



## Fact Sheet:

# UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN K-12 EDUCATION

Sara Partridge, Ph.D.

Almost seven decades since the pivotal Supreme Court ruling *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the state of America's schools remains profoundly unequal. Non-white children tend to be concentrated in lower-performing schools that offer them fewer skills, opportunities, and resources to succeed. As the data in this fact sheet show, students of color are more likely to attend schools in areas of concentrated poverty that are less effective on every measure than majority-white schools.

In spite of *Brown's* conclusion that separate schools are inherently unequal, K-12 education in America is more racially segregated today than it was in the late 1960s. After a period of active federal desegregation efforts in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Nixon and Reagan administrations and their Supreme Court appointees rolled back laws and programs promoting more racially integrated schooling. The Supreme Court ruling *Oklahoma vs. Dowell* (1991) stripped the federal government of powers to desegregate schools, and school segregation has steadily increased since its low point in 1988 as a result.

Integrated schools do not only benefit students of color: multiracial schools better prepare students of all races to live, work, and succeed in a diverse society. Even when controlling for socioeconomic status, students from integrated schools have higher test scores and are more likely to graduate and attend college.<sup>1</sup>

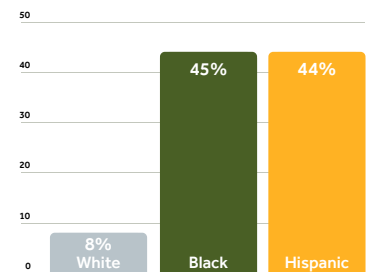
### Education spending per student<sup>5</sup>:

**\$13,908** vs. **\$11,682**

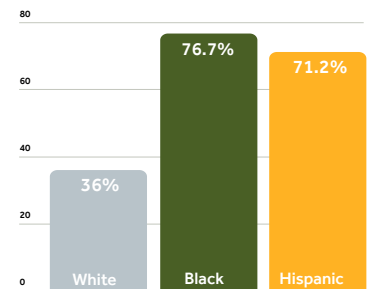
predominantly white districts

predominantly non-white districts

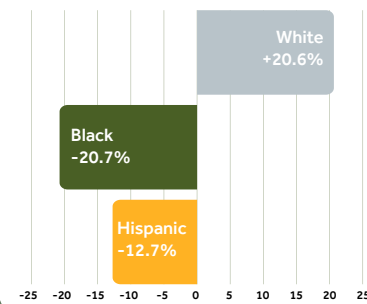
Percentages of students who attend high-poverty schools (2018)<sup>2</sup>



Percentage of students in underfunded school districts (2021)<sup>3</sup>



Average funding gap (above v. below adequate spending) (2021)<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Orfield, Gary and Danielle Jarvie. "Black Segregation Matters: School Resegregation and Black Educational Opportunity." UCLA Civil Rights Project, December 2020.

<sup>2</sup>"Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch." National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clb>

<sup>3</sup>Baker, Bruce D., Matthew Di Carlo, Kayla Reist, and Mark Weber. "The Adequacy and Fairness of State School Finance Systems," 4th Ed, December 2021. Albert Shanker Institute and Rutgers Graduate School of Education. [https://www.schoolfinancedata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SFID2022\\_annualreport.pdf](https://www.schoolfinancedata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SFID2022_annualreport.pdf), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Baker, Bruce D., Matthew Di Carlo, Kayla Reist, and Mark Weber. "The Adequacy and Fairness of State School Finance Systems," 4th Ed, December 2021. Albert Shanker Institute and Rutgers Graduate School of Education. [https://www.schoolfinancedata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SFID2022\\_annualreport.pdf](https://www.schoolfinancedata.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SFID2022_annualreport.pdf), p. 27.

<sup>5</sup>"\$23 Billion." EdBuild. <https://edbuild.org/content/23-billion>

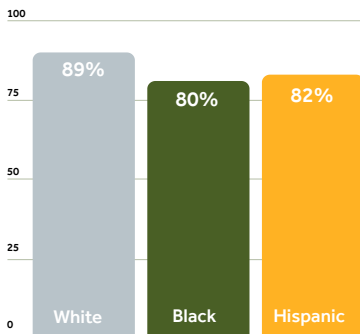


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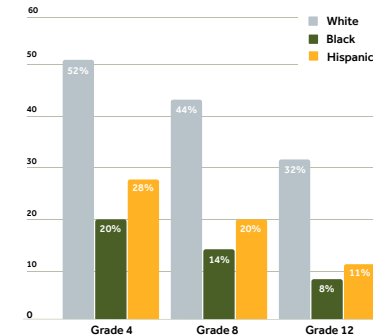
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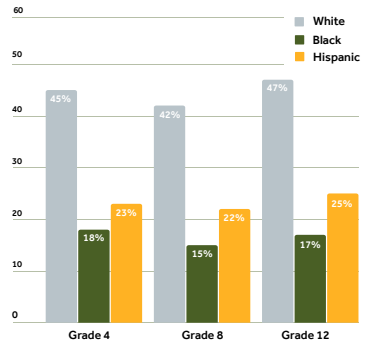
Public High School Graduation Rates (2018–19)<sup>6</sup>



Percentage of students achieving NAEP proficiency in mathematics (2019)<sup>7</sup>



Percentage of students achieving NAEP proficiency in reading (2019)<sup>8</sup>



## INTERVENTIONS FOR EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY: WHAT ARE SOME METHODS THAT CAN BE USED TO INTEGRATE AMERICA'S SCHOOLS?<sup>9</sup>

### Federal Actions

- ▶ Incentivize local efforts to voluntarily decrease school segregation
  - ▷ Adopt the **Strength in Diversity Act** (H.R.729), which would award grants to districts that implement plans “to improve diversity and reduce or eliminate racial or socioeconomic isolation in publicly funded early childhood education programs, public elementary schools, or public secondary schools.”
  - ▷ Increase Title I funding to offer grants for local school district plans that pursue integration programs
- ▶ Modify the Title I funding threshold that currently works as a penalty for school integration efforts, as schools that enroll more higher-income students may lose their Title I eligibility
- ▶ Repeal **Section 426 of General Education Provision Act (GEPA)** to allow districts to provide transportation for students from under-performing districts to higher-performing districts
- ▶ Pass an Economic Fair Housing Act to **curb exclusionary zoning policies** that prohibit apartments and multi-dwelling units to create more mixed-income neighborhoods
- ▶ Pass legislation to allow the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights to **review and halt school district secession plans** that create racially and socioeconomically exclusionary school districts
- ▶ Add stronger provisions to the **Charter Schools Program (CSP)** to promote racially and socioeconomically integrated schools and to ensure that newly-created charter schools do not divert existing resources from traditional public schools
- ▶ Hold charter schools to the same standards of **data reporting** as public schools

### State & Local Actions

- ▶ **Re-map attendance zones** to produce schools that more accurately represent the racial makeup of a larger area, such as a county
  - ▷ Create **socioeconomically diverse** attendance zones
- ▶ Increase the share of **low-income and affordable housing** in middle-class, wealthy, and/or suburban areas
- ▶ Require **robust racial diversity plans** in all application processes for **charter, magnet, and specialized schools**, and ensure high standards for racial equity are met during renewal processes
- ▶ Pass laws to prohibit charter schools from engaging in **discriminatory practices** like not providing free and reduced price lunch, requiring parent office hours, and not providing student transportation

<sup>6</sup>“Public High School Graduation Rates,” National Center for Education Statistics. <<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi>>.

<sup>7</sup>National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). “National Achievement-Level Results: Mathematics.” The Nation’s Report Card. <<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/mathematics/nation/achievement/>>.

<sup>8</sup>National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). “National Achievement-Level Results: Reading.” The Nation’s Report Card. <<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/nation/achievement/>>.

<sup>9</sup>Kahlenberg, Richard D. and Hailey Potter. “A Bold Agenda for School Integration.” The Century Foundation. April 2019. <<https://tcf.org/content/report/bold-agenda-school-integration/>>.

Potter, Hailey and Miriam Nunberg. “Scoring States on Charter Integration.” The Century Foundation, April 2019. <<https://tcf.org/content/report/scoring-states-charter-school-integration/>>.

Potter, Hailey and Miriam Nunberg. “How Can the Federal Government Support Integration in Charter Schools?” April 2019. <<https://tcf.org/content/report/can-federal-government-support-integration-charter-schools/>>.