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Economically Segregated Schools Hurt Poor Kids, Study Shows

By Alan Gottlieb

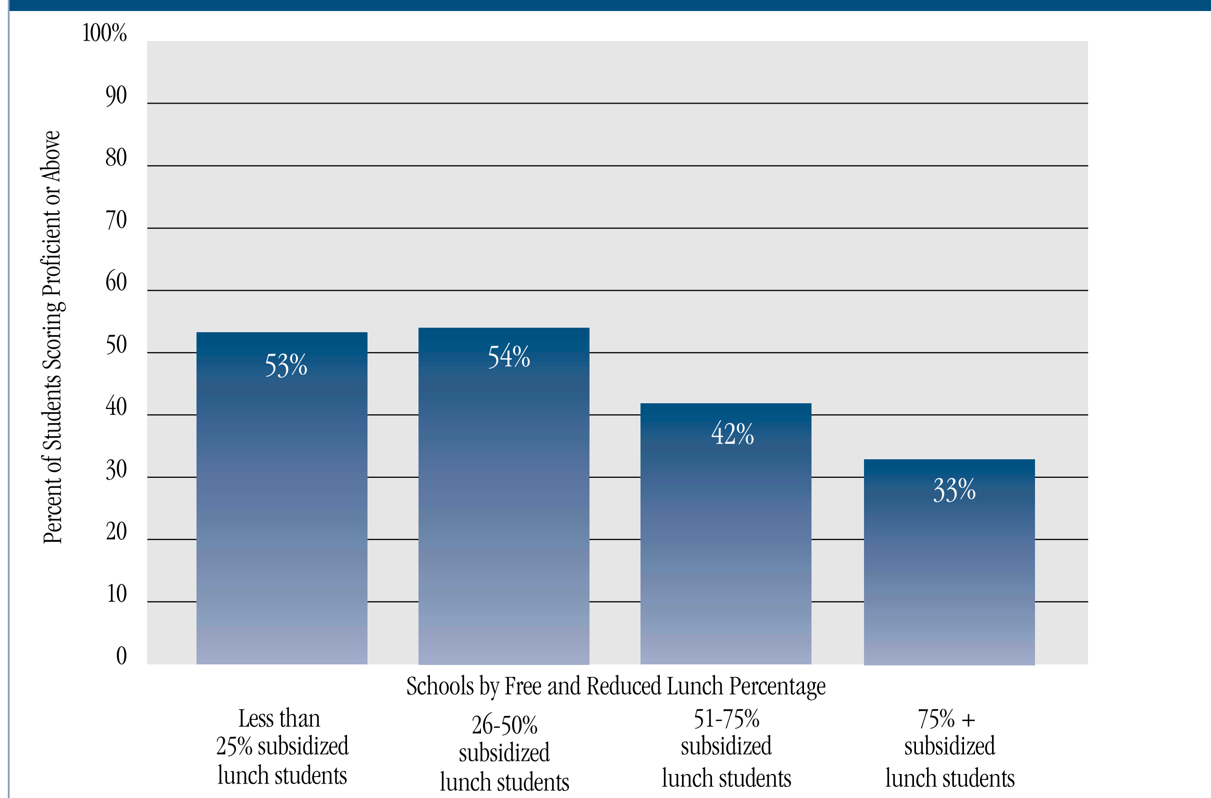
Grouping high concentrations of low-income Denver children into neighborhood schools is keeping their achievement far lower than it could and should be, new research shows.

The research, commissioned by The Piton Foundation, shows that low-income elementary school children in Denver perform significantly better on standardized tests when they attend schools where fewer than 50 percent of the students are poor. Today, the vast majority of low-income Denver children attend high poverty neighborhood schools, where, with a few notable exceptions, achievement levels are lagging.

These findings are consistent with a growing body of research around the nation that makes a powerful argument for economic integration of schools.

Researchers caution that it's difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint reasons for the discrepancy in achievement of low-income students in schools with differing levels of poverty.

The Piton study found a statistically significant connection between student economic status and performance on standardized tests. The study, however, cannot tell us whether one causes the other. But no other variables tested—i.e. teacher experience, student stability—produced an even remotely significant statistical correlation. But whatever the reasons, a high concentration of poverty clearly is statistically associated with the poor performance of all students in a school.



"If we know that concentrating poverty has this negative effect on low-income students, then how can we not take action to remedy the situation?" asked Anne Majestic, lawyer for the Wake County (North Carolina) Public School System. "Unfortunately, there is no identifiable constituency out there today that is interested in integration."

Wake County has a 20-year history of maintaining a healthy mix of incomes in its schools. As a result, student achievement in Raleigh outstrips many other urban school districts (see accompanying article).

The lure of neighborhood schools

When Denver came out from under a federal court desegregation order and returned to neighborhood schools in 1996, the move was widely hailed as a victory for the city's children.

People rejoiced that long bus rides were a thing of the past. Politicians predicted that people would feel so committed to their neighborhood schools that the post-busing era would spark a public education renaissance throughout Denver.

That hasn't happened. Neighborhood schools mean segregated schools — not by race so much as by income. And schools filled with low-income students, in Denver and other cities across the country, are having a difficult time meeting those students' needs.

Some cities have begun to integrate their schools based on the socioeconomic status of students. Their experience suggests that if Denver metro-area school districts acted collectively to distribute low-income kids

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Raleigh: a Model for Economic School Integration

By Alan Gottlieb

RALEIGH, N.C. – Civic leaders in this southern city demonstrated courage and foresight 27 years ago when they took steps to ensure that low-income children of color would be educated on par with their more affluent peers.

Had they not acted boldly, public schools in Raleigh today might look a lot like schools in Denver and elsewhere in the north.

Instead, while Denver schools have resegregated by class and race in the post-busing era, schools throughout Wake County, North Carolina show notable demographic balance. And, more significantly, while student achievement in Denver can be predicted with disturbing accuracy by socioeconomic status, Raleigh's wealthy and low-income students alike are achieving at high levels.

Although Raleigh's combined urban-suburban school system doesn't look much like Denver Public Schools (most notably, only 24 percent of public school children qualify for subsidized or free lunches, compared to 67 percent in Denver), it offers some inspiring lessons.

Raleigh school officials are ardent evangelists for their approach. They contend that if cities like Denver could muster the kind of political will Raleigh demonstrated almost three decades ago, achievement disparities plaguing Denver schools could be narrowed considerably.

"Our county and our school system have been committed for about 25 years to trying to make sure that all schools are balanced," said Walt Sherlin, associate superintendent of the Wake County Public School System. "Had we not done that 25 years ago and consistently since then, we might well have been in the same situation as Denver is in now."

Overall, from the 1970s until recently, Raleigh's efforts aimed to create racial, not socioeconomic balance. But the two are closely correlated. In the past couple of years, however, as federal court rulings have limited options for fostering racial integration, Raleigh turned toward a strategy of socioeconomic school integration.

Raleigh's plan for keeping individual schools from becoming over-populated with low-income students con-

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more evenly among high-performing schools, those students would perform significantly better than they do under today's system of neighborhood schools. (See accompanying story on other cities).

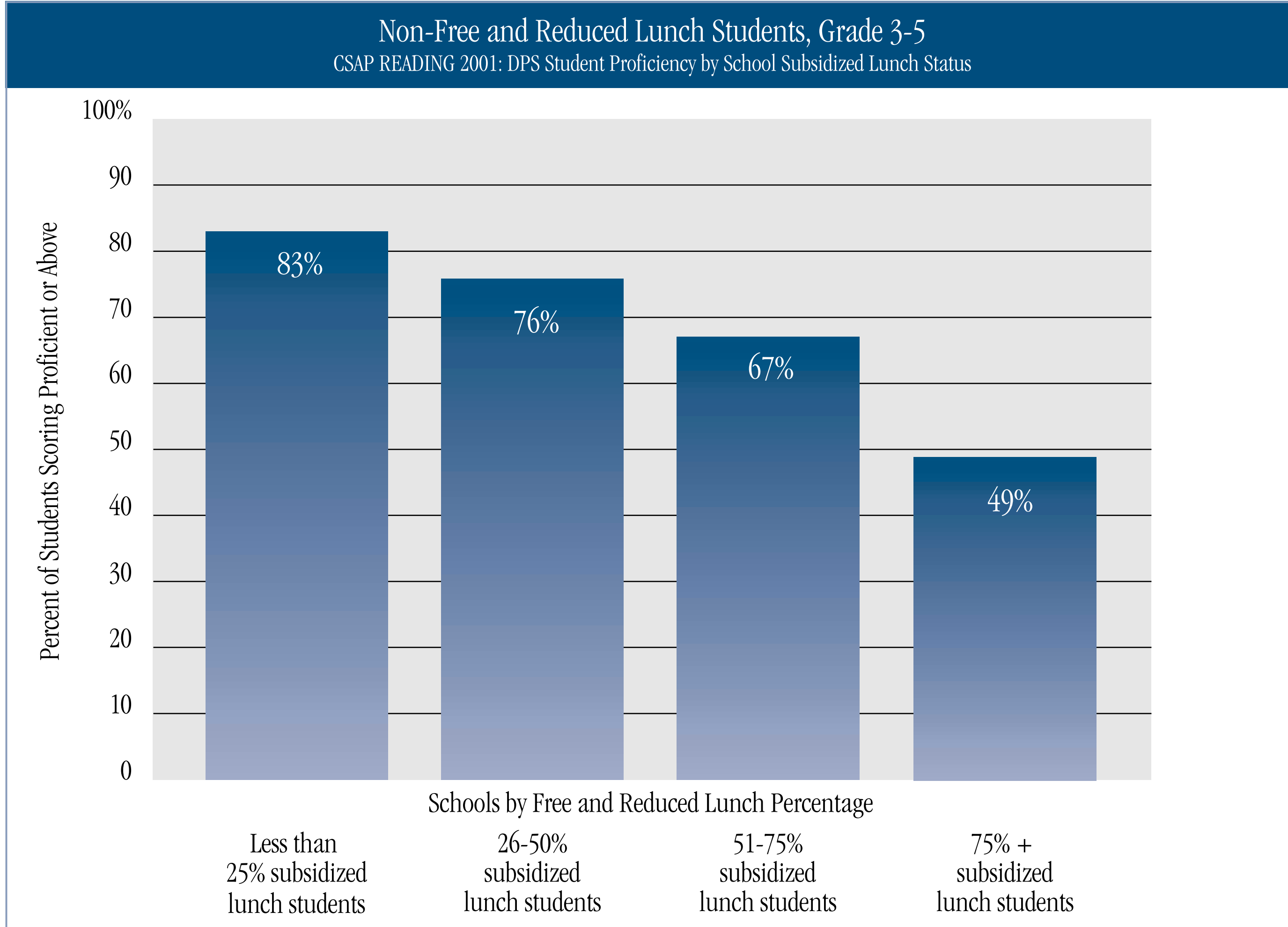
And, the Piton analysis shows, academic performance of more affluent students would not suffer as long as the percentage of low-income students in a school remained under 50 percent.

variable "regression analysis," seeking associations between other school factors and student test performance.

But no other variable remotely approached statistical significance. The other variables she tested were size of school, percent of English language learners, percent of stable students, percent of high and low-experience teachers, and percent of stable teachers.

Lefly looked at scores over the last three years of elementary students (grades three through five) on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) reading test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading test. Lefly analyzed the performance of students who qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches in schools with low, medium and high rates of poverty.

The analysis also included non-subsidized lunch students in schools with varying levels of poverty (see box on page 6 for more detail on how the study was conducted).



High poverty in Denver schools

Simple math suggests that Denver cannot solve this problem alone. More than two-thirds of DPS students are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch. Because research shows that schools need to stay under the 50 percent poverty threshold, Denver cannot dilute its poverty sufficiently without either drawing private school students back into the public school system or forging an agreement with one or more suburban districts.

Currently, 25 of the district's 87 elementary schools have fewer than 50 percent of their students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch.

> **"Simple math suggests that Denver cannot solve this problem alone. More than two-thirds of DPS students are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch."**

Piton's analysis was performed by Dianne Lefly, a Ph.D. statistician and the research manager in the Denver Public Schools Assessment & Testing Department.

Lefly's analysis found a strong—.851—correlation between student socioeconomic status and test scores. This means that 85 percent of the differences in test scores between high and low-performing students can be explained by socioeconomic status. She also performed a multi-

The Piton analysis

Among the findings:

• Low-income students (as measured by eligibility for federally-funded free or reduced-cost school lunch) perform significantly better in low-poverty schools than in schools where over half the students are poor. For example, on the 2001 CSAP reading test, 53 percent of low-income elementary students scored proficient or advanced in schools where fewer than 25 percent of students qualified for free or reduced cost lunch. However, in schools where over 75 percent of the students were poor, just 33 percent of the low-income students scored proficient or advanced.

• Non-poor students perform well on standardized tests in schools with low to moderate levels of poverty. However, the scores of non-poor students begin to deteriorate significantly in schools where over 50 percent of all students are poor. In elementary schools where under 25 percent of students are poor, 83 percent of non-poor students scored proficient or advanced on the 2001 reading CSAP. However, in schools with over 75 percent low-income students, only 49 percent of the non-poor students scored proficient or advanced.

• Proficient CSAP scores are far lower within the proficiency band in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools. In other words, even "good" test scores are less "good" in high-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools.

English language learners were not included in the analysis, because many of them take the Lectura test (in Spanish) rather than (or in addition to) the CSAP. Also there are so few English language learners in low-poverty schools that revealing their scores could raise issues of confidentiality.

Excluding English language learners "controls for bias in the analyses and makes them stronger," Lefly said. Including those students in the analyses would not have changed the findings dramatically. If anything, their inclusion would have "pushed the high-poverty schools lower," in terms of the performance of low-income children, she said.

> **"Lefly's findings are consistent with research conducted in cities in this and other countries. And they raise questions rife with profound policy implications. "**

Lefly's findings are consistent with research conducted in cities in this and other countries (see the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment on the web at www.pisa.oecd.org). And they raise questions rife with profound policy implications.

Studies from Denver's busing era (from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s), show that busing for racial integration did not significantly boost the achievement of minority students. Studies of the impact of busing in other cities, however, show more positive results.

But, Lefly pointed out, because the Denver data analyses never took into account the socioeconomic status of the families involved, it's not possible to compare those data to the data in the new Piton study.

Selling the concept

It seems safe to say that Denver will not return in the foreseeable future to a system of court-ordered busing. So, the key question becomes: How can low-income and affluent people alike be convinced that a system of voluntary economic integration would be in everyone's best interest, or at least not counter to anyone's best interest?

This is a difficult question, because any proposed solution would almost certainly provoke strong opposition.

A logical first step would be to persuade people that economic integration would benefit low-income students without hurting the academic achievement of more affluent children. In fact, proponents of integration have long argued, affluent students benefit from attending school with a diverse group of peers, because this mix more accurately reflects the world in which they will work in the future.

The next step would be building the political will to put a voluntary plan in place.

Richard Kahlenberg of the Washington, D.C.-based Century Foundation, is a leading scholar on economic school integration. His book, "All Together Now" (The Brookings Institution Press, 2001), has sparked debate about economic integration across the country. Kahlenberg believes advocates can make some persuasive political and moral arguments for economic integration.

Politically, "we should build on the valid conservative premise that it is unfair to trap kids in bad schools. There should be more choice," Kahlenberg said in a recent interview. "But if you want to put it into practice, I think common sense would tell you that transportation has to be provided to make it a realistic opportunity for choice."

Arguments pro and con

Opponents will argue that transporting large numbers of children over a large area is too costly to be feasible, Kahlenberg said. But he pointed to St. Louis, where inner-city students are offered free busing to a choice of suburban schools within a limited geographic zone, as a relatively economical solution (see accompanying story).

Morally, people in middle-class or affluent suburbs must be urged to think of children trapped in failing urban schools in the same way they think of suburban children.

"People in the suburbs will say, as a first line of defense, that their schools are overcrowded and can't take in more students," Kahlenberg said. "They say 'It's not that we don't want poor kids. It's that we're already over-taxed and our facilities are bursting at the seams.'

But suburban districts don't turn away new students who move to their areas, Kahlenberg said. They build new facilities as their populations grow. "Ideally we should think about those kids trapped in really bad schools as equally deserving," he said.

Often, Kahlenberg said, people will argue that it's unfair to have to pay for the education of other people's children. To counter this, he points out that in many school districts, state funding accounts for half or more of a district budget. About 35 percent of DPS' budget comes from the State of Colorado.

"In other words, the suburban parents are already paying for other kids' educa

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tinues to evolve, and meets with controversy at every turn in the road. This fall, for the first time, Raleigh will begin assigning affluent children to lower-income schools outside their neighborhoods.

This represents an effort to maintain socioeconomic balance. But it is being met by furious opposition from affluent parents, who believe, contrary to statistical evidence, that it will harm their children.

"We are being forced to do something that is not beneficial to our children," said Beth Rossi, whose first-grade daughter will be bused come fall to a lower-income school 10 miles away. "We didn't settle where we did to be shipped all over the place to help the school system meet its numbers."

Any steps Denver might take to address socioeconomic disparities in its schools would be fraught with extraordinary political challenges (see main story and editorial). The remedies Raleigh chose – merging urban and suburban districts, creating a large-scale system of magnet schools, busing to achieve socioeconomic balance — may not all be available here. Still, Raleigh's approach and the impact of its decisions have gained national attention, and are worth describing in some detail.

An unusual merger

In 1975, facing a massive loss of federal funds for running racially segregated schools, the Raleigh and Wake County school boards decided to merge the two systems. The city was experiencing large-scale white flight, emptying schools and sending achievement into a downward spiral. The county schools, meanwhile, were growing at an unsustainable rate. But, with school buildings empty and shuttered just a few miles away, the county school district decided not to seek a tax increase to build new schools.

Voters turned down a 1972 merger proposal by a 2-1 margin. But three years later, the two systems merged anyway. How did this come to pass? Long time observers of the local political scene say something extraordinary happened: civic and business leaders decided that the merits of addressing long-term needs of the schools – and, by logical extension, the economy — outweighed the temptation to pander to voter sentiment.

"It was a business decision as well as an educational one," said John Gilbert, a retired North Carolina State University political science professor who served on the Wake County Public School System board from 1983-99. "It was good for business and good for the economy to have one healthy school system instead of two troubled ones."

Gilbert said businesses realized that attracting qualified workers to the region would be easier with a strong school system as a selling point.

Magnets a draw

Once the systems merged, school officials tried various ways of fostering integration. But the flight of affluent families to the suburbs continued.

Then, in 1982, a new superintendent proposed creating a network of magnet schools, all of them located in the core city. The idea was to create schools in low-income neighborhoods that were so attractive that affluent suburban families would clamor to get their kids into them.

It worked. Today, there are some 30 magnet schools in Raleigh, all of them racially and socio-economically balanced.

Twelve inner-city schools where enrollment had dipped below 80 percent of capacity and were threatened with closure, are now overloaded with students. If those schools were populated only by neighborhood kids, each of them would have overwhelmingly low-income, minority student bodies.

"It's amazing," Sherlin said. "We have 5,000 more kids now going to school downtown than we had 20 years ago."

Most important, students in Raleigh are achieving at a rate that far outstrips achievement in most urban school districts.

On North Carolina's annual End-of-Grade tests, about 85 percent of Wake County third and eighth-grade students tested at above grade level in reading and math last year. The goal, probably unattainable, is to hit 95 percent by 2003. Almost 64 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch performed at or above grade level in 2001. That number has climbed steadily over the past five years.

Affluent suburban families compete to get their children into the Washington Elementary Gifted and Talented magnet School, despite its location, across the street from a public housing project.

Raleigh's magnet schools, located in inner-city neighborhoods, boast state-of-the-art facilities, like dance and music studios.

Drawing affluent students

Most of the magnets are located in low-income neighborhoods. Typically, about one-third of the magnet students come from the local attendance area, and two-thirds from outlying areas. Neighborhood children not assigned to magnets are bused to outlying schools, to help balance them.

Thanks to millions of dollars in federal grants, Wake County has been able to create a system of magnet schools that offer a wide array of attractive educational choices. Most of these schools have no trouble drawing scores of suburbanites. Many, in fact, have lengthy waiting lists.

One such school is Washington Gifted and Talented Magnet, located across the street from the dilapidated Walnut Terrace public housing project. Of the elementary school's 601 students, 445 come from outside the neighborhood. About 30 percent are low-income.

What draws people to Washington is its "Gifted and Talented" magnet offerings. In Raleigh, unlike Denver, "gifted and talented" students are not identified by academic or cognitive ability. The term instead describes a special program, that exists in more than a dozen magnets, in which students do core academic work in the morning and choose from a dazzling array of elective courses in the afternoon. Each student takes three 45-minute electives after lunch. The electives rotate quarterly.

Suburban parents often express reservations about the neighborhood when they first visit the schools. But those worries quickly fade, according to Principal Allynna Stone.

"Our word of mouth reputation is so strong that I have (suburban) parents begging me to get their child in here," Stone said.

Visiting Washington, it's easy to see why it's in such high demand. The school boasts a professional caliber dance studio, and full-time drama and dance teachers. Colorful and accomplished student art work adorns the walls. The energy level is high, but students seem focused on their work.

This year's 104-page catalogue of elementary school electives is thick and rich enough to rival those of some colleges. Students can chose an array of dance, drama, instrumental and vocal music courses. Or, if they are lagging behind academically or want additional academic content, they can enroll in Spanish or French, technology, math, social studies, science or language arts electives.

"I have a neighbor who told me she can't believe I let my kid ride a bus 45 minutes each way to school," said Washington parent Carol Anne Moehring. "Then, in the next breath she complains that her kid can't take Spanish in his school."

Overhauling student assignment

To keep suburban families hungry for the magnets, the school district does not allow outlying schools to offer special programs like gifted and talented electives. Suburban schools have a more traditional look and feel than the vibrant, inner-city magnets.

This creates some internal tension. Teachers and principals at outlying schools tend to feel like neglected step-children.

"Magnets don't have to rob Peter to pay Paul like the traditional schools do. They get the resources," said Ruth Steidinger, principal of the non-magnet Dillard Drive Elementary School.

"The bells and whistles of magnets attract the affluent parents, no question," agreed Melanie Rhoads, principal of Swift Creek Elementary, another outlying, non-magnet school. "Some parents feel that if the school is one they have to apply to, it must be better. That is hard to combat."

Swift Creek and Dillard Drive are located just outside the Raleigh city limits, an area that is becoming increasingly low-income. Because so many of the more affluent families are opting for magnets, both schools are beginning to exceed the district's limits for low-income children.

A few years ago, Swift Creek had an enrollment of 820 students, 18 percent of whom were eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch. Today, enrollment has plummeted to 480, with 39 percent of those students on the lunch program.

Both Dillard and Swift Creek look like an affluent Denver school, but their reputations have been spiraling downward as their percentages of low-income students have climbed.

"Parents around here are shopping not for a good educational program but for low free and reduced lunch percentages," Steidinger said. "I spend an awful lot of my day dispelling myths about Dillard, spread by people who have never walked through the doors."

Busing for socioeconomic integration began during the 2000-2001 school year. Some 4,000 students were bused, most of them lower-income students from the inner-city out toward or into the suburbs. This did not represent a significant increase in the number of students that were bused under the old, racial integration plan.

But the continued socioeconomic imbalance in some schools caused the school board to add several hundred affluent children to the list of those to be bused beginning this fall. Parents of those children organized to fight the plan, and made considerably more noise than the thousands of low-income parents whose children were bused last year.

As a March vote on the assignment plan neared, the nine-member school

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The Whys and Hows of Socioeconomic School Integration

By Richard D. Kahlenberg

In recent years, a number of school districts across the nation have begun to pursue a new approach to school improvement that strikes at the fountainhead of educational inequality: giving all students the chance to attend an economically diverse public school.

Educators in numerous districts, from San Francisco, California to Raleigh, North Carolina to La Crosse, Wisconsin and Cambridge, Massachusetts have concluded from overwhelming social science research evidence that economic integration offers a promising path for boosting student achievement.

Years of trying to "fix" schools with high numbers of low-income children has led to frustration and disappointment. Yes, there are some terrific schools here and there that serve students in concentrated poverty; the Heritage Foundation, for example found 21 high performing high poverty schools in a recent study. But there are roughly 7,000 high poverty schools that are deemed failing by the U.S. Department of Education.

By contrast, most of our public schools serving middle-class students work fairly well. Nationally, about two-thirds of students are middle class (defined as not eligible for the federal subsidized lunch program) so the concept of making all schools middle class is entirely within our grasp if we think creatively.

While most educators believe that students from all economic backgrounds can learn, if given the right environment, high poverty schools generally do not provide a good environment for teaching. Why are separate schools for low-income and middle class children inherently unequal? Why should it matter whether low-income children "sit next to" middle-class children in school?

The evidence suggests that school quality is driven largely by the people who make up the school community – the students, the parents, and the teachers and principals – and struggling low-income communities have the deck stacked against them. Consider this list of ingredients for good schools.

What makes a good school?

Good schools should have the following 10 attributes:

1

An adequate financial base (as measured against student needs) to provide small class size, modern equipment and the like. Middle income schools, on average, spend as much as twice what low-income schools spend per pupil.

2

A place where money is spent wisely, on the classroom rather than on bureaucracy. In middle class areas, pressure is less intense to make education a jobs program, so bureaucracies are less likely to be bloated.

3

An orderly environment. Middle class schools report disorder problems half as often as low-income schools.

4

A stable student and teacher population. Middle class schools see half as much student mobility as higher poverty schools, and teacher mobility is one-fourth as high.

5

A good principal and well-qualified teachers trained in the subject they are teaching. Teachers in middle class schools are more likely to be licensed, less likely to teach out of their field of expertise, less likely to have low teacher test scores, less likely to be inexperienced, and more likely to have greater formal education. Even when paid comparable salaries, teachers consider it a promotion to move from poor to middle class\ schools, and the best teachers usually transfer into middle income schools at the first opportunity.

6

A meaty curriculum and high expectations. Curriculum in middle class schools is more challenging; and expectations are higher. The grade of C in a middle income school is the same as a grade of A in low-income schools, as measured by standardized tests results. Middle class schools are more likely to offer AP classes and high level math.

7

Active parental involvement. In middle class schools, parents are four times as likely to be members of the PTA and much more likely to participate in fundraising.

8

Motivated peers who value achievement and encourage it among classmates. Peers in middle income schools are more academically engaged, more likely to do homework, less likely to watch TV, less likely to cut class and more likely to graduate – all of which have been found to influence the behavior of classmates.

9

High achieving peers, whose knowledge is shared informally with classmates all day long. In middle class schools, peers come to school with twice the vocabulary of low-income children, so any given child is more likely to expand his vocabulary through informal interaction.

10

Well connected peers who will help provide access to jobs down the line. Children attending middle class schools are given access to informal connections that serve children well in finding jobs after graduation.

More than Equity: Raising Overall Achievement

One could argue on this basis alone, that as a matter of fairness we should integrate schools so that everyone has an equal shot. But the argument on behalf of economically integrated schools is much stronger than that.

Creating middle class schools won't just more evenly spread discipline problems or anti-achievement culture, it will reduce them all together, and raise overall achievement. Integration is not a zero sum game where the benefits to the disadvantaged students come at the expense of more advantaged students.

In the context of racial integration, the scores of African American students improved (particularly where racial mixing also involved economic mixing) but even the biggest critics of busing concede that white scores did not decline. This seems too good to be true. How is that possible that the poor will benefit from integration but the middle class will not be hurt?

For one thing, researchers have found that numbers matter. There appears to be an academic "tipping point," around 50 percent low income, where schools start to go downhill. The numerical majority in a school set the tone, and just as housing projects tend to perpetuate poverty, so do schools with poverty concentrations.

For another, it is possible to level up without hurting middle class students, in part because middle class kids are less influenced — for better or worse — by school environment . On average, middle income children come to school from stronger, more firmly rooted families, with greater adult supervision, so the relative influence of family vs. peers tilts toward family for middle class students and toward peers for low-income students.

This phenomenon makes it possible for peer effects in majority middle class schools to harmonize achievement upward.

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How to get there

How can we move toward the goal of making all schools majority middle class? Today, roughly one quarter of our public schools are majority low income. The problem is that most students are still assigned to schools based on residential status, so "neighborhood" schools end up reflecting residential concentrations of poverty and race. Forced busing 1970s style is politically dead. But there is a third alternative that avoids both compulsory busing and segregation.

A number of communities are marrying integration and public school choice by providing open enrollment accompanied by a set of fairness guidelines to ensure that choice promotes integration rather than segregation. In places like Cambridge, Massachusetts, Montclair, New Jersey and elsewhere, the old system of automatic assignment based on what neighborhood people can afford to live in has been discontinued.

Instead, school officials poll parents and find out what kinds of schools they'd like for their children; then all schools in the community are "magnetized," each providing a special signature or theme (computers, the arts) or special teaching approaches (Montessori, back to basics). Families are given the opportunity to rank their preferences at the elementary, middle and high school levels, and those choices are honored by school officials with an eye to ensuring all schools are middle class. In districts where a majority of students are low income, creative choice plans that reach across district lines are necessary.

The prospects for economic integration

The move toward economic school integration is the logical culmination of three major trends in American education: choice, accountability, and race-neutrality.

In arguing for private school vouchers, advocates say it's unfair to trap poor kids in bad schools. There are a host of reasons to work within the current system of public schools rather than resorting to privatization.

But the recognition by Americans of all political persuasions that the "neighborhood school" can be a source of profound unfairness for children stuck in bad schools has laid the groundwork for greater public school choice. This movement can be harnessed to overcome the geographic separation of low-income and middle class children.

The bipartisan support for greater accountability in education, including an emphasis on closing the achievement gap, also is leading communities to explore economic integration. The stubborn reality is that no one has figured out how to make high poverty schools work on a systematic basis.

We know that middle class schools tend to work well, by contrast, and officials who are desperate to find ways to raise achievement are increasingly examining the benefits of economically integrated schools.

The third major development is the decline in the legal viability of racial desegregation. In a number of communities, successful racial integration programs have been deemed legally vulnerable given the trend in the courts to strike down the use of race in student assignment. Seeking economic school integration will produce a fair amount of racial diversity as a byproduct but is perfectly legal.

The concept of socioeconomic integration appears novel. But the notion of a "common school," in which children from all different backgrounds come together and learn what it means to be an American and where we make good on our promise that education should be an engine for social mobility, is thoroughly American.

Richard D. Kahlenberg is a senior fellow at The Century Foundation in Washington, D.C. and the author of All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice (Brookings Institution Press, 2001). ■

Revolutionary Dreams

Editor's note: *This issue of The Term Paper explores the idea of economic integration as a school reform strategy to improve the educational achievement of low-income students. Educator Rona Wilensky addresses this same concern from another perspective, while also arguing that reform legislation, which relies primarily on testing and accountability, is wholly inadequate to do this work.*

By Rona Wilensky

Public schools, to a remarkable degree, reflect the inequalities in American social and economic life. By every measure of student achievement, students from middle class and wealthy families outperform students who qualify for "free and reduced lunch." It also is undeniable that whites and Asians outperform African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. The problem is not that American public schools do not produce excellent students, but that different Americans have dramatically different educational outcomes.

In response to these facts, politicians, acting in a remarkably bi-partison manner, have crafted a national reform package designed, they claim, to "leave no child behind."

"Leave No Child Behind" is a moving, unifying slogan. The emotional power of the phrase is simple. All children, it proclaims, should have an equal chance to become functioning and successful adults in our society. What could be more true to the spirit of American democracy? And yet, as the law's supporters - liberal and conservative alike – agree, it will take a "revolution" in American education to achieve these results; a revolution which, they promise, their legislation will unleash.

Is this possible? Do our leaders really intend that schools should be the engine of social, and economic equality? Do they really want all poor and/or minority students to be qualified to compete with middle class white kids for the opportunities that the children of relatively privileged families currently enjoy? Do they really believe that the American pie is big enough to provide hearty slices to everyone?

Before you begin celebrating the advent of a new utopia, I must tell you that the answer to these questions is "No, not really." The solution proposed — test students and punish the schools that fail our children — is brilliantly designed both to dramatically change schooling as we have known it and maintain the social and economic status quo.

What would we do if we really wanted all kids to learn? Common sense tells us that each child should be able to learn if the student is 1) prepared for learning and school in the early years, 2) sent to a competent public school and 3) actively supported by family and community. Happily, this also is the overwhelming lesson of decades of research into student learning. Unhappily, many American

> **"Schools that serve disadvantaged students must become places where intelligent, educated, skilled and committed teachers would want to teach. "**

students encounter only one or two or, sometimes, none of these three essential conditions.

If we acknowledge that these three distinct realms - preschool, school and home - constitute the true "education system," an effective reform program follows directly. To close the gap, we would have to refocus (and multiply) our reform efforts in three different environments: in classrooms serving underachieving students, in their preschools, and in the out-of-school world of these same students.

The classroom reforms that are needed are obvious, if not simple. Schools that serve disadvantaged students must become places where intelligent, educated, skilled and committed teachers would want to teach.

Researchers have conclusively shown that 1) in general, disadvantaged kids have the least qualified teachers and 2) when such students do have access to more qualified teachers the learning gap is significantly narrowed. Teachers are individuals who are free to offer their services wherever they see fit. To entice highly qualified teachers to work with the most challenging students would require major changes in how we fund and run schools.

In short, we would have to turn teaching disadvantaged children into a career that stands a chance against the rewards and working conditions of the other professions that the most talented young people can choose. Significantly, the new policies that have been enacted, which put greater, ever increasing pressure on teachers in under performing schools to raise test scores, are antithetical to this goal.

The reforms needed to prepare disadvantaged students for classroom success and to support the work of qualified teachers are equally well proven. They include 1) home visits that assist disadvantaged mothers and fathers in getting their children ready for school, 2) high quality, affordable preschool programs (beginning at age three) that offer disadvantaged students access to the early childhood learning experiences that middle class families provide their offspring and, 3) after-school programming that supports studying and homework, as well as providing enrichment opportunities.

There you have it in a nutshell: bring well-prepared and supported students to qualified teachers and the guaranteed result is high levels of student achievement. This is, after all, the formula used in affluent, suburban school districts across the country.

Instead of engaging the full challenge head on, what we have gotten in recent legislation is unprecedented levels of mandated testing and a few billion dollars thrown at all of the urban systems, any one of which could easily absorb the full amount.

The tests and the mandatory consequences of "failure" will, in effect, create a national curriculum and new pedagogies based on industrial training models. The new money will not even pay for the cost of the newly mandated tests, much less address the imbalance of educational resources between the rich and poor schools. Nothing that is being done will significantly close the gap. In fact, the way the legislation is structured it will make the current difficult situation intolerable for many teachers and students alike.

The laws' stated goal is to expose those schools that are not educating students. This public humiliation, coupled with serious consequences, is intended to "force" educators to change their ways and get around to doing the right thing for all their students.

Implicit in this strategy is the assumption that it is bad faith and poor teaching on the part of educators that accounts for low student achievement. Only lip service is paid to the issues of placing qualified teachers in challenging classrooms or preparing disadvantaged students to meet the school curriculum where it starts for their middle-class peers.

The truth is that there is no political mandate for closing the gap. Moreover, Americans are overwhelmingly opposed to efforts that energentically seek to eliminate social and economic inequality.

Just think about the fate of initiatives to provide health coverage to the uninsured, to raise the minimum wage, or to provide more affordable housing to the working poor. Even the paradigm case of government-sponsored racial integration has met with almost universal rejection by all parties.

The rhetoric demanding that "every child must have an equal place at the starting line" floats weightlessly above a social landscape where all such efforts have been doomed. The reality is that middle class parents vigorously compete to get their children into not only the best colleges, but the best academic preparatory preschool programs.

The new accountability system may well raise test scores at the bottom end, but you can rest assured that it will not change the rankings of wealthy, middle class and poor students.

When the radio storyteller speaks of a community "where all the children are

> **"When the radio storyteller speaks of a community 'where all the children are above average' his audience smiles at the wry joke."**

above average" his audience smiles at the wry joke. When our politicians paint a similar picture we should denounce them for demagogues and demand an honest approach to public business.

Rona Wilensky has been principal of New Vista High School, a small, innovative, public school of choice in Boulder, Colorado since 1992. From 1985-1992 she worked as an education policy consultant to the Education Commission of the States, the Public Education and Business Coalition, the Kettering Foundation and The Piton Foundation. She holds a PhD in Economics from Yale University. ■

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tion," Kahlenberg said. "So we have already crossed that bridge."

In any case, he said, "it is an ugly sentiment that 'we are not responsible for those kids.' (Author) Jonathon Kozol says kids don't pledge allegiance to Denver or Cherry Creek. They pledge allegiance to the United States. And that gets at this idea that we can't think of these children as 'other.'"

Inherent challenges

Another obstacle to economic integration is persuading people that something inherent in high-poverty schools makes them likely to fail. Arguments against this position come from across the political spectrum.

Conservatives argue that private, religious schools in low-income neighborhoods thrive, and produce high-performing students. They also point to high-poverty, high-performing public schools across the country (most notably, the Heritage Foundation's 21 "No Excuses" schools) as proof that low-income schools are not doomed to fail.

Undermining the argument that private, religious schools have found the magic bullet is the indisputable fact that students attending those schools are there by choice.

"By definition they are creaming off the most motivated families," Kahlenberg said. "I would be shocked if you had instances where you essentially screened out the most motivated poor, put them in a school and they did not do better than high-poverty, non-selective schools. You'd expect and anticipate that they'd do better."

% At or Above Proficient and % Below Proficient by Lunch Status and School Economic Status

School Free and Reduced Lunch Status	Lunch Status	# Below Proficient	% Below Proficient	# At/Above Proficient	% At/Above Proficient	Total #
< 25% Subsidized	Pay Students	162	17.12	784	82.88	946
	Subsidized Students	66	47.48	73	52.52	139
26%-50% Subsidized	Pay Students	393	24.26	1227	75.74	1620
	Subsidized Students	330	46.22	384	53.78	714
51%-75% Subsidized	Pay Students	403	33.22	810	66.78	1213
	Subsidized Students	842	57.79	615	42.21	1457
> 75% Subsidized	Pay Students	740	51.03	710	48.97	1450
	Subsidized Students	3827	67.07	1879	32.93	5706
Table Total		**6763**	**51.06**	**6482**	**48.94**	**13245**

A voluntary economic integration program would have the same, effect, of course, benefiting primarily those families with the motivation to see educational options for their children.

As for the argument that high-performing, high-poverty schools exist in inner cities, the simple counter-argument is that if this were easy to replicate, we'd see far more than 21 "No Excuses" schools across the country. The fact is, Kahlenberg said, when school populations exceed 75 percent poverty, the odds are stacked almost insurmountably against those schools.

Can neighborhood schools work?

At the other end of the spectrum, some residents of low-income neighbor-

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board faced increasing pressure to modify it, leaving the affluent families in place. The political pressure yielded a partial victory: the board voted March 19 not to send 143 affluent students from Apex Elementary School to Swift Creek, the most controversial part of the reassignment plan.

The board kept in place its plan to send 78 students from the more affluent Baucom Elementary School to Dillard Drive.

Now, Sherlin said, the test will be to see how many affluent parents whose children will be bused "show up in the fall." Their displeasure with the system may deepen if, as expected, the school board's next move is to slap stricter limits on the number of affluent families allowed to transfer out of any given school to magnet programs.

MANY RALEIGH MAGNET SCHOOLS FOCUS ON ACADEMICS IN THE MORNING, THEN SWITCH TO A WIDE ARRAY OF ELECTIVE CLASSES AFTER LUNCH.

Continuing challenges

The school district's goal is to keep all schools socioeconomically balanced. This means holding the number of students eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch below 40 percent at all schools. The district also aims to prevent any school from having more than 25 percent of its students scoring below grade level on state-authored standardized tests.

But some of the system's own policies are undermining that goal. Thirteen years ago, in an effort to cope with overcrowding, Raleigh began opening year-round schools in suburban areas. The district built the schools in outlying areas, Sherlin said, "because that's where the land is."

Year-round schools are magnets. They have attracted large numbers of affluent families, but few low-income students. School officials speculate that the year-round schedule, with its weeks-long breaks throughout the year, are more difficult for the working poor to manage. Most low-wage jobs lack the flexibility in hours and the vacation benefits of higher-paying jobs.

Today, a dozen year-round schools enroll about 11,000 students. They are disproportionately white and affluent. Increasing numbers of suburban parents have figured out that the year-round schools offer a solid education and an upper-middle-class student body.

The result has been a growing socioeconomic imbalance in some Raleigh schools. System-wide, the number of schools enrolling less than 15 percent low-income students has increased in the past two years from 19 to 25, according to the Raleigh News and Observer newspaper.

Simultaneously, the district has experienced an increase in the number of schools with unacceptably high poverty rates. This year, 14 of Wake's 102 elementary and middle schools have enrollments exceeding the 40 percent standard – compared to eight schools at the time the new assignment plan took effect two years ago. Of those 14 schools, four have more than 50 percent low-income students. The district is attempting to mitigate this situation by assigning affluent families to lower-income schools. But, as described above, the school board appears to be backing away from that plan as the political heat increases.

Future years will bring new challenges and struggles for the Wake County schools, as the district attempts to uphold its commitment to socioeconomically diverse schools.

"You win some battles, but the war never ends," said John Gilbert, the retired school board member. "You win and then you have to fight them all over again, and it goes on and on." ■

Wake County Public Schools at a Glance

Enrollment: 101,397 students
Schools: 122 (78 elementary, 24 middle, 15 high, 5 special/optional schools)
Student Racial Composition: 61.6 percent white, 26.3 percent African-American, 5.6 percent Hispanic, 4.1 percent Asian, 1 percent multi-racial, 0.3 percent American Indian (2000-01)
Free and reduced lunch percentage: 24
Budget (2001-2002): $706.5 million

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hoods contend that their schools are starved for resources – money, materials, and good teachers – that middle class schools seem to get without a struggle. Level the playing field, they say, and their children will perform better.

This can become a touchy point to address. The Education Trust, a national advocacy organization, sides with those who argue an infusion of the best teachers would help turn around high-poverty schools.

But experience suggests that it's not that simple.

"It's attractive to say let's stick with neighborhood schools and simply fix the bad schools," Kahlenberg said. "But no one has been able to figure out how to do it systemically. There are a number of exceptions to this rule, where you can have a charismatic principal who pulls it off. But no one has been able to figure out how to bottle that."

Denver Public Schools

Enrollment: 72,437
Schools: 134 (87 elementary, 18 middle, 12 high, 17 "other")
Student racial composition: 20.9 percent white, 19.7 percent African American, 54.9 percent Hispanic, 3.3 percent Asian, 1.2 percent American Indian)
Free and reduced lunch percentage: 67.5
Budget (2001-2002): $472.7 million

Indeed, research strongly suggests that something about high-poverty public schools does stack the deck against their success. After all, low-income students in schools with lower rates of poverty perform far better than their peers in high-poverty schools.

"These findings are statistically significant," Lefly said of her research. "So, what is it that is different about the schools where large numbers of kids are in poverty? Is it expectations? Is it mobility? Or is it something else?"

In Kahlenberg's view, a number of factors contribute to low-income students performing worse in high-poverty schools.

"The most important element in a school is the people who make up that community," Kahlenberg said. "It's the parents, the teachers and the students.

"If you pack together the kids with the smallest dreams, given their life experience, the parents who are struggling and least able to be active in the school, then you are creating a very difficult environment. And for that reason, the high-quality teachers as a whole do not end up in those schools." ■

About the data analysis

Colorado State Assessment Program data from DPS elementary schools were used in this analysis. Elementary schools were chosen because CSAP reading was administered in three successive grades and because the free/reduced lunch data is the most complete.

13,245 students from 89 elementary schools were included in the study. Data for each of the 89 schools were summarized by determining the number of students in each proficiency category in grades 3, 4 and 5. To obtain the percentage of students in each category at each school, the number of eligible students is divided by the number of students assessed in each school. This resulted in a single percentage of students in each reading proficiency category (Unsatisfactory, Partially Proficient, Proficient and Advanced) at each school.

Schools were assigned to 'Free/Reduced Lunch' bands based on the percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price lunches as reported to the state in the fall of 2000. Band 1 consisted of schools with 25% or less eligible for free/reduced price lunch; Band 2 consisted of schools with 26% to 50% of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch; Band 3 consisted of schools with 51% to 75% of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch, and Band 4 consisted of schools with greater then 75% of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch. The table below indicates the breakdown of students included in the study.

Number of Students	Free/Reduced Lunch Status				Group Total
	Less than 25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	Greater than 75%	
Pay Full Price	946	1620	1213	1450	5229
Eligible for Subsidized Lunch	139	714	1457	5706	8016
Total	**1085**	**2334**	**2670**	**7156**	**13245**

Students were assigned to Lunch Status (Free/Reduced or Pay) based on their free or reduced price lunch eligibility as determined by the DPS Department of Food and Nutrition Services.

The analyses, which had a 95% confidence interval, included only students who were not English language learners. ELL
students were excluded because of the small number of ELL students in schools with low eligibility free/reduced lunch percentages. The numbers were so low in those schools that there was a possibility of violating federal and state student confidentiality regulations.

The main analysis examined the percentage of students in each CSAP proficiency category in each FRL band for 2001. Comparative analyses were conducted for 1999 and 2000 CSAP and ITBS.

For further information on this issue's topic:

http://www.equaleducation.org/Task_Force/community.html/ — Web site for The Century Foundation's Common School Task Force, which advocates for economic school integration. Includes many links to other sites.

http://www.wcpss.net/ — Wake County, North Carolina Public School System. Includes links to detailed research studies on student performance by economic status.

http://www.cps.ci.cambridge.ma.us/ — Cambridge, Mass. Public Schools web site. Includes information on new economic integration student assignment plan

http://www.slps.org/ — St. Louis Public Schools web site.

http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/ — San Francisco Unified School District web site. Contains information on the district's complex new "diversity index" for economic school integration.

http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/ — Harvard University's civil rights project. Indepth research on school desegregation and its effects.

Other Cities Experiment with Economic Integration

By Alan Gottlieb

As federal courts across the country have released urban school districts from mandatory racial desegregation orders over the past several years, people who believe mixed schools work best for all children have devised new strategies.

Several cities have come up with variations on a theme: making socioeconomic status, rather than race, the criteria for integrating schools. Other cities have stayed with a race-based integration system, but have made it voluntary.

In all cases, however, the goal is the same: to move low-income students out of high-poverty schools and into schools where they have a better chance to achieve at high levels.

Four cities in particular have stepped forward: Raleigh, N.C. (profiled separately elsewhere in this issue), Cambridge, Mass., St. Louis, Mo., and San Francisco, Calif. The policies and practices in each city are different enough to merit a brief examination.

Cambridge

For 20 years, this city, located across the Charles River from Boston, implemented a "controlled choice" school assignment plan to keep its schools racially integrated. Late in 2001, however, the Cambridge School Committee to decided to shift its assignment plan to one based on income rather than race.

Beginning this fall, new kindergarten students and people who enroll in the system for the first time, will be assigned to schools in an effort to maintain an economic balance across the city.

Students in Cambridge are not assigned to schools based on where they live. Instead, parents make three choices of schools. In most cases, families get their kids into one of their top three choices. Last year, when assignments were still based on race, 43 kindergarten students were placed in a school not in their top-three list.

This year, with assignments based on socioeconomic status, the number of kindergarten students not assigned to one of their family's choices climbed to 53, according to Lenore Prueser, the school district official in charge of the choice plan.

About 40 percent of Cambridge's 7,000 public school students qualify for free or reduced-cost school lunch. Come fall, each school's student body must fall within 15 percentage points in either direction of that 40 percent. The following year, schools must be within 10 percentage points of the target, and thereafter they must be within 5 percentage points.

The school board's decision to move to an assignment plan based on economic status was not particularly controversial, Prueser said. "The data stares you right in the face: high poverty means low scores and low parental involvement," she said.

"Trying to convince people this was the right thing to do was not hard. This is not a racist city. Cambridge is extremely diverse, and people love it for what it is. The goal is to raise the level of all schools. When some schools are overwhelmingly poor, then you get a situation where some schools work ten times as hard to get half as far."

Data from Cambridge's old, race-based "controlled choice" plan showed that minority students outperformed white students in math and reading citywide. Cambridge students outperform students nationally in eighth grade assessments, but fall short of the national norm on fourth grade tests.

St. Louis

The Voluntary Interdistrict Choice program that St. Louis Public Schools operates with 23 suburban school districts has allowed over 50,000 inner-city students to attend suburban schools over the past 20 years, with transportation provided at no cost to the families. A much smaller number of suburban students have been bused voluntarily to magnet schools in the city.

Although the St. Louis plan is not based on the socioeconomic status of students, it offers an example of how urban and suburban school districts can work together voluntarily to provide educational opportunities to inner-city stu dents who otherwise would be trapped in high-poverty neighborhood schools.

The St. Louis program came into existence after suburban districts faced the threat of a federal lawsuit claiming "de jure" racial segregation. Rather than have a mandatory desegregation plan imposed upon them, the districts entered into an agreement with St. Louis and the state of Missouri that led to the voluntary transfer program.

Until 1999, the state made incentive payments to the suburban districts to take inner-city children, and paid all transportation costs. To keep the transfers from decimating the city school system's budget, the state also paid St. Louis half the state aid for the transfer students, and additional money to bolster magnet schools that might attract white, suburban students.

Court supervision ended in 1999, but the parties, strongly supported by the St. Louis business community, agreed to continue offering the transfer option to students in both the city and suburbs through at least the 2008-2009 school year.

The state will continue to provide funding for transportation. But city students, who once had their pick of 122 suburban schools, now must attend a suburban school within a designated zone closest to their home. This will save on busing costs.

At its peak, the St. Louis program bused about 15,000 students a day out to the suburbs. Since the 1999 settlement, that number has dropped to about 11,000. Still, that's over 25 percent of the district's 42,000 students.

About 1,200 suburban students bus into city magnet schools, "but that has dropped significantly in the last few years," said Sharon Heisel, recruitment coordinator for the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation.

Detailed data are lacking about how the program has affected student achievement. However, according to state studies, transfer students "are nearly twice as likely as their peers in city schools to complete high school, and those who graduate from suburban schools are much more likely to go on to two- or four-year colleges than St. Louis Public School graduates."

San Francisco

Come fall, San Francisco will initiate one of the most complex and ambitious economic school integration plans in the nation.

Families in the 60,000-student district will list up to five schools where they would be willing to have their children attend. The San Francisco Unified School District will then assign students based on to which school they would contribute the greatest degree of diversity.

Diversity is measured in San Francisco by a six-point index, which does not include race or ethnicity:

- Socioeconomic status;
- Academic achievement status;
- Mother's educational background;
- Language status;
- Academic ranking of previously attended school;
- Home language.

The complexities of the assignment process boggle the mind. On initial computer runs, some students may be assigned to more than one school, until the diversity index can determine which school benefits the most in terms of diversity from a particular student's attendance.

A family may choose as one of its five options the attendance area school to which they would normally be assigned. But under the diversity index, there is no guarantee that child will end up in the neighborhood school.

"..students residing in that school's attendance area will receive an enrollment priority so long as they contribute to increasing multifaceted diversity at the school (without regard to race or ethnicity)," the district policy reads in part.

Some parents have figured out that they are more likely to be assigned to their neighborhood school if they list fewer than five choices on their initial application. Nowhere in the policy does it say that parents must choose five schools.

Another flaw in the San Francisco plan is that siblings and "program students" will be assigned to schools before the diversity index takes effect. Program students include special education, gifted and talented and bilingual students.

This means that close to half the students in the district could receive school assignments before the diversity index kicks in, diluting its effectiveness. ■

TERM PAPER ADVISORY BOARD

Six individuals play a key behind-the-scenes role in producing this publication, and they deserve a public show of gratitude. They comprise the Term Paper Advisory Board. From the development of a theme for each issue to development of the story log and editing of the stories themselves, these six already busy people put in several hours over each issue. They are:

Kay Frunzi: Kay has been an urban elementary school principal for 17 years. Since 1999, she has been principal at Denver's Cheltenham Elementary School. She also has served as a faculty member in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Northern Colorado. Before becoming a principal, Kay taught for 11 years and served five years as an assistant principal. She has a Ph.D. in administration, supervision and curriculum development from the University of Colorado at Denver.

Carla Santorno: Carla is a Denver Public Schools Area Superintendent, responsible for the northeast quadrant of the city. She has served in that position for one year. Prior to that, Carla was DPS' director of curriculum. She also has been DPS' director of federal programs, the executive director of curriculum for the Boulder Valley School District, a DPS elementary school principal and, for the first 10 years of her education career, an elementary school teacher.

Van Schoales: Van is the vice president for education initiatives and director of the Colorado Small Schools Initiative at the Colorado Children's Campaign. He was the founding principal and CEO of The Odyssey School, an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound school in the Denver Public Schools. Van has previously been head of school at Jarrow School, a progressive Montessori school in Boulder, CO. He has been a consultant to Brown University, Outward Bound USA and the Geological Society of America. Van was also the executive director of the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools, a non-profit school reform organization for several years. He has an MA in Education from Stanford University.

Rob Stein: Rob is Head of School at Graland Country Day School. He has been teaching and working in schools for 20 years. Rob is the former Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning. He currently serves as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Denver and the University of Colorado, teaching graduate courses in school leadership and teacher education. Rob has a Ph.D. in education from Harvard University.

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Miguel In Suk Lovato: A native of Denver, Miguel is the Manager of High School Relations for the Daniels College Prep and Scholarship Program, part of The Daniels Fund, Colorado's largest private foundation. He is actively involved in a number of education-related organizations, serving on the board of directors of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and the Latin American Research and Services Association. He volunteers as an adult advisor to a student-led organization at Denver's North High School, which often tackles complex issues including social justice, education, and cultural preservation.

As always, we'd welcome your thoughts on this issue's topic. Please e-mail them to termpaper@piton.org

The Term Paper

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COMMENTARY

Working Toward Mixed-Income Schools

Talk to people about the compelling case for economic school integration, and you're almost sure to get this response: "How interesting. But it could never happen here."

We believe it could, at the very least on a modest level.

Data produced from research commissioned by The Piton Foundation is hard to dispute: in Denver, low-income elementary school children achieve at higher levels when they study in schools where fewer than half of their classmates are poor. And, equally important, the learning of non-poor kids does not suffer until the number of low-income students in a school exceeds 50 percent.

These facts are bolstered by data analyses in other cities, even in other countries.

But facts do not necessarily lead to action, no matter how compelling.

No doubt, this issue will strike some raw nerves, across the political and socioeconomic spectrum. Some affluent people will worry that by integrating with lower income students, their children will be used as pawns in a social-engineering experiment of dubious merit. And in low-income communities, some will complain that once again, their children are being labeled as failures because an unjust system has neglected to fix the schools in their neighborhoods.

We predict such a reaction with some confidence, because this topic has rubbed nerves raw at Piton, too. It has sparked heated debate in our offices. We believe that such debate is important, not just here, but among the larger public.

As our new research shows, economic integration, while surely not a silver bullet, is at least another arrow in the school reform quiver. And yet it has not been openly discussed in Denver. Nor does it seem to be high on anyone's priority list.

We do not claim to know what to do to achieve economic integration, and we are not proposing specific solutions at this time.

But here is what we do know: as a community we can no longer ignore the connection between socioeconomic status and academic performance. We must begin the hard work of acknowledging current social and political realities while not losing sight of what ought to be. We can not let this issue, no matter how uncomfortable it may be to discuss, go unexamined any longer.

Denver Public Schools does not have enough affluent students to promote economic integration on its own. Efforts to promote mixed-income schools require a community-wide effort. Luring some of Denver's18,000 school-age children who do not attend DPS back to the public schools might help.

A regional, inter-district effort would have a bigger impact. But that is a long way down the road. At the moment, economic school integration is a long way from happening here.

So we must begin by talking about this issue. Air our concerns and dreams. Reach agreement about what our collective and individual responsibilities to each other are. As we begin this exploration, we welcome your ideas and suggestions.

Such discussion need not and should not delay other reform efforts currently underway. Denver Superintendent Jerry Wartgow and his team are hard at work designing new systems aimed at improving teaching and learning in low-performing schools. These initiatives are highly worthy, and deserving of widespread support. Such efforts might well be enhanced by economic integration of Denver schools.

—Alan Gottlieb and Teri Pinney
Education Program Officers

FROM THE EDITOR

This is the second issue of The Term Paper, The Piton Foundation's newspaper on education issues. We hope our readers find it thought-provoking.

The Term Paper intends to spark debate and provide credible, in-depth analysis and data, embedded in compellingly written stories. Ultimately, we would like to nudge forward the ongoing Denver debate on education reform.

We would hope readers will approach this publication expecting what a term paper ideally should offer: a breadth of research and a depth of thought that passes knowledge on to those who read it.

Why, after more than 20 years working on school reform initiatives, has Piton decided to launch this publication now? It would be presumptuous of us to claim we have the answers; that we know how to solve public education's persistent problems. But we believe that the lessons we've learned from our two decades of work have taught us how to ask the right questions.

Piton is a private operating foundation that focuses its work on improving the lives of children in inner-city Denver. Therefore, The Term Paper will concentrate its research and reporting on education issues in Denver or directly relevant to Denver. It often will be the case, however, that school reform work being done elsewhere will offer Denver valuable lessons.

We hope that you find The Term Paper a stimulating, provocative read. Please let us know what you think, by e-mailing us at termpaper@piton.org, or calling the editor, Alan Gottlieb, at 303-825-6246.

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