PART 5:

Collaborative Cross-Sector Approaches to Education and Equity

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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.

Acknowledgments

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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.
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Segregation is a multidisciplinary issue that affects many areas beyond education, including health, workforce opportunities, and more. Multisector coordination has become crucial to present-day "Integration 2.0" efforts and advancing educational equity. Authors in this part outline how collaborative approaches can help overcome some of the pitfalls of past integration efforts by connecting across fields of study, developing shared narratives and understandings, and bridging geographies.

As many of the essays in this compendium make clear, people-centric, collaborative approaches lead the way in guiding researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and communities toward designing more integrated, equitable schools for the future.

Community Development for Integrated Schools: The Detroit Choice Neighborhoods Initiative

Sarah Winchell Lenhoff, Wayne State University, Huriya Jabbar, University of Southern California, DeMarcus Jenkins, University of Pennsylvania, and Kara S. Finnigan, University of Michigan

More than 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*,[1] U.S. schools remain racially[2] and economically[3] segregated. Although many have questioned the research[4] that helped justify the Supreme Court decision that "separate was inherently unequal," empirical studies have confirmed that segregation harms students of color and those who live in poverty. As a result of the structural inequities surrounding opportunities and resources, students who attend segregated schools have lower academic achievement[5] and lower educational attainment, and they earn less[6] over their lifetimes. Under court orders, efforts to desegregate schools largely "worked" following Brown—students of all races benefited[7] from attending desegregated schools—but these efforts were short-lived. In addition, many students of color and their families had to endure racist responses and practices that were never addressed as part of these policies.

Any attempt to sustain desegregation efforts faces challenges. Given mandated busing and the *Milliken v. Bradley*[8] decision, in which the Supreme Court ruled that school systems did not have to desegregate across district boundaries, many white and higher income residents left cities for the suburbs,[9] supported by racist and exclusionary housing and mortgage-lending practices.[10] Large urban school districts such as those in Detroit, Milwaukee, and Cleveland became majority Black and today serve highly segregated, mostly low-income students.[11] Students of different races now tend to live separately and, in turn, attend different schools. But desegregation is still our most effective tool for educational equity.[12] Rather than give up on inadequate attempts at desegregation, we need to examine new approaches to integrating schools.

Efforts to integrate schools through housing reforms or school choice policies have often failed to disrupt segregated patterns. One reason may be that these policies focus

on just one sector—housing or schools—neither of which can tackle the problem alone. Instead, cities may benefit from place-based **community development interventions**, such as the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to integrate neighborhood schools. These approaches combine mixed-income housing with new educational opportunities and purposeful efforts to create community cohesion. Cities across the U.S. have received CNI grants, yet few studies have explored their implications for school integration. [13] How might investing in high-poverty neighborhoods change the composition of local schools? We need both a robust theory of how community development interventions may spur school integration, and an empirical investigation into the long-term impact.

Why Haven't School Choice Policies Worked?

Although not necessarily designed for desegregation, charter schools are one strategy that severs the link between housing and school assignment, permitting students who may not live near each other to attend school together, which could potentially lead to schools that are less segregated. In reality, however, charter schools have exacerbated rather than ameliorated the problem. Across the country, charters tend to be more racially segregated than the traditional public schools nearby. [14] Both school practices and parents' choices contribute to higher segregation. Schools make decisions about location,[15] embed subtle messages in their marketing[16] about who belongs, and can "cream-skim"[17] affluent or higher performing students. Parents can also reinforce or increase segregation. Even when white families say they care most about academics, many choose schools based on racial or socioeconomic characteristics, and they avoid schools[18] that are racially diverse. In gentrifying areas, where there may be hope for school integration as white and affluent residents move into historically low-income, Black, or Hispanic communities, schools often remain segregated. New residents use school choice to enroll elsewhere, and in some cases, neighborhood schools experience short-term integration as new residents enroll, but they become resegregated as long-time residents of color are displaced.[19]

Other policies, like interdistrict choice and magnet schools, also have the potential to reduce racial and economic segregation by allowing public school students to enroll in schools outside their attendance zones or districts. These too have had limited effect because they do not disrupt the root causes of structural inequality and are often a Band-Aid rather than a solution to regional inequities.[20] Even with controlled expansion

of these forms of choice, individual preferences, school decisions, housing availability, and transportation[21] inequities typically reproduce school segregation by race and class. Choice alone cannot achieve equity or overcome broader structural inequities.

Why Haven't Housing Interventions Worked?

If school choice cannot break the link between segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools, we might expect housing-based interventions to be more promising. Despite the promise of housing-based integration programs, public investment is far outpaced by the demand.[22] Underinvestment in housing, particularly affordable or publicly subsidized housing, keeps many low-income and racially minoritized residents from moving to more affluent neighborhoods.[23] Housing programs that do exist are often not designed to promote integration, and public housing has a sordid history of segregation. The results from the few housing programs that have sought to integrate residents are mixed. For example, the Moving to Opportunity project, which provided vouchers for low-income families to move to low-poverty neighborhoods, had positive effects only among those with children who moved[24] at a young age; older children were adversely affected. The programs had positive outcomes (increased college attendance) and intergenerational impacts, providing more evidence that where one lives matters for economic and educational opportunity. Yet programs that move residents from their neighborhoods can risk further depressing the areas that they move from and create risks for families who may not be supported in their new schools and neighborhoods, particularly if they are racially minoritized in predominantly white settings. Given these tensions, there is a need to invest in the neighborhoods where low-income and Black residents already reside and to ensure that all residents benefit when neighborhood change occurs.

Community Development for Integrated Schools

Housing interventions and school choice have not led to racial and economic integration because they have failed to build on the assets of neighborhood communities. To integrate schools, we must integrate communities themselves. Rather than remove low-income or racially minoritized residents from their neighborhoods (e.g., through school busing or Moving to Opportunity) or schools (e.g., via charter schools or school choice), community development initiatives must cultivate new social networks across race and class by creating physical spaces where neighbors can live, get

to know each other, and attend school. To be clear, we are not arguing against interdistrict choice, busing, or housing voucher programs, but we also need place-based strategies that invest directly in high-poverty communities. Community development for integrated schools values a community's cultural wealth,[25] cultivates it, protects it, and builds on it to create cross-sector and democratic approaches to neighborhood improvement and integration.

Some research suggests that desegregation is most effective when carried out in individuals' early education rather than in K–12.[26] Yet many cities have a shortage[27] of high-quality integrated early childhood spaces. When parents' social networks[28] are diverse, children's racial bias decreases. Community development for integrated schools promotes intergroup social engagement through playgrounds and early childhood centers, and it offers educational opportunities throughout the pre-K–20 pipeline.

Community development for integrated schools is grounded in what social science suggests are the strongest mechanisms for spurring racial and socioeconomic integration. The most important of these is the broadening of social networks through social contact. When lower income children interact more with higher income peers, they benefit[29] from increased information and support for navigating systems that are often designed to exclude, such as the college application process, insurance registration, or public services. They then combine this critical knowledge with their own cultural capital[30] to successfully navigate public systems. Furthermore, when white families interact with racially minoritized families in deep, sustained ways, they may become less racially biased[31] and more likely to choose schools in ways that foster integration. And the benefits of integration are clear for white students, as well. White students in racially diverse schools report[32] higher levels of student engagement, civic participation, and sense of belonging than white students in segregated schools. In this way, we see community development for school integration as a cyclical, exponential process that may lead to better outcomes for all students over time.

The Corktown CNI

In Corktown, a 1-square-mile neighborhood just west of downtown Detroit, only half of the 1,000 children in the neighborhood attended a public school in 2021–22. In part due to Detroit's expansive school choice policies, they attended 97 different traditional public and charter schools, and only 98 children attended Corktown's zoned school.

Corktown's racial demographics make it uniquely positioned to benefit from community development for school integration. Although Detroit is the most segregated city[33] in America, Corktown is racially diverse, with 59% of residents identifying as Black, 28% as white, and 6% as Hispanic. Yet the public school enrollment of students in the neighborhood was 90% Black in 2021–22.

With the Ford Motor Company's recent $740 million investment in a new autonomous vehicle campus in Corktown and its near-complete restoration of Michigan Central Station, a neighborhood landmark, many residents and policymakers are concerned about the possibility of gentrification. In the City of Detroit's Choice Neighborhoods application, it reported that the median home value in the neighborhood rose to $179,583 in 2020, whereas the median income of neighborhood residents was just $28,910, lower than that of the city overall, with 41% of Corktown residents identified as "extremely low income." Investing in Corktown during this critical transition period will help determine whether urban development there can translate into more opportunities for all residents or simply lead to the ouster of long-standing lower income residents, as we have seen in other cities across the United States.

The Corktown neighborhood in Detroit has been selected for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods Implementation (CNI) grant. This grant is intended to improve current public housing, create additional affordable housing units, and provide wraparound services for residents of Corktown. With this grant, the City of Detroit seeks "to ensure that residents of all income levels can remain in the neighborhood, and experience and participate in the neighborhood's economic activity."[34] Over the next 5 years, the CNI will create more than 800 new mixed-income housing units in Corktown, which will include replacing 86 existing public housing units and building 65 new Section 8 units, nearly 500 affordable units, 161 market-rate units, and 40 for-sale home-ownership units. The CNI will also support the development of a new mixed-income early childhood center and community gathering space near the existing K–12 neighborhood school, along with educational and economic wraparound services.

Investing in Community

The Detroit CNI is a place-based school integration intervention that combines **education** and **housing** strategies within a greater neighborhood investment plan. This

intervention envisions an integrated neighborhood that disrupts historical and predicted segregation patterns by purposely facilitating **community cohesion**. It seeks to proactively take advantage of the opportunity for racial integration with new community investment and increased housing stock, while forestalling the potentially negative impacts of urban development and gentrification.

The intervention includes three primary elements:

- **Education:** An early childhood center designed to be mixed income, located in the heart of the neighborhood just blocks from the zoned elementary-middle school. In addition, the CNI will support family case managers and wraparound services outside the formal school system, including tutoring and postsecondary transition support.
- **Housing:** Replacement low-income units and new mixed-income units fully integrated into the existing community with efforts to remove physical barriers to community interaction, and upgraded facilities to fit into the neighborhood aesthetically.
- **Community Cohesion:** A community-engaged process for neighborhood development, including community meetings to obtain input on the planned initiatives, case management for low-income families, and new common spaces (e.g., a community center, parks, and a newly constructed greenway).

The mechanisms through which the Detroit CNI may lead to greater school integration are threefold (see logic model in Appendix 5-1). First, the initiative will improve and create new low-income housing alongside the construction of “market-rate” units. The CNI thus increases opportunities for residents of different races and classes to live near each other. We see this as the first necessary step toward school integration.

Importantly, the CNI does not stop at housing; this initiative also generates new opportunities for neighbors to develop social ties, work together toward common causes, and participate in new educational opportunities within the bounds of an existing neighborhood. Without mechanisms to foster trust and build relationships among people from different races and classes, simply residing in the same neighborhood may not lead to integration. The CNI does this by removing physical barriers to interaction (i.e., fencing between the public housing development and the rest of the neighborhood), creating community centers and shared spaces, and soliciting community input. These efforts to build trust among community members and facilitate

social cohesion are often missing in other interventions, but we see them as critical in the logic of school integration through community development.

Not only will residents of different races and classes live near each other, they will have opportunities to interact, learn about, and develop social bonds with their neighbors. Research in Detroit,[35] as well as scholarship from other contexts,[36] shows that social networks are the most reliable source of information when families choose schools. Although families of all races and income levels prefer schools close to home, they discuss the options they are considering and they solicit advice from friends and family members, listening especially to trusted social contacts who have personal experiences with schools. Therefore, we view the increased social contact and community building of the CNI as a mechanism for families to expand their social networks and trusted sources of information about schools, which may lead to integrative school choices.

Finally, the CNI will invest in new educational resources through an early childhood center that will double as a community center, and it will improve the conditions surrounding neighborhood schools through beautification efforts. These investments may improve residents' perceived quality of the neighborhood public school and induce more families to enroll their children there, which in turn may create greater diversity in the social networks in which the neighborhood schools are being recommended. We hypothesize that Corktown children across race and class will be more likely to enroll in preschool and elementary school together, increasing the likelihood of racial and socioeconomic integration. The promise of this community development intervention will be realized only if residents across race and class see themselves as co-designers who are helping to create the future of integrated Corktown. The City of Detroit has committed to a community-engaged process with the potential to do just that.

Studying a Promising Approach to School Integration

As we have shown, many promising approaches to school integration have not succeeded. Rigorous, community-centered research is essential to identify the short- and long-term impact of CNI in Corktown. As scholars with deep personal and professional connections to Detroit, we believe a study of the Corktown CNI should capture rich data over time to deeply document and understand the changes associated with the initiative. Research should examine the effect of the Corktown CNI intervention on student enrollment decisions and on the racial and socioeconomic integration of the

early childhood center and the K–12 schools in the neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods. It is just as important to measure the mechanisms and conditions that create these outcomes, so research activities should also focus on topics such as neighborhood race- and class-based segregation, politics, power, and community input in the redevelopment process. A robust, evidence-generating research study on the Corktown CNI would include these elements:

- An evaluation of the housing program's impact on multiple outcomes (e.g., school integration, student attendance and achievement, health, political engagement).
- An examination of the mechanisms that drive those outcomes (e.g., student and parents' social networks, social cohesion, resources, and community advocacy).

These two components would enable researchers to answer questions such as, what actually happens when families from different racial and economic backgrounds come together in a residential building complex, a preschool, or a community center? What conditions foster authentic relationships across differences? How do residents work together, if at all, toward shared goals? Where do conflicts emerge? Learning from these challenges could help inform future integration efforts across sectors.

This research should be conducted through cross-sector collaborative relationships (such as those cultivated through the Detroit PEER[37] center at Wayne State) with school district officials, community organizations, and education advocacy groups, including the parent- and youth-led grassroots organizing group 482Forward. Interviews, observations, surveys, and administrative data should be collected to document changes as they occur, as well as to follow residents over time after the HUD grant concludes to examine long-term outcomes. To the extent possible, data should be collected at baseline from both Corktown residents and a representative sample of other Detroit residents to compare how both the mechanisms and outcomes change over time for those in and outside the Corktown footprint.

To ensure that the research is community centered and nonextractive, interim findings should be shared with residents to inform interpretation and refine future research protocols. The research team should also coordinate with other researchers studying similar initiatives across the country to share ideas and see how these dynamics are playing out differently across contexts, with important implications for policy design.

Conclusion

Integrated schools and communities do not just lead to better short- and long-term outcomes for all involved; they are needed to counter the growing divisions in our country, for the sake of social cohesion and democracy. Where school choice policies and housing interventions that move low-income residents have not succeeded, we see community development as an underexplored pathway to integrated neighborhoods, social networks, and schools. The HUD-supported Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, with its explicit focus on racial and social equity, has the potential to build on existing community assets while strengthening ties between neighbors in cities across the country.[38] We look forward to joining a growing community of scholars, activists, and civil servants interested in investing in communities and learning from the experiences of their residents.

Appendix 5-1: Logic Model of Community Development for Integrated Schools

Figure 5-1.A-1. Logic Model of Community Development for Integrated Schools

Note. The logic model graphic was designed by Whitney Miller, a research assistant at the Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research at Wayne State University.

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Stories of School Travel: Using a Mobility Justice Framework for Desegregation Research and Policy

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In the Hunters View public housing project in San Francisco, California, children rode hours on public transit buses from their high-poverty neighborhood to “low-performing schools” in all corners of the city, when they could have walked mere feet to a comparable local elementary school. When asked about their choice, parents shared that their priority was keeping their kids healthy and safe, which meant sending them out of their neighborhood suffering from gun violence.[1]

In West Hartford, Connecticut, many families of color coming from the adjacent city of Hartford through an interdistrict desegregation program have trouble attending school events, extracurricular activities, and parent–teacher conferences because of poor transit connections and limited school district funds for yellow buses or taxis. A school administrator said to me, “Don’t tell my bosses, but sometimes I drive the kids home after an event. I know I’m not supposed to do that, but how else are they going to get there?”[2]

Michael Dumas, a scholar of education and the Black experience, described the “everyday assaults” he, as a Black child, experienced on his way to a desegregated school in Seattle in the 1980s: “My shortcut through the alley might put me directly in the path of a growling stray dog who sometimes ran loose back there.” If he forgot “to set the alarm, or [took] too long eating breakfast” he would have to take public transit: “First, the 48 bus north…where I would get off…to wait on an often windy freeway overpass for the 75 to the white, affluent Wedgewood neighborhood where my short legs would endure yet another hill, to get to the school building at the top. Late.” Meanwhile, white students whose parents drove them to school had extra time “to hang out at their lockers…or chat casually with teachers, who would ask them questions like, why don’t you try out for band, or get involved in French Club? Even on these days, when we arrived on time, we were already too late.”[3]

Stories of school travel are all around us. They capture parents' complex decisions that transcend simple conceptions of "good schools." They reveal the trade-offs district leaders balance in the face of diminishing budgets for transportation and give us a window into the risks some educators take in bucking their district's policies to personally drive kids home. They elevate the hardships Black and Brown youth experience when navigating complex and less-than-reliable public transit systems. They point out how the journey to school creates ripples and waves in students' delicate social dynamics and in classrooms that teachers manage every day.

Yet, overall, in formal research and policy circles, the journey to and from school remains underexamined and underappreciated. As we think about Integration and Equity 2.0, we would do well to include transportation as a critical element. Desegregation schemes require both the right configuration of policies and programs within schools and the physical pathway to get to schools. After all, contemporary approaches to desegregation[4] are predicated on a student's ability to physically get to a new, often further afield, school. Desegregation programs intentionally decouple schools from their neighborhood context to reverse discriminatory housing and land use policies; disrupt the cumulative negative consequences of entrenched segregation; and enable better academic, health, and life outcomes.[5] Regardless of the type of effort—redesigned school attendance boundaries and feeder patterns, controlled choice plans, magnet or diverse-by-design charter schools, and/or interdistrict transfer programs—they cannot be successful without some investment in transportation. In other words, across diverse geographies, achieving integrative goals is impossible without intentional and sustained attention to transportation.

A Gap in Understanding

A few recent reports have shed light on the constraints school districts face and how they manage diminishing transportation resources, exacerbated by pandemic-related budget cuts, health and safety measures, and bus driver shortages.[6] Even a small sampling of press coverage from across the country reveals some of the political and logistical headwinds districts face in trying to implement integration plans and the transportation needs associated with these plans.[7] Research, however, has provided a nuanced sense only of the poor conditions at a young person's starting point (an under-resourced, racially and socioeconomically segregated neighborhood) and her aspirational destination (a better resourced, diverse, and integrated school).

But the journey to get to and from school is a central plot in the struggle for desegregation and as such also deserves more rigorous attention in research, policymaking, and program design.[8] Currently, the way we ask questions and assess the success of desegregation programs does not fully account for the experiences—positive and negative—of young people on their journeys to school. Dumas's testimonial above about "everyday assaults" perhaps most poignantly drives home the burdens—or "suffering" in Dumas's words—that young people bear as they participate in desegregation. Researchers and policymakers have not made space for these experiences.[9] Notably, Dumas's struggle is not only the function of his bus ride, but a result of the intersecting dynamics of household activity, wage and labor policy, housing and land use policies, food security, and school access, as well as the physical and social topographies that young people and their families manage daily. Reconfigured or additional bus routes alone would not have ameliorated his pain. Rather, his testimony suggests that the overlapping and compounding realities of school travel in the context of desegregation require transdisciplinary approaches to research and policy making.

Perversely, many already draw from a wide range of disciplines to construct arguments opposing school district desegregation policies. For example, in the past few years, parents and decision makers in Howard County, Maryland, spoke with deep ambivalence about how to manage the movement of students across their countywide school district during a recent attendance rezoning process.[10] They expressed commitment to ensuring that all students had access to high-quality education, but when actually confronted with an alternative attendance boundary design to decrease concentrated poverty, they voiced empirically dubious concerns about health and environmental impacts of long bus or car rides.[11] After a recent review of the school travel literature, I can confirm that we do not have evidence to definitively assess the consequences of commuting to school, particularly when weighed against remaining in a segregated school or neighborhood. But parents across the country who oppose desegregation pick up arguments circulating in smart growth and sustainable transportation circles, which emphasize the need to reduce "vehicle miles traveled" and greenhouse gas emissions in school travel.[12]

Opponents also elevate the ideal of a walkable neighborhood school and the importance of active travel to school (walking and biking) for physical health.[13] But these ideals neglect the deeply racist and exclusionary values imbued in early neighborhood

designs with segregated schools at their centers.[14] They do not adequately reconcile their normative commitment for active travel to neighborhood schools with the reality that those schools and neighborhoods reflect patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation. Walkable school attendance zones can actually cement concentrated poverty and disinvestment in some places and opportunity hoarding and white privilege in others.[15] As Nikole Hannah-Jones has stated, commuting by bus to a desegregated school "was not always easy, but I am perplexed by the audacity of people who argue that the hardship of a long bus ride somehow outweighs the hardship of being deprived of a good education" endemic to high-poverty and racially segregated schools that we otherwise conscript so many Black and Brown children to attend.[16]

Toward a Transdisciplinary Understanding of Educational Justice

Elsewhere, collaborators and I have argued that a mobility justice framework can build understanding of school travel and its implications in both transportation and educational equity.[17] Here, I argue that this framework is particularly relevant in the context of school desegregation program design and implementation. A mobility justice framework opens transdisciplinary possibilities by looking beyond material movement—how we get from home to school—to also consider the larger systemic configurations that foster or constrain free, easy, and fearless movement for all groups.[18] This framework takes up issues of public spaces broadly and "governance processes that lay claim to regulate those spaces," be those transportation, housing and land use, education, or policing policies, all of which contribute to cementing patterns of segregation.[19] Thus, it is broadly applicable in rural, suburban, and urban places that are struggling with implementing desegregation policies and achieving integrative outcomes.

Mobility justice demands attention to school desegregation by a more expansive set of stakeholder perspectives. It also suggests a broader portfolio of methods to (re)conceptualize how school desegregation gets implemented and what school travel in that context looks like. Beyond questions of benefits and burdens, we seek justice for young people and their families beyond simplistic measures of distributive justice, turning to a more restorative or reparative approach that considers the historical "origins of disparities and the ongoing processes that continue to reproduce them."[20] Further, we can find procedural justice by expanding our methodological toolbox to shift "who is involved in decision making, the extent to which they can affect outcomes, and whose knowledge is considered valid."[21]

An Agenda for Participatory and Policy-Changing Research

As the opening vignettes encapsulate, understanding of how desegregation programs and their transportation strategies are actually lived by young people, parents, and educators remains elusive. As argued above, a mobility justice framework has the potential to illuminate the transdisciplinary realities of school travel and to the material lived experiences of intersectional identities for historically minoritized and marginalized peoples. But how? Mobility justice is not only a conceptual framework but also a call for a particular methodology, one that shifts the locus of control and power away from researchers and policymakers and that foregrounds systemic oppressions and the subjectivities of students and families. Unfortunately, researchers and policymakers do not generally ask the questions or conduct the data collection and analysis that would yield insights that center young people and parents as protagonists in their own school travel story.

Expanding our methods beyond those traditionally used in transportation and education policy research can help. Right now, in transportation, we focus on things such as the mode, cost, frequency, speed, and distance of a particular trip because "transportation research paradigms may give relatively less attention to social issues, qualitative data, and local knowledge, while emphasizing quantitative data, modeling, physical factors, and infrastructure building."[22] Likewise, education research and policy traditionally measure outcomes through quantitative metrics like test scores, absentee or graduation rates, and the like. Thus, my provocation is to initiate and design research with and for young people, families, and educators.[23] Students and families can drive the questions they want answered about how to realize the aspirations of desegregation policies. Looking beyond traditional approaches to desegregation research, policymaking, and program design is the path to a model of integration defined not simply by proximity (Black students learning with white students), but one that truly disrupts power in schools, policymaking, research, and ultimately, the broader society.[24]

To do so requires creating safe spaces through intentional relationship building over time and shared inquiry processes characteristic of participatory-action research methods, for which we have many precedents. From the early Civil Rights Movement to contemporary efforts, young people have led and continue to lead in fights for integration and educational justice.[25] Their work centers the experience and expertise of young people, families, and educators in the study of systemic oppression, in this case

through public education and transportation infrastructure investments that yield "arrested mobility."[26] These approaches ensure that those who ask the questions that push for change are the same people who bear the consequences. When this happens, their needs, burdens, and benefits are not merely speculative on the part of third-party researchers or policymakers, but rather they are the central drivers of change. Research and related policy or program outcomes are accountable to these young people and their communities.[27]

Research questions can start as descriptive explorations of students' daily travels, environments, and emotions. Interviews, focus groups, travel diaries, and ride-along and auto-ethnographies, along with photography and film, will help capture suffering, fears, joys, and other visceral and somatic experiences[28] of the school journey, and complement travel survey and administrative data that are fed into models and projections that usually shape transportation decisions. Analysis could include how different modes and pathways are affecting physical and mental health and a young person's readiness to learn when they arrive at the school door. Comparative analysis could examine how school travel for the purposes of desegregation is experienced and perceived relative to school travel in general. A mobility justice framework would also call attention to how school travel affects the subjectivities of students and families, depending on their multiple and intersectional identities.

Further, studies can explore the experience of educators in the classroom managing students who arrive after long and varied trips. Learning with educators about their experiences in classrooms with students who travel to their schools from outside the neighborhood or district may include more observational studies, auto-ethnography, and interviews or focus groups. Administrators also have important insights into issues that transcend their local school district and travel up the chain to state and federal budgeting and policymaking, particularly those that constrain the ability of local districts to provide transportation for desegregation programs.[29]

Envisioning Possibilities for Change

Research and resultant evidence-based policymaking or program specifications should be guided not only by statistical measures, quantitative modeling, and outcome-based assessments. Rather, qualitative data that capture processes in real time and are gathered directly from the constituencies who have the daily experience of travel to

school can inform policy and practice at all levels. Participatory research is iterative, so it has a built-in opportunity for real-time learning, change, and programmatic response to interim findings. For example, insights can help district administrators better plan routes, bus bell schedules, extracurricular activities, family engagement, and the like. Student research on their school travel can be connected to other curricular activities in social studies, math, and English language arts classes. Furthermore, these findings can also inform school district decisions regarding school assignment boundaries, school siting, and budgetary priorities for desegregation programs. Longer term, research can inform regional transportation policies and planning, federal regulations on the use of education funds for transportation expenses, and cross-agency guidance for collaborative efforts across the U.S. Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Transportation.[30]

A mobility justice framework relies on transdisciplinary perspectives that take seriously the full range of issues raised by respondents and community researchers, the full impact and application of which remains yet to be known. Questions in other domains—neighborhood change, housing and land use, commercial development, policing, arts and culture, to name a few—will surely emerge and complete the full story arc. Policy interventions may well exist outside of education that can make the journey to desegregated schools not one of hazards and burdens, but rather one of learning and connection. Ultimately, participatory research and consultative processes with students, families, and educators can help inform how desegregation and transportation policies, operations, data collection, and funding can better align with their needs and support them on their literal and metaphorical journeys to and through places of learning.

Notes

1. Personal communication, November 2007.
2. Personal communication, February 2022.
3. Dumas, M. J. (2014). “Losing an Arm”: Schooling as a site of Black suffering. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *17*(1), 1–29. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2013.850412
4. I use the terms “desegregation” and “integration” interchangeably to mean “the practice of bringing together students from different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds in an attempt to address systemic educational inequities and foster social cohesion across lines of difference.” From Chirichigno, G., Tegeler, P.,
& Hollinger, A. (2020). [Policy Brief 10]. National Coalition on School Diversity.
5. See, for example, Johnson, R. C., & Nazaryan, A. (2019). *Children of the dream: Why school integration works*. Basic Books and Russell Sage Foundation. https://www.basicbooks.com/titles/rucker-c-johnson/children-of-the-dream/9781541672697/; and Briggs, X. (Ed.). (2005). *The geography of opportunity: Race and housing choice in metropolitan America*. Brookings Institution Press.
6. Vincent, J. M., Makarewicz, C., Miller, R., Ehrman, J., & McCoy, D. L. (2014). *Beyond the yellow bus: Promising practices for maximizing access to opportunity through innovations in student transportation*. Center for Cities & Schools; and Burgoyne-Allen, P., & O’Neal Schiess, J. (2017). *Miles to go: Bringing school transportation into the 21st century*. Bellwether Education Partners. https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_Bus-WFF-Transportation_FINAL.pdf
7. For some contemporary examples in New Jersey and Rochester, New York, see, for example, Koruth, M. A. (2022, September 16). *How a school district’s decision to halt bus service got swept up in integration debate*. northjersey.com. https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/education/2022/09/16/south-orange-maplewood-nj-school-district-bus-service-ends/68415977007/; Kudisch, B. (2022, September 12). *Plan to integrate schools, cut ‘courtesy’ busing roils N.J. school district*. NJ.com. https://www.nj.com/essex/2022/09/plan-to-integrate-schools-cut-courtesy-busing-roils-nj-school-district.html; Murphy, J. (2021, October 17). RCSD floats preliminary proposal to end busing for Urban-Suburban, other suburban schools. *Democrat & Chronicle*. https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/education/2021/10/07/rcsd-may-end-busing-urban-suburban-other-suburban-schools/6023711001/; and Cornwall, G. (2018, May 1). How lack of access to transportation segregates schools. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/gailcornwall/2018/05/01/why-tech-is-prepping-to-overhaul-school-transportation/?sh=572fe38a588a

8. Historically, transportation has been the stage and weapon in battles over (de)segregation for generations. For a recent account of the history of forced busing and transportation debates, see Hannah-Jones, N. (2019, July 12). It was never about busing. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/opinion/sunday/it-was-never-about-busing.html. Legal precedent emanates from Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 US 537 (Supreme Court 1896), a case about public transportation and "separate but equal" public facilities. The landmark Brown v. Board of Education, 347 US 483 (Supreme Court 1954) decision that overturned *Plessy*, in part hinged on a Black parent, Oliver Brown, suing his local school district to allow his daughter to attend her neighborhood school, which at the time was designated for white students, instead of getting bused out of their neighborhood to a segregated Black school elsewhere in the district. Subsequent court decisions acknowledged the ways that physical access through transportation provision is central to legal remedies. Also see Green v. County School Board, 391 US 430 (Supreme Court 1968); and Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Bd. of Ed., 402 US 1 (Supreme Court 1971).
9. Dumas, M. J. (2014). "Losing an Arm."
10. Bierbaum, A. H., & Sunderman, G. L. (2021). School desegregation, school re-zoning, and growth management in two Maryland counties. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 29*(August-December), 165. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.6111
11. This is not to suggest that weaponizing school transportation for an anti-integration agenda is new, but rather that today, arguments add layers of "sophistication" by drawing from scholarship outside the field of education.
12. Marshall, J. D., Wilson, R. D., Meyer, K. L., Rajangam, S. K., McDonald, N. C., & Wilson, E. J. (2010). Vehicle emissions during children's school commuting. *Environmental Science and Technology*, *44*(5), 1537–1543. https://doi.org/10.1021/es902932n; Krizek, K. J., Wilson, E. J., Wilson, R., & Marshall, J. D. (2014). Transport costs of school choice. In G. K. Ingram & D. A. Kenyon (Eds.), *Education, land, and location* (pp. 214–238). Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
13. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)'s grantmaking on nutrition, active living, and childhood obesity funded significant research and resulted in local, state, and federal policy changes and programs promoting active travel to school. For more on RWJF, see Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. On the efforts that centered on active travel to school and Safe Routes to School programs, see, for example, Pedroso, M., Hubsmith, D., & Driesse, B. (2011). *Safe routes to school: Helping communities save lives and dollars*. Safe Routes to School National Partnership. https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/SRTSNP-2011-Policy-Report.pdf
14. Lawhon, L. L. (2009). The neighborhood unit. *Journal of Planning History*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513208327072

15. For a discussion of the pitfalls of walkability in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, see, for example, PolicyLink, ChangeLab Solutions, and Safe Routes to School National Partnership. (n.d.). *Maximizing walkability, diversity, and educational equity in U. S. schools: A convening report*. https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/maxamizing-walkability-diversity-and-educational-equity-in-us-schools; Chirichigno, G., & Zimmerman, S, (2012, November). *Promoting safe routes to school programs in low-income communities and communities of color: Challenges and opportunities.* [White paper from annual symposium.] National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity. https://www.consumerfreedom.com/app/uploads/2013/02/Copy-of-2012-NPLAN-Symposium-Documents.pdf

    For a recent comprehensive review of Active Transport to School literature and critique, see Bierbaum, A. H., Karner, A., & Barajas, J. M. (2021). Toward mobility justice: Linking transportation and education equity in the context of school choice. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *87*(2), 197–210. https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01944363.2020.1803104

16. Hannah-Jones, N. (2019, July 12). It was never about busing. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/12/opinion/sunday/it-was-never-about-busing.html

17. Bierbaum, Karner, & Barajas, *Toward mobility justice*.

18. Untokening. (n.d.). *Summary: What is mobility justice?* http://www.untokening.org/summary

19. Untokening, *What is mobility justice?*

20. Bierbaum, Karner, & Barajas, *Toward mobility justice* (p. 199). See also Sheller, M. (2018). *Mobility justice: The politics of movement in an age of extremes*. Verso.

21. Bierbaum et al., *Toward mobility justice* (p. 199).

22. Lowe, K. (2021). Undone science, funding, and positionality in transportation research. *Transport Reviews*, *41*(2), 192–209.

23. I appreciate the skepticism that may result from a researcher suggesting "more research" as a crucial next step. In general, despite my vocation, I am loath to call for research for research's sake. But in the case of school travel and desegregation, I am confident that parents and district leaders are making bold assertions and decisions about the educational, health, environmental, and budgetary impacts of transportation schemes for desegregation in the absence of robust empirical, and especially qualitative, data.

24. Kirkland, D. (2021). Using research evidence to address segregation: A racial equity perspective. *Poverty & Race,* (October-December). https://www.prrac.org/using-research-evidence-to-address-segregation-a-racial-equity-perspective-by-david-kirkland-oct-dec-2021-pr-issue/

25. See, for example, IntegrateNYC, a youth-led organization, that "develop[s] youth leaders who repair the harms of segregation and build authentic integration and equity." IntegrateNYC. (2022, December 5). *Building school integration and education justice*. https://integratenyc.org

26. As Michelle Fine commented in a recent interview, "I want to be clear that we are *not* studying people/communities/groups—together we design projects so that, in collaboration and with critique and radical imagination, we are studying systems of oppression—economic, criminal legal, educational, foster care—that privilege some and oppress others." Sukhadia, Q. (2022, April 27). No research about us, without us: Discussing the Public Science Project's community-based research practice with co-founder Michelle Fine. *Distributaries* [blog]. The Center for Humanities, City University of New York. https://centerforthehumanities.org/distributaries/interview-with-michelle-fine

    "Arrested mobility" is a framework that reveals "how the inalienable right to move, to be moved or to simply exist in public space has been denied by legal and illegal authority," specifically to Black Americans. Brown, C. T., Rose, J., &Kling, S. *Arrested mobility: Barriers to walking, biking, and e-scooter use in Black communities in the United States.* New Urban Mobility Alliance. https://www.numo.global/news/report-arrested-mobility-barriers-walking-biking-and-e-scooter-use-black-communities-us

27. For more on accountability see, for example, Fine, M. (2018). *Just research in contentious times: Widening the methodological imagination* (pp. 114–116). Teachers College Press.

28. For an example of attending to youth's somatic experiences of urban life, see Welch, B. J., Bierbaum, A. H., & Rusli, A. (2020). Mindful mapping: An integrated approach to helping youth navigate neighborhood change. In J. Loebach, S. Little, A. Cox, & P. Eubanks Owens (Eds.), *Handbook for designing public spaces for young people: Processes, practices and policies for youth inclusion* (pp. 14–35). Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780429505614/chapters/10.4324/9780429505614-35).

29. See, for example, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). Final Policy Statement on FTA's School Bus Operations Regulations, 49 CFR Part 605 [Docket No. FTA–2008–0015]. § (2008). https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2008/09/16/E8-21601/final-policy-statement-on-ftas-school-bus-operations-regulations

30. For example, efforts to make transportation an allowable expense in the Magnet School Assistance Program and repealing statutes that prevent federal funding from being used for transportation for school integration. See, for example, George, J. (2021, March 3). *Federal action removes long-standing obstacle to school integration*. [Blog]. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/federal-action-removes-long-standing-obstacle-school-integration

    On cross-agency guidance, see, for example, Castro, J., King, Jr., J. B., & Foxx, A. R. (2016, June 3). *Dear colleague letter: AFFH and school segregation*. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Transportation. https://www2.ed.gov/documents/press-releases/06032016-dear-colleagues-letter.pdf

Strength in Collaboration: How the Bridges Collaborative Is Catalyzing School Integration Efforts

Halley Potter, The Century Foundation, Stefan Lallinger, Next 100 and The Century Foundation, and Lara Adekeye, The Century Foundation

> What are other school districts doing to create diversity in their magnet schools? Have any other schools had success de-tracking their high school classes? How can we support our housing clients to help them find good schools for their children? How can we diversify our schools without leading to "white flight?" Who else is doing this work?

Over the years, our team of education researchers at The Century Foundation (TCF) has heard questions like these from dozens of education and housing leaders who are trying to advance integration in their schools and neighborhoods. They are looking for support in what feels like uncharted territory. They feel alone.

Our TCF team often shares research summaries or provides technical assistance to organizations based on our knowledge of successful integration strategies. But one of the most effective ways that we have been able to support local school integration efforts is to offer connections with leaders in other communities who have tackled similar challenges, thereby catalyzing school integration efforts by spreading ideas across the ecosystem. School and housing leaders learn things through peer conversations that reports or consultants cannot give them. When tackling a problem as vexing and complicated as segregation, leaders are more motivated and produce more creative solutions when they can think through challenges with other practitioners in the trenches whose experiences both mirror and diverge from their own.

In 2020, we launched the Bridges Collaborative to facilitate more such opportunities. The result was a forum for practitioners to share what works (and what does not), exposing leaders to innovation and providing opportunities for collaboration at the national and regional levels that ultimately advance integration.

In creating the Bridges Collaborative, we also aimed to create a national social and political ecosystem that would be more accepting of school integration work. We set out on a mission to supplement the peer-to-peer work with in-depth messaging research and training so that we might help partners surmount what has historically been the most challenging obstacle: convincing stakeholders to take actions that will lead to less segregation.

What has emerged from the work of the Bridges Collaborative, therefore, has been not just one groundbreaking idea for how to further school integration right now, but rather a set of unique approaches our members have taken that collectively have been shared, amplified, and spread through the work of the collaborative, supplemented by a strategic effort to shift public opinion on the broader issue of integration. The value proposition is simple: For school integration to make progress, there must be a forum for practitioners to come together on equal footing to learn about new approaches and how to implement them, as well as to share challenges and brainstorm strategies for surmounting them. Moreover, there must be a more favorable public narrative to enable practitioners to implement what they learn. Integration leaders are stronger together. That is the promise of the Bridges Collaborative.

The Need for Collaboration and Compelling Messaging to Achieve Integration

Five decades of research suggest that socioeconomic and racial integration is one of the best design principles for creating successful schools that produce strong results for students and society.[1] But despite this research consensus that integration is beneficial to all students, diverse learning environments remain a scarce educational resource, and segregation is a stubborn scourge in American public schools. Nationwide, two out of five Black and Latino students attend schools where more than 90% of their classmates are non-white, while one in five white students attends a school where more than 90% of students are also white.[2] This segregation undergirds systemic racism, creates social strife, and leaves our children unprepared for an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world. As economist Heather McGhee explains, "segregation sends disturbing messages not just to Black and brown but also to white children."[3]

School segregation and education inequality are not products of nature: They are the result of racist school and housing policies—conscious decisions by lawmakers—

combined with individual choices made in a society steeped in white supremacy. The work of school integration should be the work of racial healing, to undo those racist structures and build a better educational future for all children founded on principles of racial equity and democracy.

Undertaking this work can be challenging, logistically and politically. School systems that are committed to advancing school integration—like Roaring Fork School District in Colorado, Shaker Heights City School District in Ohio, and Blackstone Valley Prep charter school network in Rhode Island—are often in communities surrounded by segregated districts where integration is nowhere to be found on the list of priorities. In a recent effort to catalog school integration efforts across the country, we identified 119 school districts and 66 charter schools or networks that consider race and/or socioeconomic status in their student assignment or admissions policies.[4] Although these districts and charters, plus others that are actively working on developing integration programs, have a lot to offer in terms of practices, policies, and approaches to integration, they still represent a small slice of school districts and charter schools nationwide. School integration can be lonely work. To avoid reinventing the wheel, leaders need concrete examples and lessons learned from practitioners who have implemented solutions to this vexing problem.

Finally, the fight for school integration over the years has been set back by strategic and coordinated attempts to turn popular opinion against integration efforts. Recent redistricting efforts in Howard County, Maryland,[5] and elite school reform efforts in New York City[6] are emblematic of such attempts. In both cases, opponents labeled reforms as unfair and even racist in some cases as they beat back efforts to make schools more integrated, and they argued that those districts should spend more time improving segregated schools as a solution.

As author Matt Delmont meticulously documented in his seminal book *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation*, the language of local control, "neighborhood schools," and the very notion of busing have their roots in the advocacy of segregationist white people such as Louisa Day Hicks.[7] Many of these terms and concepts now enjoy immense popularity, even among some people of color, many of whom are totally unaware of their origins. Practitioners who hope to combat segregation in their communities also need strategic language at their disposal to

supplement their initiatives, and ultimately a friendlier political ecosystem for implementing solutions to segregation.

Launching an Integration Collaborative

In 2020, TCF issued a call for school districts, charter schools, and fair housing organizations to apply to join a cohort focused on increasing access to diverse, integrated, and inclusive schools and neighborhoods. That fall, we launched the Bridges Collaborative with 57 schools, school districts, and housing organizations. Members include some of the largest school districts in the country, as well as single-site charter schools, and various housing nonprofits and housing authorities across both red and blue states. In contributing to the national conversation on the benefits of school diversity, the Bridges Collaborative seeks to improve the specific conditions in the local communities represented and to highlight successes, demonstrating what is possible. Collectively, our members are given the space and opportunity to learn from one another, develop grassroots political support, and discuss successful strategies for integration.

Creating Spaces for Collaboration on Integration Across Sectors and Geographies

Throughout the first cohort, the Bridges Collaborative engaged 250 participants from across 22 states in more than 300 hours of programming. The Bridges Collaborative seeks to increase access to diverse, integrated, and inclusive schools and neighborhoods and improve the quality of these schools and neighborhoods through two primary mechanisms. First, by strategic, meaningful collaboration among partners, and second, through relevant and accessible research and expertise curated by TCF and the Bridges Collaborative.

To that end, the Bridges Collaborative offers national convenings, regional convenings, and peer collaboration groups. National convenings take the form of multiday programming and provide the space for all Bridges members to attend interactive sessions featuring Bridges members and national experts; lead their own sessions on regional successes, outcomes, and points of inquiry; experience substantial opportunities for networking; and visit local schools and places of historical interest. Mia Hall, executive director of equity and excellence at Fort Worth Independent School

District, described how participating in a neighborhood tour of and site visit to an integrated school in Howard County, Maryland, helped make the goals for integration that Fort Worth is working toward more concrete: "Before coming to this national convening, I only could aspire or imagine in my head what an inclusive, integrated, high-performing high school would look like.... It's now no longer an aspiration... it's now more of a destination. It's a real place that actually exists that I can now see."[8]

Bridges Collaborative regional convenings offer several Bridges teams from different schools, school districts, and housing organizations the opportunity to jointly host learning sessions in their communities. Previous regional convenings focused on sharing best practices for school integration in North Carolina; regional solutions to segregation in Milwaukee; exploring the potential for school-housing partnerships in Dallas/Fort Worth; and exploring avenues for future strategies across district, charter, and housing partners to ensure a more integrated city in Los Angeles. These regional convenings provide an opportunity for school districts, housing organizations, advocates, and policymakers to discuss specific regional goals. These convenings also serve as a launching pad for further collaboration and calls to action within their respective communities. In North Carolina, for example, district officials, school board members, city council members, and leaders from local housing authorities came together to present problems of practice and promising solutions. One district presented preliminary data from their efforts to redraw attendance boundaries and revise admissions priorities for magnet schools; in the process, the district created relationships with leaders from other districts in the region who had tackled similar enrollment planning issues in the past.

The Bridges Collaborative also provides peer collaboration groups. Each peer collaboration group is designed as an opportunity for smaller clusters of Bridges Collaborative teams from across the country to explore a specific topic and engage in peer learning. Throughout the inaugural cohort, the Bridges Collaborative offered more than a dozen peer collaboration groups on topics such as comparing districtwide enrollment strategies that lead to integration, making the research-based case for integration, zoning reform, and building empathy across difference in politically diverse school communities. Members can reference an abundance of research presented by the Bridges Collaborative during the sessions that includes both resources from other organizations and original research conducted or commissioned by the TCF team, such

as polling and messaging research on how best to frame the issue of school integration. Members frequently follow up with one another to forge ongoing connections across organizations.

Finding ways to measure the effectiveness of Bridges Collaborative's efforts to create spaces for collaboration and spur new connections is important for honing and improving our model. A team from the American Institutes for Research (AIR), funded by the AIR Equity Initiative, has selected Bridges Collaborative as the subject for a multiyear study on education capacity-building, which is providing important insights for our work.[9] Initial findings of the study include a social network analysis of Bridges Collaborative members that shows positive trends: After joining the collaborative, Bridges members report increased interactions with other Bridges member organizations and external organizations.

Dynamic Ideas for Spreading Integration

What are some of the most promising ideas that Bridges Collaborative members pursue? Although there are far too many to list here, we have listed a sampling of some of the most innovative approaches practiced by Bridges members that exemplify the types of ideas that will catalyze the next wave of integration across the country.

- In a large public school district in Texas, the school district has opened a set of brand new schools under its "innovation zone," which attracts families with a specialized focus (e.g., arts, sciences) and that uses a unique algorithm to admit students (as opposed to traditional school boundaries) to ensure a roughly equal proportion of low-income students and middle-/upper-income students. These schools have become some of the most successful and sought-after schools in the district.
- In a large U.S. city, a housing mobility nonprofit has connected low-income families with housing vouchers to housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods that have "A-rated" schools and offered a variety of supports and services to ensure that families have a successful transition and that students succeed academically in some of the best schools in the city. This model breaks down the traditional barrier of housing stock for housing voucher recipients being available only in areas with low-quality educational options. The students in this program have thrived socially and academically.

- In a northern U.S. district, leaders successfully launched and executed a community engagement series that led to the overhaul of the middle school admissions process, leading to a new system that uses a weighted lottery to ensure diverse student bodies across all middle schools in the district. The schools are diverse and there has not been the “white flight” that critics of the process predicted.
- In a school district in North Carolina, two schools with dramatically different school populations and separated by only 1 mile successfully executed a merger (one campus became K–2 and the other became 3–5) and became two successful, racially and socioeconomically integrated campuses.

Providing Strategic Language and Shifting Public Opinion

In addition to serving as a convener of practitioners, an initial focal point of our work with the Bridges Collaborative was to conduct research on effective messages for garnering support for school integration. We partnered with the Topos Partnership, a well-regarded polling, messaging, and public opinion firm, to conduct talk-back testing and message testing in a large, national poll to understand how we might help our members talk about these issues, as well as begin to win back the public narrative on the issue of school integration.

The initial work resulted in some very promising findings. First, despite many advocates’ tendency to lean into social justice framing on the school integration issue (e.g., focusing on historical discrimination, prejudice, redlining, racism), a much more effective frame with the general public is messaging that leans into the direct benefits of an integrated education to individual students. Second, specific frames are more effective than others for different segments of the population. For instance, the social justice framing polled particularly effectively with Democratic women and Black respondents, but not with Republican or Asian American respondents.

We documented our findings on a comprehensive messaging guide, which we have provided to all of our Bridges Collaborative members. We also authored a public report describing the results of the polling work.[10] Finally, we have conducted five training sessions for our members on how to talk most effectively about school integration, digging into our messaging guide, revealing some of the data specific to certain subpopulations, and guiding partners to craft their own localized messages using effective framing.

Bridges members have reported that the messaging work we have done with them has been some of the most useful and effective training, helping them think about their initiatives and consider framing as part of the process rather than an afterthought. Moving forward, we will continue to share and spread the messaging results and partner with other advocates to help change the national popular view of this issue.

Seeding More Connections

The Bridges Collaborative has reopened its membership to invite additional schools, school districts, and housing organizations to apply to join the collaborative on a rolling basis.

As we continue this work with members new and old, we are focused on several goals that have emerged from the learnings of our initial years of Bridges Collaborative work:

- *Deepen cross-sector networks in a region.* Some of the Bridges Collaborative activities that have yielded the most connections, conversations, and cross-pollination of ideas have happened where school districts, charter schools, housing organizations, and other community organizations from the same region have all come together. In areas where we do not have all of these partnerships lined up yet, where currently a lone school district or charter school or housing organization is a member, we are working to recruit other members from the region.
- *Continue empowering Bridges Collaborative members to grow their local networks.* Bridges' regional convenings pushed the organizations involved to consider who else in their local communities—neighboring school districts and charter schools, school board members and city council members, grantmakers, social service organizations, researchers—could be valuable partners in their integration work. We will continue to create opportunities for Bridges Collaborative members to reach out to new partners, because these connections are strongest when organizations take ownership of making these connections.
- *Advocate for state-sponsored collaboration spaces.* While nongovernmental organizations like Bridges Collaborative play a critical role in supporting work to advance integration, state and federal education, housing, and transportation departments should also use their convening power to bring leaders together to look for collaborative solutions to address segregation.

- *Deepen the messaging research and adapt to specific community needs*. Our initial messaging work has been very promising; however, as our research makes clear, adapting overarching messages and language to communities requires intentional work listening to and understanding local contexts. The Bridges Collaborative must continue connecting local work with the broader narrative to ultimately shift public opinion on this issue.

Chris Thiel, legislative policy manager for Milwaukee Public Schools, is part of the Bridges Collaborative team from Milwaukee that hosted a regional convening. He described how connecting with leaders in their region and across the nation has brought renewed energy and progress to their community's work on integration:

> Over the last several years, frankly, before the Bridges Collaborative came along, the impetus and the desire to continue to [do] this kind of work existed, but it didn't have a focus. And when you had conversations in our community, people just wondered: *Will we ever be able to do this work again?* So the Bridges Collaborative, and the conversations we've been able to have locally and nationally now, have really reinvigorated that conversation and brought back to the fore the passion that people have for integration.[11]

This is the goal of the Bridges Collaborative: to serve as a hub for practitioners across the country and reignite a national movement addressing school and housing integration. "School systems can't do it alone," Effie McMillian, executive director of equity at Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, explained. "So we need elected officials. We need housing authorities. We need school leaders. We need everybody to come to the table."[12] Collaboration within and across sectors is essential for sharing knowledge and resources and creating political power for the change needed to advance integration. Integration requires committed work over time and constant problem solving, as well as an ecosystem that is hospitable to positive change. Whether through the Bridges Collaborative, other national organizations, or locally driven efforts, creating spaces for education and housing practitioners to collaborate is essential to fostering the discussion and solidarity needed to tackle the vexing problem of segregation and chart a more integrated, inclusive future for students and families.

Notes

1. See, for example, Johnson, R. (2015, August). *Long-run impacts of school desegregation and school quality on adult attainments*. [National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 16664]. https://gsppi.berkeley.edu/~ruckerj/johnson_schooldesegregation_NBERw16664.pdf; Mickelson, R. A. (2008). Twenty-first century social science research on school diversity and educational outcomes. *Ohio State Law Journal*, *69*, 1173–1228; and Brief of Amicus Curiae 553 Social Scientists, Parents Involved v. Seattle School District 551 U.S. 701 (2007) (No. 05-908).
2. Authors' calculations, U.S. Department of Education, Common Core of Data, 2018–2019.
3. McGhee, H. (2021). *The sum of us: What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together*. Random House Publishing Group.
4. Potter, H., & Burris, M. (2020). *Here is what school integration in America looks like today*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/school-integration-america-looks-like-today/.
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6. Harris, E. (2018, June 2). De Blasio proposes changes to New York's elite high schools. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/nyregion/de-blasio-new-york-schools.html
7. Delmont, M. (2016). *Why busing failed: Race, media, and the national resistance to school desegregation*. University of California Press.
8. M. Hall, interview with TCF, May 20, 2022.
9. See Sambolt, M., (n.d.). *Bridges Collaborative continuous improvement study*. American Institutes for Research. https://www.air.org/project/bridges-collaborative-continuous-improvement-study
10. Potter, H., Lallinger, S., Burris, M., Kahlenberg, R. D., Edwards, A., & Topos Partnership. (2021). *School integration is popular. We can make it more so*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/commentary/school-integration-is-popular-we-can-make-it-more-so/
11. C. Thiel, interview with TCF, May 20, 2022.
12. E. McMillan, interview with TCF, May 20, 2022.

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