, **Too Slow!**

Unification, **Too Slow!**

Do things gradually

Would bring more tragedy.”

The time to act is now.

Notes

1. Matt Gonzales is an educator, organizer, facilitator, and policy expert. He is director of the Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative at the NYU Metro Center. His work supports grassroots education justice movements across New York City and the country. His work also focuses on supporting schools and districts in developing the policy, tools, and capacity to implement education justice initiatives. He helped design New York City's policy framework for school integration. He has also been integral in shaping the policy and implementation of the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Educational (CRSE) practices of the New York City Department of Education. He is coordinator for [New Yorkers for Racially Just Public Schools](#), an education justice coalition in New York City. He serves on the steering committee for the [National Coalition on School Diversity](#) and the advisory board for a national network called IntegratedSchools. He is a former special education teacher at Bancroft Middle School in Los Angeles and earned his master's in education policy from Teachers College, Columbia University in 2016. He earned his bachelor's in urban education and a special education teaching credential from California State University, Los Angeles, and began his higher education journey at Santa Monica Community College.
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Fostering More Integrated Schools Through Community-Driven, Machine-Informed Rezoning

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Introduction

Education scholars and practitioners have long highlighted the adverse consequences of school segregation by socioeconomic status (SES) on the academic performance and attainment of lower SES students.^{1,2} One reason for this is that SES segregation often impedes the equitable distribution of qualified teachers, opportunities for advanced learning, and other resources across schools.^{3,4} Yet a resources-first view often misses the role that networks and social capital can play in uplifting students and families: School integration can help students and parents access “bridging social capital” that can expose them to new career pathways and other quality-of-life-enhancing opportunities.^{5,6} There is evidence that socioeconomic integration can reduce inequalities in academic outcomes,^{7,8} especially when care is taken to cultivate an educational and social environment that is inclusive and responsive to the new mix of students.^{9,10} Integration can also promote more empathy and compassion for different lived experiences¹¹—suggesting that integration, when done thoughtfully, can benefit all students and families.

Yet actual socioeconomic integration remains elusive across many districts, largely because affluent families decide where to live and send their children to school based on factors related to income.^{12,13} This can recapitulate neighborhood segregation in schools because, across the United States, the vast majority of students attend the schools closest to their homes by virtue of how “school attendance boundaries”—or catchment areas—are drawn.^{14,15,16} The expansion of school choice programs has sought to challenge the geographic determinism of boundary-driven school assignment and

thereby also mitigate school segregation.¹⁷ Yet school choice also sometimes perpetuates segregation because of family self-selection into particular schools.^{18,19,20} Furthermore, where students live can also influence the priorities they are assigned to attend certain choice-based schools,²¹ or even which schools are part of the choice set.²² This makes attendance boundaries an important factor in school attendance policies.

Challenges in Changing Attendance Boundaries

Unfortunately, changing attendance boundaries is often highly contentious because parents worry about longer travel times,²³ reassignment to lower quality schools,²⁴ safety,²⁵ home valuations,^{26,27,28} and community cohesion^{29,30} among other factors. These concerns can block boundary changes altogether³¹ or lead families to leave their schools and districts.^{32,33} A number of issues contribute to such public outcry in the face of boundary changes: [**loudest voices**] the loudest voices are the ones that receive the most attention;^{34,35,36} [**transparency**] families challenge boundary changes because they mistrust proposed methods and aims,³⁷ and/or argue they lack transparency;³⁸ [**individual over collective**] family school selection is a “tragedy of the commons”:³⁹ families support policies that will benefit their own children even if doing so may harm others’ and stifle progress on broader societal issues like integration; and [**inherent preferences**] families simply do not want diverse schools: they may be racist or classist,^{40,41} fail to value diversity, opt to focus on other interventions like reducing school funding disparities,⁴² or other factors. Each of these issues poses a formidable challenge to fostering integration through boundary changes. While [inherent preferences] is arguably most entrenched and difficult to change, it is possible that making progress on the first three might help foster greater integration as the longer term work of the last one continues.

Recommendation: Community+Machine Rezoning

What would it take to better understand how tractable the issues of [loudest voices], [transparency], and [individual over collective] really are, and identify practical pathways to making progress toward mitigating them? Districts often use ArcGIS and other software to display potential rezonings to families for input, but the processes used to produce these options are often manual—hence, time consuming and not always clear to communities. To address these issues, researchers and school districts can form

researcher-practitioner partnerships (RPPs) to develop and evaluate new community-driven, machine-guided school rezoning programs across America.

Focusing on racial and ethnic segregation, our team recently developed artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and applied them to thousands of U.S. school districts to show, via a publicly available dashboard,⁴³ that it may be possible to redraw school attendance boundaries in ways that could reduce segregation while also slightly reducing travel times.^{44,45} The issue of school segregation is hardly a technology problem—indeed, it is an intricate social and political problem—but thoughtfully designed human-centered technologies that are supported by AI may be useful tools in the fight for more integrated schools for a number of reasons:

- Although many machine learning algorithms are opaque and prone to bias,⁴⁶ redistricting algorithms can be interpretable: Families can see which factors the models weigh to produce alternative boundaries designed to achieve a particular goal (which may help address [transparency]).
- These algorithms can seed “human+AI” collaborations⁴⁷ by factoring in community preferences⁴⁸ to automatically create different boundary scenarios more efficiently than humans wielding GIS/mapping software—and, perhaps, mitigate human biases in the process.

New civic technologies that surface AI-generated policy proposals can help address [loudest voices] by creating new channels for different voices to participate in the community feedback process. They might also help families learn from stories and ideas that differ from their own, potentially helping to mitigate [individual over collective]. Critically, these channels can be more accessible than typical channels, such as giving speeches at school board meetings.^{49,50} Given that contentious local changes like boundary redrawing are primarily a societal, not a technological problem, this approach should be guided through a value-sensitive design (VSD) process.⁵¹ VSD is an iterative framework in the field of human-computer interaction that identifies and accounts for stakeholders’ values while designing new technologies. It considers how technology affects human values, on an individual and group level, and how these values can shape technology. Given this, along with VSD’s prior application in similar contexts,⁵² we believe it offers a useful framework for this work. Focusing on socioeconomic integration, which is of interest to many school districts, we pose the following overarching research questions to anchor new approaches to community-driven, machine-informed rezonings across

school districts: (1) Can a community engagement strategy based on asynchronous technologies yield feedback from families who generally do not engage through traditional district channels? (2) Can algorithmically designed attendance boundaries increase support for policies that promote socioeconomic integration? and (3) Does highlighting the potential gains that new SES diversity-promoting boundaries may offer to families increase support for these boundaries? RPPs may explore these questions via the following three phases:

Phase I: Preliminary Modeling and Exploration

Using geocoded, anonymized student counts by Census block shared by school districts, RPPs can explore which current attendance boundaries are most responsible for socioeconomic segregation across the district. This may involve expanding our team’s existing rezoning algorithms to account for specific requirements set forth in the partnering district’s boundary redrawing policies—e.g., preserving the stability of existing feeder patterns. RPPs may also seek to anticipate family demand for certain schools in the face of boundary changes (using historical data and leveraging existing demand choice models as a starting point).⁵³ This choice modeling may help make rezoning models more robust by accounting for family dynamics that might affect eventual socioeconomic integration (like opting out of assigned schools) and also advance the existing frontier of school assignment modeling—which, to our knowledge, has included little work on computational models that jointly change boundaries and anticipate family responses to such changes. Using these data and algorithms, RPPs may identify which groups of two to three elementary, middle, or high schools with bordering attendance boundaries (i.e., “school clusters”) have the greatest potential for achieving more socioeconomic integration. RPPs may then choose x school clusters as the sites of analysis and engagement (where x is selected by the RPP)—prioritizing those that exhibit the greatest potential for integration.

Phase II: Gathering Initial Community Input

Next, working with trusted community organizations, nonprofits, influencers, and leadership at the schools comprising each cluster, RPPs can recruit families to participate in small-group conversations to learn more about what parents in the targeted communities value when it comes to (a) drawing school boundaries and (b) having their children interact with a socioeconomically diverse set of peers—namely, whether and why socioeconomic diversity in schools is important to them. Values underlying family

preferences can be inferred through qualitative thematic analyses of conversation transcripts and applications of recent advances in natural language processing (NLP), using tools similar to those that our team has developed and deployed to support community feedback analysis in school districts (<https://www.feedbackmap.org>). Comparing findings from qualitative analyses and NLP tools can also help contribute to the limited but emerging literature on both the promises and pitfalls of large language model-based tools for supporting qualitative research.⁵⁴ RPPs can use the insights from these small-group discussions to design and develop an asynchronous community engagement platform, which is created to achieve the following objectives that correspond to the aforementioned research questions: (1) Engage audiences from different linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds—particularly those who do not typically participate in district-wide community engagement efforts; (2) engage families in an iterative dialogue about boundary planning that values their contributions—even if eventual policy decisions do not align with their desires; and (3) help parents gain exposure to the perspectives that different parents have on the topic of school boundaries and socioeconomic diversity. This platform can be iteratively prototyped, incorporating user feedback into the development process.

Phase III: Iterative Community Deployment

RPPs may next work with trusted school and community leaders to deploy the feedback platform to families attending schools in the selected clusters, tracking inbound traffic sources and using optional demographics questions to measure the extent to which the platform engages families who are usually underrepresented in typical district community engagement efforts (to explore Question 1). The platform can show different SES-diversity-promoting boundary scenarios; a transparent explanation of any constraints and prior community feedback that were factored in by the algorithms in order to produce them; and finally, their expected impacts on school-level demographics, travel times, and other outcomes families might find relevant. Families can then have an opportunity to indicate how likely they are to support the depicted boundaries (through map annotations as well as close-ended feedback) and offer open-ended feedback to further contextualize their decisions. RPPs can use both qualitative methods and the NLP tools described earlier to analyze families' feedback, inferring their underlying values and priorities and translating them into items that are then encoded back into the algorithms—for example, new constraints on the rezoning models or new importance weights on existing constraints. The algorithms then regenerate new boundaries that seek to foster

SES integration while respecting parents' expressed values and preferences, aiming to resolve value conflicts similar to prior applications of VSD.⁵⁵ These updated boundary scenarios can be transparently explained to parents. To explore Question 3, RPPs may also design and run randomized A/B tests to evaluate what impact, if any, exposing families to boundary preferences and priorities that differ from their own has on the extent to which they support policies that might help foster more diverse schools.

After at least two such iterations (and perhaps more, depending on community interest and the district's timeline), RPPs can generate a final set of boundary scenarios that promote integration while also factoring in community concerns, and explore how boundaries might change under different feedback aggregation schemes: for example, a scheme where each piece of input from families is weighted equally versus a scheme where input from groups is weighted proportional to the group's relative population across the school clusters of interest. District leadership can then review these results and select a final set of boundaries to share with the community, along with a detailed review of how community feedback was incorporated to arrive at them. The configurations can also be presented to the school board for review as a proposed policy change. At the end of the project, RPPs may conduct 1:1 semi-structured interviews with parents across both clusters to explore Question 2: the extent to which participants found the community engagement model to be transparent and trustworthy—especially in comparison to prior engagement efforts. Crucially, parents can also share ideas for how to foster inclusive environments in schools post-integration, to ensure segregation does not manifest in smaller scales like classrooms and cafeterias.^{56,57,58}

Conclusion

We believe this approach offers a new, interdisciplinary method for seeking to address an age-old problem that continues to perpetuate inequalities in the life outcomes of children across the country. Such efforts are new; hence, they require thorough development and evaluation. Yet they have the potential to result in the practical implementation of policies that increase integration, create new networks of bridging social capital,⁵⁹ and ultimately help reduce achievement gaps for students across the district. These efforts may also help foster more trust among families and district leadership overall—which can help strengthen collaborations to improve education in upcoming years. Finally, they can seed the development of new “sociotechnical

infrastructure” and associated best practices for conducting participatory rezoning projects across other school districts.

The challenges before us are large, but the opportunity is even larger. Integrated schools are seeds of hope that can blossom into intergenerational change to produce a future where we are more connected, more supportive, and more compassionate across divides than we are today.

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School Rezoning: Essential Practices to Promote Integration and Equity

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What Is at Stake When District Leaders Redraw School Attendance Boundaries?

Over the past several decades, many school districts have experienced rapid demographic shifts and population growth alongside rising racial and socioeconomic segregation across schools. When school boards draw and redraw attendance boundaries to address these concerns, the process is often referred to as school rezoning. School systems around the country, including those in Washington, DC; New York City; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; and Howard County, Maryland, have recently engaged in major rezoning efforts that seek to balance racial and/or socioeconomic composition, over- or under-enrollment, and the need to build new schools.

School attendance boundaries that divide students into schools within districts help structure segregation.^{1,2} With approximately 85% of public school children attending their local public schools, boundaries drawn around proximate neighborhoods often reinforce the strong relationship between residential and school segregation.³

There is a legal basis for redrawing attendance boundaries to reduce segregation. Under the 1974 Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA), districts are prohibited from adopting rezoning schemes that create more segregation than if students were zoned to their closest schools. In the aftermath of *Parents Involved*, a Supreme Court ruling prohibiting the use of an individual student's race/ethnicity in student assignment, rezoning schools based on the racial/ethnic makeup of neighborhoods remains, for now, one of the few race-conscious policies available to address school segregation.

The Research Behind Rezoning for School Integration

Between 2020 and 2022, a research team at Virginia Commonwealth University examined school rezoning processes in two Virginia school districts. With support from the William T. Grant Foundation, the team engaged in an in-depth, multicase study and conducted semistructured interviews with 15 school leaders and community stakeholders; examined 3,339 public comments across two districts' rezoning processes; and methodically analyzed school rezoning policy criteria in Virginia. Given the dearth of research on school rezoning, the team also sought to expand the research base by conducting a systematic literature review of rezoning processes to strengthen district and policy implementation. The interdisciplinary nature of the work underscored policy, legal, and practical aims. Portions of it were conducted in partnership with colleagues and students at Penn State, at the request of former Governor Ralph Northam's education secretary. Findings were shared broadly with key stakeholders, including district superintendents and the Virginia School Boards Association.⁴

Across both the urban and suburban districts, the team identified salient themes to mobilize change related to rezoning implementation. More specifically, findings from a critical examination of the 3,339 written public comments highlighted the complexity of public opinion on rezoning policies related to (a) competing values and visions for school diversity, (b) racialized conceptualizations of community members' sense of belonging, and (c) forms of boundary maintenance used to discursively resist boundary changes by excluding students and families of color from crucial resources.⁵ Likewise, findings from qualitative interviews with the 15 community members revealed that how stakeholders understand race and whiteness—with regard to rezoning-related history, the broader history of resistance to school desegregation, and past and present racial dialogue—thoroughly shapes, and is shaped by, the political and public engagement dimensions of school rezoning.⁶ Findings provide a lens for school leaders and policymakers to better understand how, and the extent to which, race is imposed in school assignment decisions, particularly as it relates to whose voices are elevated and diminished throughout the process.

Rezoning for School Integration: Policy Development

Based on the team's qualitative study of the contemporary school rezoning process in these two Central Virginia school districts, as well as the review of the literature on

school rezoning, we have identified five essential practices for rezoning for racial integration.⁷

First, school leaders should offer a rationale for rezoning for greater school diversity. It should be presented affirmatively, as in, “School diversity is an asset. The benefits of school diversity accrue to all students and are especially robust if students are equitably integrated.” The rationale must also state clearly that racial and socioeconomic segregation should be disrupted or prevented.

Second, community and school leaders need to speak openly about the racialized history surrounding school and residential segregation. Many stakeholders in the rezoning process presume a historical blank slate when it comes to existing school attendance boundaries. But distant and not-so-distant echoes of earlier rezoning and/or school desegregation efforts will emerge during contemporary processes, often absent crucial context. For instance, calls for “neighborhood schools” ignore the ways government-sponsored segregation in housing and education have shaped neighborhoods. Leaders should anticipate the emergence of ahistorical, race-evasive narratives and meet them with a clear accounting of how the past shapes the present when it comes to rezoning.

Third, school leaders must set clear, measurable, and race-conscious integration goals. While the legal context surrounding race consciousness in education is contested, racial diversity remains a compelling government interest. During the rezoning process, educational leaders should seek to ensure that school-level racial and economic diversity roughly reflects the overall racial and economic diversity of the district (within plus or minus 5–10 percentage points). Potential school zone configurations should not be considered if they fall outside those flexible margins.

Fourth, educational leaders should prioritize integration as a rezoning criterion. Integration should rise to the first or second decision-making priority among a given set of criteria. This matters because too often common rezoning criteria—for example, adhering to natural boundaries or reducing transportation—are in direct conflict with integration.

Fifth, and relatedly, leaders should not assume that prioritizing transportation efficiency or relying on boundaries like rivers or roads is desirable when crafting school attendance boundaries. Centuries of racial discrimination in planning, land use,

infrastructure, and construction mean that an overreliance on land features, built or natural, will likely reify segregation.

Rezoning for School Integration: Policy Implementation

Given the barriers identified in our own research and the extant rezoning literature, we also recognize that developing integrative rezoning policy alone may not translate to more integrated schools. Indeed, outcomes are also influenced by the processes that school boards use to translate policy into new boundary lines. These processes must reduce barriers like public distrust—particularly among stakeholders with generational memories of past segregative policy efforts—and disproportionate representation that minimizes or renders invisible historically marginalized groups. Implementing inclusive processes for public engagement is another crucial ingredient to foster more integrated attendance zones.

Inclusive public processes should expand access to public input opportunities and feature leadership responses through multiple communication channels.⁸ One promising model is the civic engagement process of the city of Minneapolis during the creation of its 20-year Comprehensive Plan, which included intentional efforts to involve and empower historically underrepresented citizens and build community capacity (<https://minneapolis2040.com/#>) Another is the 2018 middle school desegregation plan for District 15 in New York City Public Schools (<https://d15diversityplan.com/>), which included a thoughtful and detailed design process for planning, outreach, and decision making facilitated by an organization with a track record of community dialogue and education on race and racism. More generally, district collaboration with external organizations that have proven expertise in public engagement, educational equity, and school integration can yield positive results.

Elevating the voices of those left out of traditional public input processes also means being responsive to that input. Public meetings that build in processes for hearing from the public can foster participants' trust and willingness to keep engaging with the school system.⁹ Additionally, efforts to center school youth as participants in rezoning processes are also imperative. Students should be encouraged to participate in traditional public comment, receiving priority at the beginning of the session. High school students should also have a seat at the decision-making table when it comes to rezoning.

Implementation of rezoning processes should also feature improvement cycles that allow policymakers to adapt their processes based on what is working well to expand participation, voice, and representation. As the K–12 sector increasingly uses the principles of improvement science or organizational improvement to address instructional or operational challenges, K–12 governance is an area ripe for the same strategies.¹⁰ Through a research-informed partnership, rezoning policies can be written to leverage frequent action for integration, and rezoning processes can be designed to learn what is working to promote equitable engagement in implementation. Then, successes can be expanded to other policy efforts centered on addressing inequities and promoting diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion

Regular engagement with school rezoning presents school district leaders with frequent opportunities to either reduce or exacerbate segregation. Too often, as research from Virginia highlights, school officials are unprepared to proactively lead the dialogue on race and racism—past and present—that will ensue. When districts do emphasize school diversity as a priority in rezoning, its meaning can become highly contested without a clear definition and measurable goals. And without intentional safeguards and procedures for equitable community input, public engagement surrounding school rezoning may be dominated by the most resourced and politically powerful groups. Growth in the use of rezoning as a lever to reduce segregation will take partnership, support, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

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