

## The Case for Balance: Socioeconomic Diversity and Its Impact on Schooling

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### Abstract

This essay outlines the case for keeping schools diverse socioeconomically as an important priority in school choice and school assignment. The author uses the current climate surrounding charter schools and private vouchers to connect to other threats, namely the civil rights era and the more current rhetoric surrounding bussing and the return to desegregation. As timely research articles and policy briefs on socioeconomic diversity and the segregation of schools, the article hopes to arm any child advocate with the information and rationale behind balance in school assignment, framing the principal reasons as 1) socioeconomic diversity brings strength, stability, and parent/teacher satisfaction to schools, 2) socioeconomic diversity is cost effective, and 3) socioeconomic diversity produces greater academic gain at all income levels. The article ends with practical ways that advocates can insure balance is a priority in the school and community.

### Key Words

socioeconomic diversity, school assignment, re

YHV L Wq: VmGHlED The civil rights era, then the introduction of vouchers, then the discussion of race in student assignment, now with the rise of racially identifiable charter schools across the country (Bonner, Stancill, & Raynor, 2017; Klein, 2016; Orfield, 2014) we are again at a national crossroads on segregation

Loewenberg, 2017; Marsh, Chaney & Jones, 2012; Mickelson, 2016; NAEP, 2015; Phillips, 2014; Quick, 2017).

As social advocate Anya Kamenetz (VWDW M2bisa (g) P Bhawer B L OOHQQ LDO S WKDW LW ¶ V D VNLOO WR WKULY environments, and employers are looking for people who can get along with individuals Ee, leade.8

When it comes to diversity these days, the discussion centers around socioeconomic status In Kentucky, HB 151 threatened earlier successfully integrated school districts would have re-segregated schools virtually overnight (Arnett, 2017; Quick, 2017)

Fortunately, on this issue, thoughtful stakeholders have over fifty years of data the most convincing being the newest that make another case for socioeconomic balance in K-12 schools.

**Balance Has Been a Satisfaction and a Strength**

, W ¶ V KDUG WR LPD-JistQH WKDW DQ\ WZHQW\ century parent would discourage child from learning early and often how to work within difference While many studies show that disadvantaged kids achieve more in diverse socioeconomic settings, new research clearly shows that the same goes for the middle class:

The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress, for example, supports the idea that all children, regardless of socioeconomics, see academic gains along with other, harder-to-measure results as a result of integration<sup>2</sup> including increased expressive language, leadership skills, college attendance, self-confidence, and critical and creative thinking abilities (Kurlaender & Yun, 2007





(Ayscue, Frankenburg, & Siegel  
Hawley, 2017; Bowman, 2013;  
Johnson, 2011; Kugler, 2002;  
Mickelson, 2016; Siegel-Hawley,  
2012)

All of the results above are correlated  
with socioeconomic diversity in school  
assignment algorithms (

privilege and principle are understandably difficult, but they are critical

inequities as the need for the most current and relevant information arises

Transparency and intention

A first, essential step for all stakeholders involves transparency and intention from the bottom up. Advocates must both understand and consider the myriad demographic, educational, and political forces that impact diversity in school settings. School leaders must read and think deeply about these issues as they address concerns and decisions that face them each day, decisions that have both intended and unintended consequences on the students they lead

These organizations can also tease out important issues regarding the layered complexities of defining Socioeconomic Status (SES) to determine school assignment algorithms, keeping in mind that accurate SES profiles for the twenty-first century, for example, might include variables such as free and reduced lunch percentage, parental income and educational level, percentage of single parent households, percentage of home ownership, even eligibility for specific government programs (Siegel-Hawley, Frankenburg, & Ayscue, 2017)

A good example lies in the fact that, in recent decades, colleges and universities have had a more effective focus on promoting diversity by putting diversity criteria into their accreditation and quality ranking apparatus: if higher ed institutions are not diverse, they simply will not be highly ranked. During these same 25 years, by contrast, K-12 education has focused more on raising achievement and test scores exclusively as the central measure of equal educational opportunity has, in the long run, led to less emphasis on the educational experiences of students and thus, fewer efforts to support diversity (Cobo, 2016, p. 6).

Each district (even adjoining districts) may have different variables. School administrators and advocates simply cannot do it on their own or rely on their own paradigms, even localized and sensitized ones. Once school administrators and advocates gather this information and make intentional decisions with it, they can share it widely. Information about student assignment should be abundant, clear, and accessible in order for parents to make informed decisions, informed public comment on assignment plans, informed votes and petitions at the local and national level. (Cobo, 2016, p. 6)

If diversity measures were added to the algorithm that decides which schools are equitable, excellent, or both, gains that diversity has enjoyed in higher education settings could be anticipated in K-12 settings as well. If advocates for diversity subscribe to updates from organizations like The National Coalition on School Diversity, or local and state think tanks that pinpoint specific regional concerns, they will know where to go, what questions to ask, and how best to address

**Informed presence and voice**  
Once this groundwork for advocacy has been laid, school administrators can join parents and child advocates at all levels to practice a next step<sup>2</sup> informed presence and voice. While school leaders and administrators exhibit many strengths to the public they serve, there can be very few more important in this century than being a consistent, informed advocate for diversity in schooling. What should be a given for one of the most diverse groups of students the United States has ever seen in its history of



emphasis on these benefits and less emphasis on testing, for example, we can shift the conversation

As a qualitative researcher who studies autobiography, narrative, and reflection, I still hear whispers about what is/is not research based on the situated and contextual reality of schooling

Let me assure anyone with a great story to tell about how diversity was re 0009u92 re W, l-3( d in a ET Q q 0.00000912 0 612 792 re W\* n B





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