

A+
Colorado
SHARPENING
PUBLIC
EDUCATION

**LEARN TOGETHER,
LIVE TOGETHER:**

A CALL TO INTEGRATE
DENVER'S SCHOOLS

AN A+ ORANGE
PAPER
FEBRUARY 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A+ Colorado would like to acknowledge Alan Gottlieb of Write.Edit.Think.LLC. for his time and thought-leadership on this report. We would also like to thank Piton Foundation and Gates Family Foundation for their support of this report.

We thank Brian Eschbacher, Executive Director of Planning and Enrollment Services at Denver Public Schools, and Sara Baris, Senior Manager of Planning and Analysis at Denver Public Schools for their help navigating and providing data.

We appreciate the work of the Denver Public Schools' Board of Education who took a lead in the conversation about school segregation by commissioning the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee. We also extend gratitude to the community members who served on the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee and provided leadership around how to integrate more Denver schools.

We are grateful to community members who provided insight into their experience with integration, including Bill Kurtz, DSST; Rosemary Rodriguez, former Director, Denver Public Schools Board of Education; Andrew Romero, All in Denver; and Laura Wilson Phelan, Kindred.

"Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together."

-Supreme Court Justice
Thurgood Marshall

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INTRODUCTION

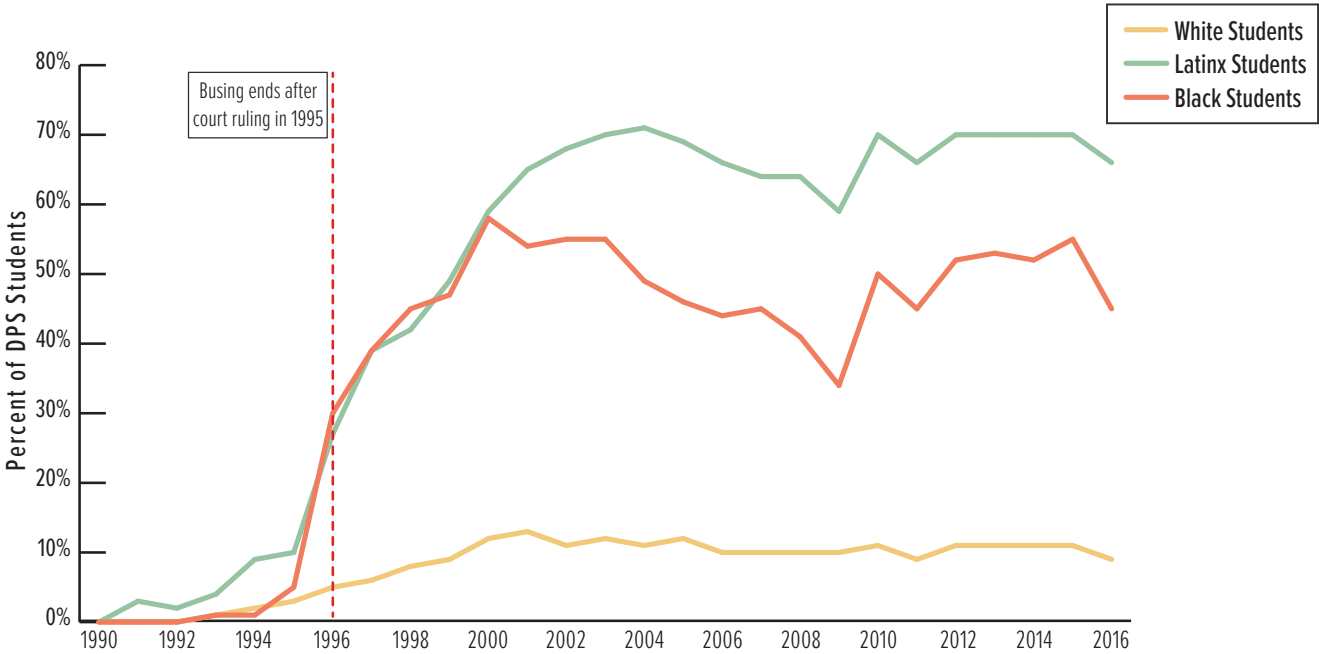
In the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

The *Brown* case dealt specifically with schools that were segregated by race. Reams of subsequent research have shown that the same holds true for schools where students are separated based on their families’ socioeconomic status. Denver’s roughly 25-year experience with court-ordered, involuntary school integration delivered mixed results. *Keyes v. School District No. 1* brought court-ordered busing to Denver in 1973. The *Keyes* case resulted in some schools that were

more racially integrated. And while DPS did not break out test scores by race or socioeconomic status in the 1960s and 1970s, the achievement gaps between predominantly minority schools and predominantly white schools pre-busing were 50 percentage points or higher.¹ Since busing ended, racial achievement gaps continue to be amongst the largest in the state.²

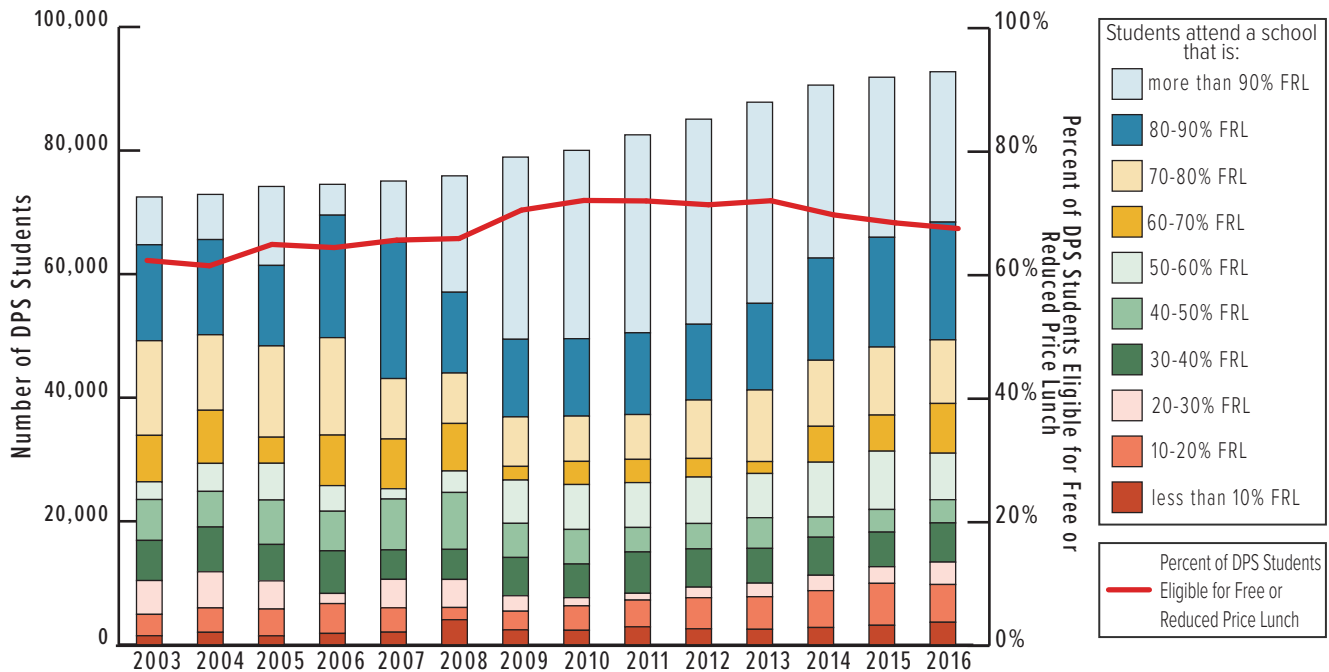
Court-ordered busing also led to massive white flight to the suburbs. And when a federal judge ended mandatory busing in 1995, a decision by the school board to return to neighborhood schools meant that Denver’s schools resegregated according to housing patterns almost overnight.

Figure 1. Percent of Students in Schools with 90-100% Students of Color



Note: Chart expands on data from Chungmei Lee, “Denver Public Schools: Resegregation, Latino Style.” Harvard University: The Civil Rights Project. (January 2006).

Figure 2. Percent of Students Served in DPS Schools Based on Concentration of Poverty



Analysis provided by Denver Public Schools

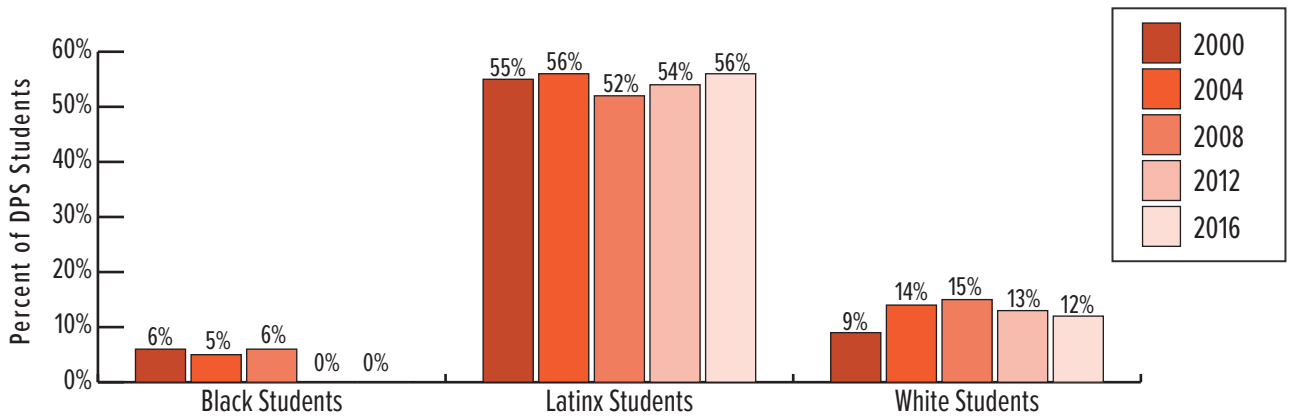
In fact, by some accounts, Denver Public Schools (DPS) is as segregated by race and class today as it has ever been. As Figure 2 shows, in 2016 26% of students enrolled in a school where more than 90% students qualified for free or reduced price lunch, compared to 11% in 2003.³ Looking by race in Figure 3, black students are far less racially isolated than they were in 2000, Latinx and white students are slightly more so.

Understanding segregation is a complicated endeavor, influenced by housing patterns, institutional boundaries, and neighborhood composition. A recent analysis from The Brookings Institution looks at over and underrepresentation of specific racial and ethnic students in schools relative to their neighborhood—a much narrower and sharper look than other measures that look at school demographics relative to district-wide demographics.⁴ In an analysis of the data shown in Figure 4, white students are more likely to be underrepresented in Denver schools relative to the neighborhood around the school, black and Latinx students are more likely to be overrepresented in Denver schools relative to the surrounding neighborhood.

Ashley Elementary provides an example of a school that does not match its neighborhood. Sandwiched between the Stapleton elementary enrollment zone, Park Hill, and Montclair, Ashley’s student body is 10% white, 21% black, and 65% Latinx. Yet the surrounding neighborhood looks quite different: within a two-mile radius of Ashley elementary (only including Denver families), 50% of children were white, 17% were black, and 21% were Latinx.⁵ As Figure 5 shows, this pattern holds true in both charters and district-run schools across the city. Some important distinctions arise however when looking by governance: white students are more likely to be overrepresented relative to the neighborhood in which they live in district-run schools than in charter schools. Black students are much more likely to be overrepresented in charters than in district-run schools, and are also more likely to be underrepresented in traditional public schools. Combined, this shows that there are patterns of racial imbalance and segregation in schools across the city and is not wholly an issue of governance structure.

It’s tragic that 63 years after the *Brown* decision, cities like Denver are still struggling with this issue. And for Denver in particular, this is a

Figure 3. Percent of Students in Schools More than 75% Their Same Race or Ethnicity



Analysis by A+ Colorado, based on data from The Brookings Institution

pivotal moment. Demographic changes have been fast-paced in Denver; as seen in Figure 6, former strongholds of the black community and Latinx community are changing as white families move in, and families of color move outside the increasingly expensive city limits.⁶

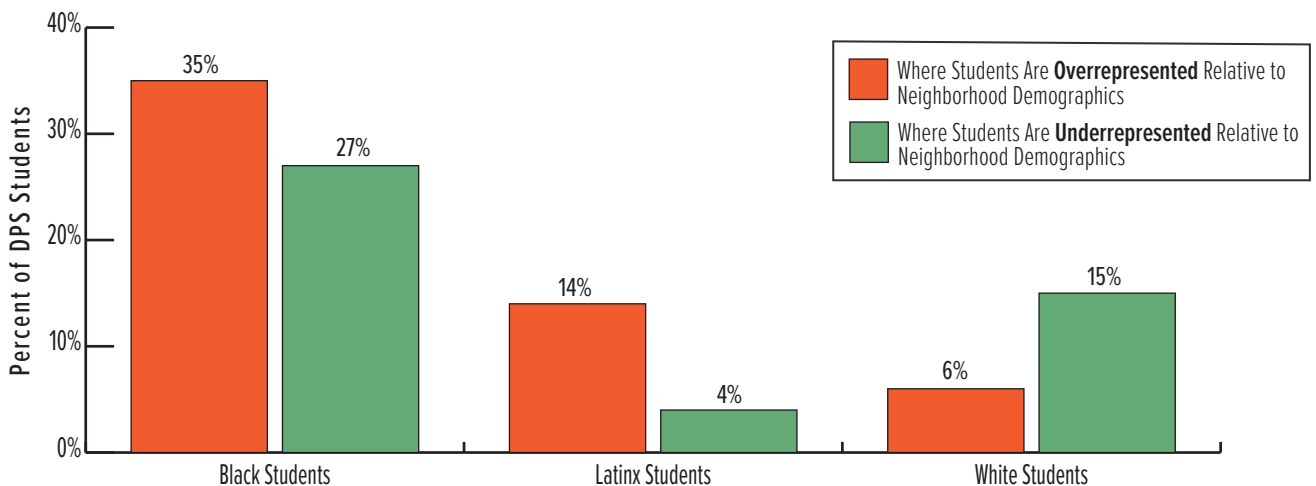
While the race story is more complicated and less linear than the patterns of socioeconomic segregation across the city, it is no less important to understand and make concerted efforts to address, such that students are respected and valued in every school.

This report will present the most compelling arguments for socioeconomically integrating

Denver’s schools, and making them centers of inclusion, where all cultures and communities are honored, and everyone feels they have a strong voice in key decisions. The report explores the current realities of integration in Denver through analyzing data and demographic trends, while considering the opinions of thought-leaders in the local community. The report will also look at how some other cities have created successful integration programs, and how Denver might find similar opportunities.

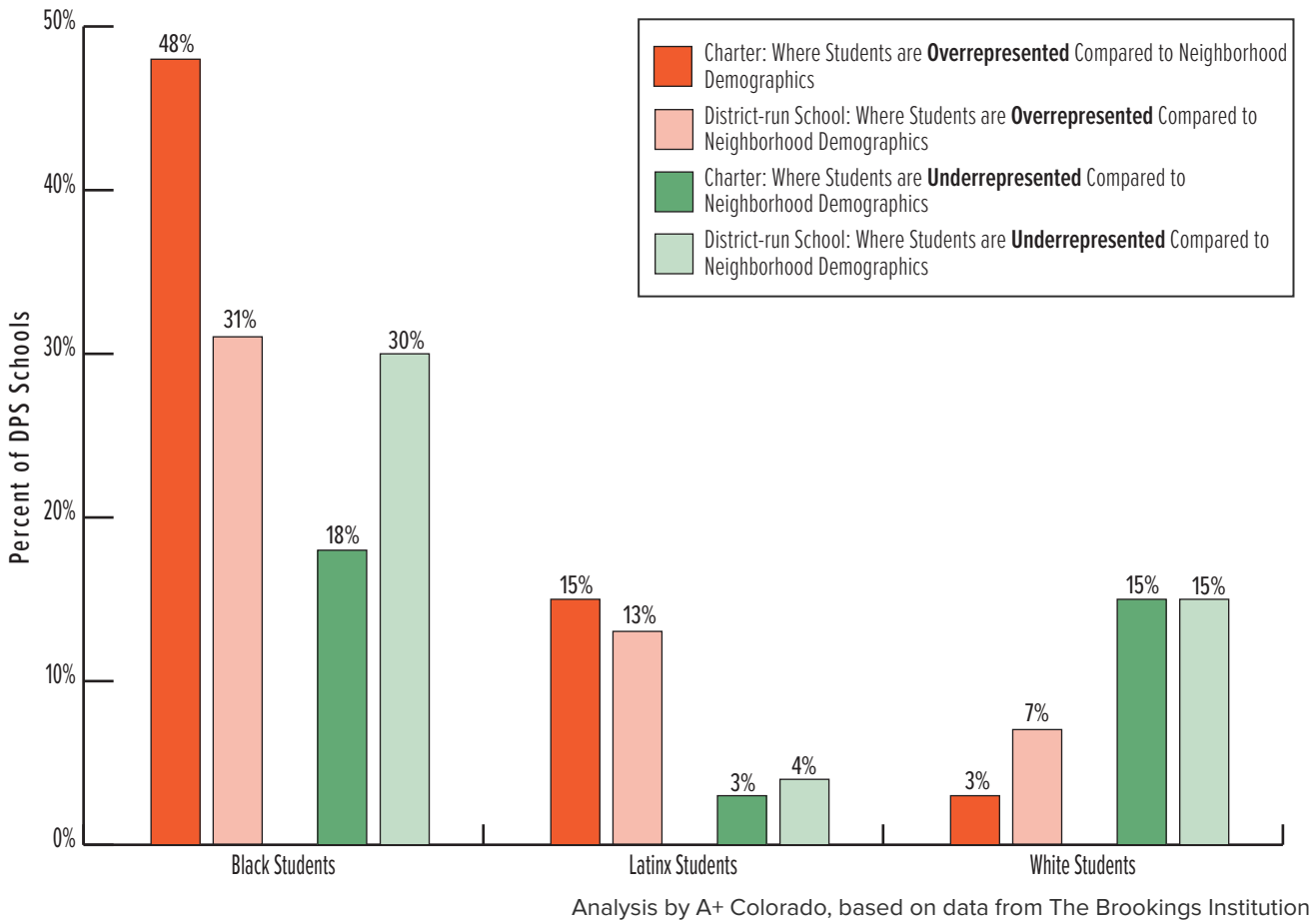
DPS leadership has made integration a priority over the past three years. In fact, the Board of Education recently created a broad-based Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee,

Figure 4. Percent of Denver Schools That Are Over or Underrepresentative of a Student Demographic Group (Race/Ethnicity) Relative to the Neighborhood Surrounding the School



Analysis by A+ Colorado, based on data from The Brookings Institution

Figure 5. Percent of Denver Schools That Are Over or Underrepresentative of a Student Demographic Group (Race/Ethnicity) Relative to the Neighborhood Surrounding the School by School Governance



charged with making recommendations to the board on how to promote integration in the city's schools.

We recognize we are at a unique moment in time: there are clear structural changes underway in our communities, and the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee was convened by DPS to consider options to address the opportunity. This report considers and reviews the policy and practice recommendations by the task force and provides additional thoughts on how to address this essential issue.

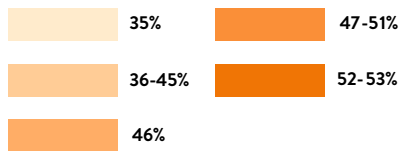
The time is now to lift up all kids in Denver.

Figure 6. Ethnic Plurality of Denver County by Census Tract, 2009 and 2014

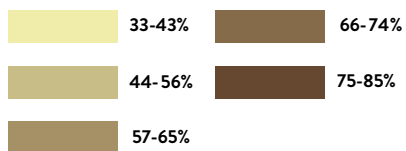


ETHNIC PLURALITY (2009 & 2014)

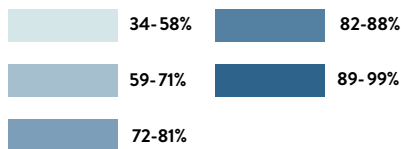
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN



HISPANIC OR LATINO



WHITE ALONE

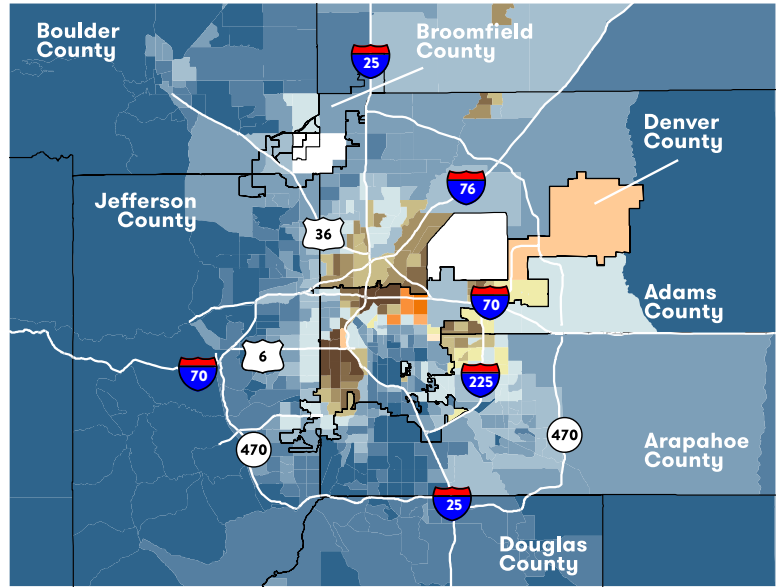


M A P

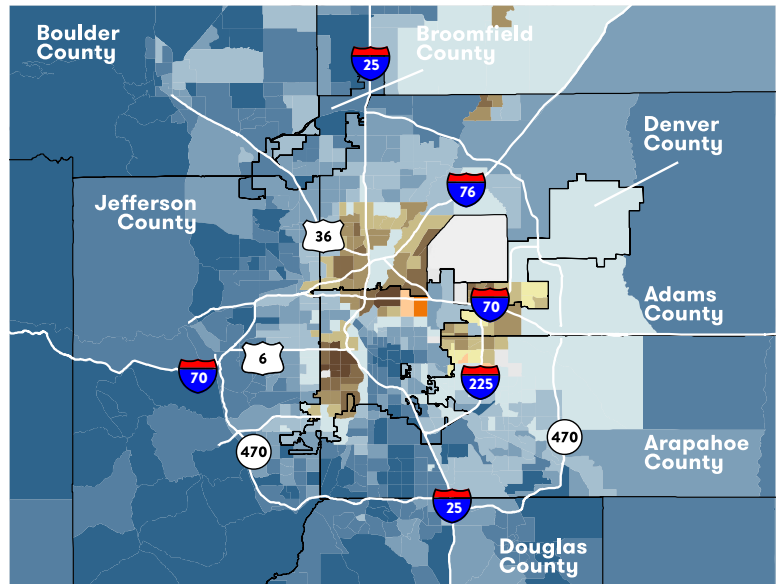
Denver's African American population saw a more than 70 percent reduction in the number of Census tracts where they are a majority and a reduction of 3.7 percent across all tracts.

Hispanics or Latinos in Adams County increased plurality among all tracts by 7.3 percent.

2009



2014



Source: Shift Research Lab, "Our Changing Denver Region"

Opportunities and Challenges

Denver is experiencing rapid growth and rapid gentrification—a process and experience where lower-income residents, often residents of color, are displaced by higher-income newcomers. As the city changes, and as gentrification transforms neighborhood after neighborhood, significant opportunities exist to integrate at least some of the city’s public schools.

The danger is that these opportunities will be short-lived, because gentrifying neighborhoods will be integrated only until all or most lower-income residents are pushed out.

If that pushing out continues apace, the experience of other American cities shows that we face the very real possibility of creating a permanently balkanized metro area, with affluent enclaves near the urban core, and expanding zones of poverty in the inner-ring suburbs.

A positive way to frame the gentrification dilemma is that it creates an opportunity to integrate schools, said Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at The Century Foundation and a leading expert on school integration.

“The good news is gentrification offers new potential opportunities for integrating schools in what had been high poverty neighborhoods,” Kahlenberg said. “But it has to be managed to ensure the integration isn’t just transitory.”

The moment for managing the situation is now, according to Bill Kurtz, CEO of DSST Public Schools, a homegrown network of Denver charters that has placed a primary value on integrated schools. “Geographically this city is as primed for integration as any major city in the country,” Kurtz said. “Between Park Hill and downtown you have six neighborhoods with different racial and socioeconomic profiles, all within a 15 minute drive.” This focus area might sound familiar; it was segregated Park Hill schools in the 60s that led to court-mandated busing under *Keyes*, as shown in Appendix A.

Denver may be primed demographically for integration. But is the city primed politically to make this happen? Denver’s political culture may

be too “nice” to engage in the sometimes bruising battles required to make tough but much-needed change. At the end of the day, Kurtz says, some people would rather go home friends than fight for causes like school integration in which they believe strongly.

And there is some evidence that even as they have made socioeconomically integrated schools a priority over the past couple of years, DPS leaders have on occasion backed down in the face of strong parental opposition to plans that would integrate schools in ways those parents wrongly perceive as weakening them academically.⁷

This report presents what we hope is a compelling call to make socioeconomic school integration one of Denver’s top priorities. For the past 15 years, a small core of funders and advocacy groups have promoted socioeconomic school integration as a strategy for improving the educational outcomes of children from low-income families. But until recently, school integration in Denver has been a back-burner issue for most advocates and policymakers.

Schools where students of different races and socioeconomic classes learn side by side enrich the educational experience for everyone, and prepare students for a future in which they will work alongside a diverse collection of colleagues.

Together with mixed-income housing, integrated schools also help create and sustain diverse neighborhoods, where truly inclusive communities are more than a transitory phenomenon.

Preventing segregation by race and class is not the responsibility of the school district alone. Elected officials, advocates, funders, and everyday people must join together to push for enlightened housing policies. And collective pressure must be brought to bear on our city’s elected leaders to demonstrate the courage and vision required to make sure Denver is a great city for all its residents.

It’s not too late. But it may be soon.

DOES INTEGRATION LIFT ALL KIDS?

There's a concern expressed commonly among middle-class parents that sending their children to a school with large numbers of low-income students will slow the pace of their kids' learning. It's true that lower-income children tend to enter school behind their more affluent peers in early literacy and math skills, including vocabulary and basic number recognition.

But almost two decades of national academic research has demonstrated that mixed-income schools often benefit lower-income and middle-class students alike. Students benefit in other, equally important ways as well.

First, let's quickly review the research on socioeconomic school integration and test scores. Multiple studies in cities across the country have found that economically mixed schools led to sharp increases in test scores for lower-income students, without pulling down the scores of their more affluent peers. This means achievement or opportunity gaps shrink in those integrated schools.

A 2016 study by the Century Foundation of racially and socio-economically diverse inter-district magnet schools in Hartford, Connecticut, for example, found that academic achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income students were much lower than in the state as a whole.

"By tenth grade the gap in scores between students from low-income families and other students shrunk to just under 5 percentage points in reading in inter-district magnet schools, compared to 28 percentage points at the state level," The Century Foundation a New York-based think-tank, wrote in a 2016 report, "How Racially

Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students."⁸

Why does the achievement of low-income students rise in integrated schools? There are multiple reasons, the study's authors say: "Integrating schools leads to more equitable access to important resources such as structural facilities, highly qualified teachers, challenging courses, private and public funding, and social and cultural capital."

In other words, high-poverty schools tend to suffer from lower-quality resources, in the form of substandard buildings, less qualified teachers, fewer advanced or accelerated courses, and less private investment to augment public funding.

Graduation rates were also 10 percentage points higher in the most socioeconomically integrated schools than in schools at the national average for integration, and 20 percentage points higher than in extremely socioeconomically segregated schools, according to an in-depth study of graduation rates in 16 states and Washington D.C.⁹

In fact, the study found "a more dramatic pattern" between socioeconomic integration and graduation rates than between racial integration and graduation rates.

Most studies over the past 15 years have found that the "sweet spot" for socioeconomic integration is a school with between 40 percent and 50 percent low-income students, as measured by eligibility for free or reduced price lunches.¹⁰

The experience in Denver is more complicated. What is clear is that students in the highest poverty schools, where over 90% of students qualify for

Figure 7a. Percent of DPS Students that Met or Exceeded Expectations - English Language Arts (CMAS 2017)

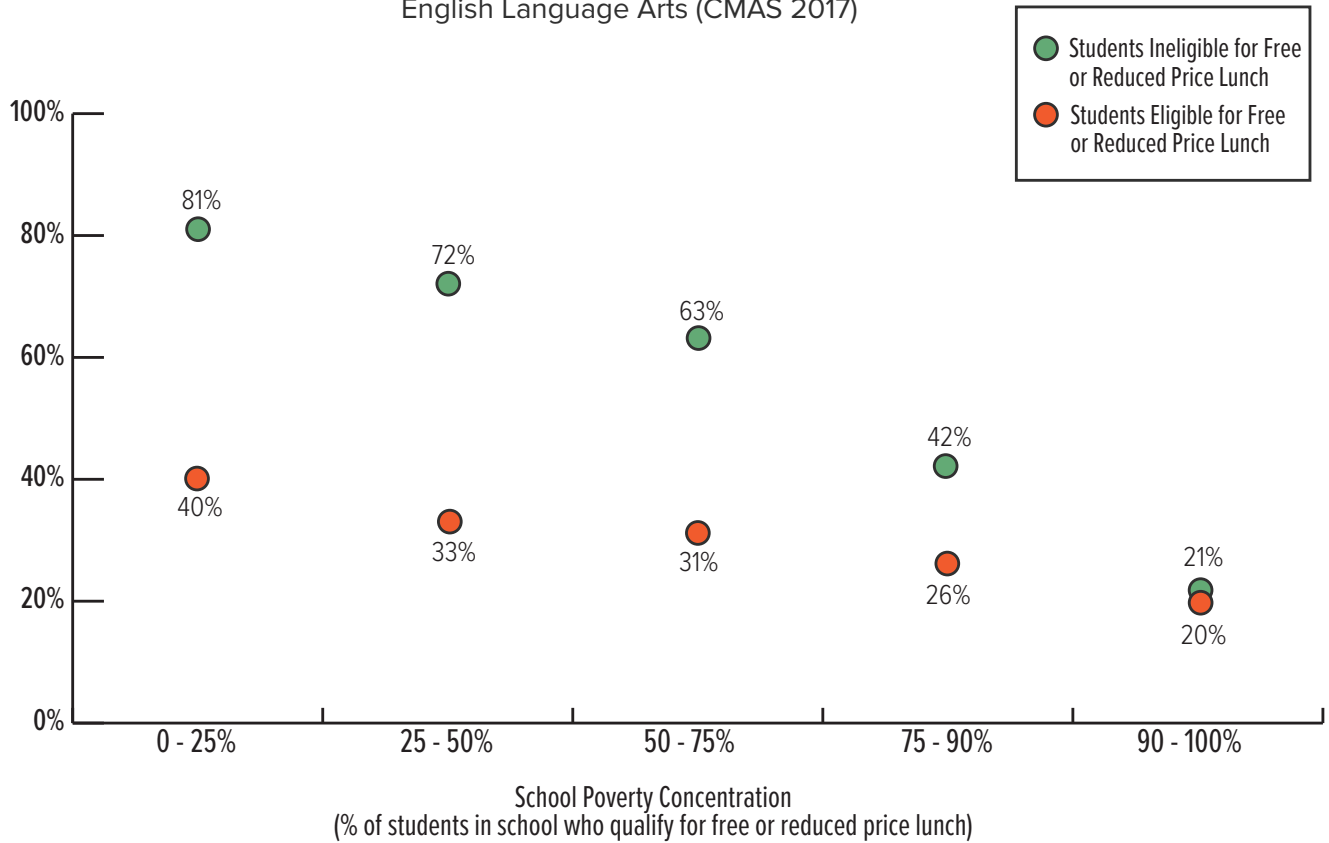
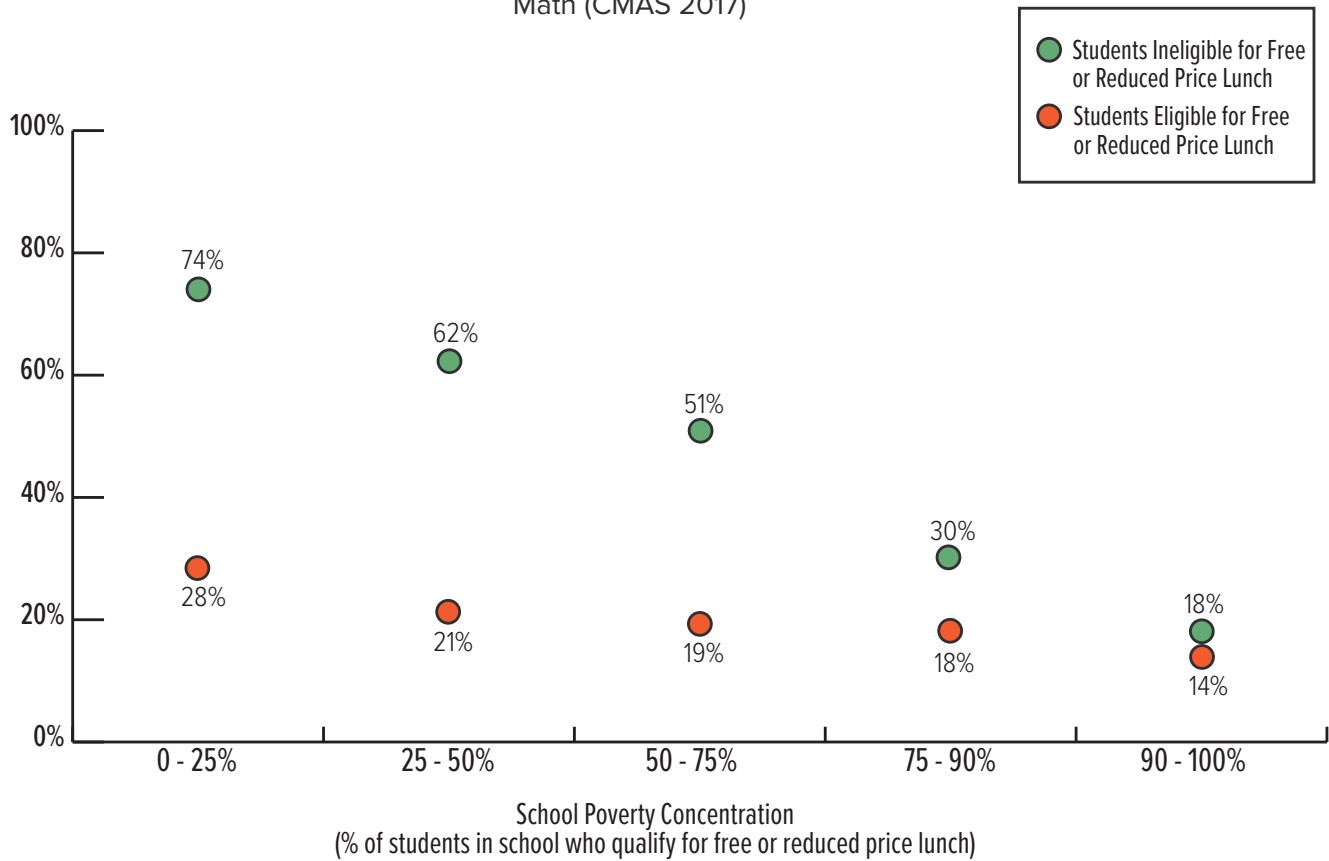


Figure 7b. Percent of DPS Students that Met or Exceeded Expectations - Math (CMAS 2017)



free or reduced price lunch, see less growth and significantly lower achievement rates than their peers in more integrated schools, as shown in Figure 7a and 7b. Over 23,000 Denver students attend these schools. Additionally, the data shows that the schools with the lowest concentrations of poverty are serving students particularly effectively, and suggests opening the doors to low-income students could positively impact these new students.

When looking more closely at the academic outcomes in Denver's more integrated schools, the data shows that integrated schools can be effective for both lower income and more affluent students, but they are not necessarily more effective. The variability shows that the quality of the school itself matters—not simply the students.

There are examples of schools that get excellent academic outcomes for integrated student populations. One such example is DSST Public Schools, a homegrown Denver charter school network, that has, since its founding in 2004, been committed to running socioeconomically integrated middle and high schools. Overall, 69 percent of students at DSST's 12 schools are eligible for free or reduced-cost meals; ranging from 38 percent at the Byers campus in south central Denver to 91 percent at Henry in southwest Denver. Across the network, 18% of students are black, 56% are Latinx, and 17% are white. DSST's schools are among the top-performing in Colorado, and it's not just affluent white students who do well. DSST students who qualified for free or reduced price lunch had a higher average SAT score in 2017 (1102) than did all Colorado students who did not qualify for free or reduced price lunch (1066).

Other examples of more integrated DPS schools where students from all income backgrounds have stronger academic outcomes in 2017 than their peers across the district and state include Highline Academy Southeast, Denver Green School, and Odyssey School of Denver. There are many other examples in cities across the country. Most of them, however, are one-off schools rather than networks like DSST, and few deliver consistently strong results for students year after year.

In 2014, 14 charters committed to recruiting and creating diverse student bodies formed the National Coalition of Diverse Charter Schools.¹¹ Today, the coalition consists of 40-plus schools across the country. Especially strong integrated schools are Blackstone Valley Prep in Providence, R.I., Bricolage Academy in New Orleans, Valor Collegiate in Nashville, and Drew Charter School in Atlanta, GA.¹²

On the other hand, there are schools that are seemingly diverse, but segregation takes place not at the front door but inside the classrooms. Denver's East High School provides one such example. At East, integration does provide some social benefits, to the extent that kids of different socioeconomic classes mix outside of classrooms (on sports teams, for example). But integration tends to stop there, and so provides few if any academic benefits to many low-income students.

The school has made concerted efforts over the years to get more low-income students and students of color into advanced-track classes. But those efforts have met with limited success particularly due to the challenge high schools face in serving students with more than a five year gap in academic skills.¹³

At East, test scores overall look relatively good, certainly better than state averages. But when you disaggregate test score data by socioeconomic status, yawning gaps emerge. In 2017, in English Language Arts, just 19 percent of low-income 9th grade students met or exceeded expectations, compared to 73 percent of non-low-income students. District-wide, 25 percent of low-income 9th graders met or exceeded expectations on the same test, and 60 percent of more affluent students did so. Median growth for low-income students at East was 43 in English Language Arts and 44 in Math in 2017, down from much higher growth rates in 2016. Gaps between groups of students are also striking when looking at college entrance exams, where students eligible for free or reduced price lunch scored similar to their peers across the district, and more affluent students scored significantly better than other affluent students in DPS.

While East does better than Colorado as a whole in getting kids of color into Advanced Placement

Figure 8. Academic Gaps: SAT and PSAT 2017

classes, huge gaps persist between students of color and white students. AP data aren't disaggregated by socioeconomic status. At East, 55 percent of white students take AP classes, compared to 33 percent of Latinx students and 29 percent of black students.¹⁴

The point is simple: integration has far less impact in a school that sorts or tracks kids by perceived academic ability. The result is separate and unequal tracks: largely more affluent, white students in one track and low-income students-of-color in the other.

Integration means integrated classrooms, which often require extra supports for students coming in below grade level.¹⁵ And for integrated, untracked high school classrooms to be effective for all students, strong, integrated early childhood education, elementary and middle school programs need to produce prepared students, regardless of their background.

Benefits Beyond Test Scores

Socioeconomically integrated schools provide other tangible benefits to students beyond high test scores. The Century Foundation report makes the case that the narrow focus in K-12 education on test score results over the past two decades has resulted in those other benefits being largely overlooked.

The report argues that colleges and universities have done a better job making the case for diverse student bodies than have pre-K-12 systems, though have not necessarily delivered on this vision.¹⁶ Citing several supporting briefs filed by top universities and research organizations in a recent federal court case on affirmative action in university admissions, the report says that similar arguments could and should be made about pre-K-12 schools.

One key finding cited in the court briefs is that diversity (in this case racial and ethnic diversity), and exposure to different ideas and perspectives, actually makes students smarter in crucial ways. "The novel ideas and challenges that such exposure brings leads to improved cognitive skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving," an American Educational Research Association brief cited by the Century Foundation concluded.

In the report, a brief from the American Psychological Association elaborated on this finding:

"White students in particular benefit from racially and ethnically diverse learning contexts in that the presence of students of color stimulates an increase in the complexity with which students—especially white students—approach a given issue. When white students are in racially homogeneous groups, no such cognitive stimulation occurs."

The bottom line is compelling: integrated classrooms benefit lower-income students and their more affluent peers. Integrated classrooms also benefit students of color and white students.

Integration Equals Preparation

So, how do advocates convince middle- and upper-middle class parents that socioeconomically diverse schools are the best choice for their kids? This has long been an uphill battle.

In a 2012 article in the *American Journal of Education*, researchers from Teachers College at Columbia University analyzed results of a survey they conducted of affluent, mostly politically progressive parents in New York City on their attitudes about integrated schools.¹⁷

What they found was that “many of these parents are bothered by the racial and socioeconomic segregation within and among schools that results from (school district) policies, but they are simultaneously anxious and concerned that their children win the “race to the top” of a highly competitive and stratified system.”

To put it bluntly, when ideals bump up against self-interest, ideals usually lose. But what if more affluent parents could be convinced that racially and socioeconomically integrated schools would imbue their children with the exact attributes they need to gain admission to top colleges and succeed in the workforce of tomorrow?

It’s a relevant question, because there is ample and growing evidence that this is indeed the case. And it’s tied directly to the profound technological transformation that we’re all living through, and whose effects we will feel ever-more acutely in the coming years and decades.

The Age of Agility by America Succeeds explains that the rapid growth of automation and artificial intelligence is transforming work as we know it so profoundly that some refer to the current moment as the advent of the “fourth Industrial Revolution.”¹⁸ Millions of jobs will be lost or radically transformed over the next two decades.

Students exiting the pre-K-12 education system will need to be prepared for this radical change if they are to have any shot at thriving professionally.

It’s a daunting challenge to be sure. Fortunately, truly integrated, inclusive schools are ideally positioned to help young people develop

the capacities they will need to thrive in this environment of ambiguity and uncertainty.

The *Age of Agility* outlines a series of desired skills for future workers as identified by the Institute for Future work. Taken in consideration with the proven benefits of integrated schools, they show a strong alignment that should further bolster the need for change.

The Age of Agility: Skills for Future Work

Sense-making (the ability to determine the deeper meaning or significance of what is being expressed).

“Students who experience positive interactions with students from different racial backgrounds (develop) more open minds and engaging classroom conversations. And improved learning actually occurs in these classrooms because abstract concepts are tied directly to concrete examples drawn from a range of experiences,” says a paper from the *Michigan Journal of Race & Law*.¹⁹

Novel and adaptive thinking.

“Students’ exposure to other students who are different from themselves and the novel ideas and challenges that such exposure brings leads to improved cognitive skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving,” says The Century Foundation report, citing research from the journal *Psychological Science*.²⁰

Cross-cultural competency.

“Diversity encourages students to question their assumptions, to understand that wisdom may be found in unexpected voices, and to gain an appreciation of the complexity of today’s world,” says an amicus brief filed with the U.S. Supreme Court on a recent affirmative action case by several elite universities.²¹

Design mindset (the ability to represent and develop tasks and work processes for desired outcomes).

“Diversity enhances creativity. It encourages the search for novel information and perspectives, leading to better decision making and problem solving,” says an article in *Scientific American*.²²

^{*}Originally appeared in the 2017 report, *The Age of Agility*.

In the past, advocates for socioeconomic integration relied heavily on the test score argument, buttressed by a softer point about how students who attended diverse schools became more tolerant and open-minded adults.

But now, as we just demonstrated, there is reason to think that diverse schools and classrooms provide all students with advantages that their peers in more segregated environments don't enjoy. Students in diverse settings have a leg up in terms of college and career over kids who haven't experienced true diversity.

Self-interest among more affluent families could dictate that they insist their children attend socioeconomically integrated schools to prepare them for 21st century life.

Learning Together

There is a growing field focused on the work of understanding one of the trickiest parts of integration: how do we get people to overcome biases to learn and live together?

Implicit bias, as defined by The Kirwin Institute, "refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner." Implicit biases are associations we make without even knowing we are doing it. These associations "cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance."²³ Research on bias suggests that biases are built off of humans' cognitive desire to group people ("groupism"). It's very clear this is a major challenge across our society. People don't have to go far to run into negative portrayals of almost any racial, gender or political group in our daily media or discourse.

Therefore, a major challenge of increasing the diversity of schools is interrupting biases and ensuring families and students of all backgrounds are welcomed and appreciated. It would be naive to assume societal biases stop at the schoolhouse door. In gentrifying or changing communities, interrupting these biases is essential. Research says that one way to combat groupism is through

"individuation" or getting to know people as unique human beings, rather than members of groups.²⁴ Teachers and families from different backgrounds need to find ways to build relationships of partnership across these lines of difference. It's essential then that schools and districts ensure families and educators build strong relationships, both at the individual level and school level.

Denver is already taking steps to build relationships within school communities, including their nationally recognized home visit program. The district is taking steps to help school leaders and teachers reflect and interrupt their own biases in working with students and families. Yet, to really take on and dismantle the deep power structure between different groups—between white families and families of color, between more affluent and low-income families, between teachers and families—will require more investment in programs that move beyond a reactive to a proactive stance. Denver could take a cue from an emerging national best practice out of Washington, D.C. that brings parents from changing communities together for substantial relationship building.

A new organization, Kindred, has been cited by new Urban Institute Research as a way to truly bring folks together.²⁵ As stated by Laura Wilson Phelan, founder and CEO of Kindred:

Parent relationships are an invisible force in every school culture—a force that could begin to drive real equity in schools. All parents want their children to grow up learning the skills and dispositions to live happy, fulfilling lives. But what we often miss when thinking about what that requires is the role of being in true relationship with people who are different from us. Without empathy, social networks—which are our source of information and socialization—remain siloed. And in a school setting, where these communities share access to resources, we need to build awareness of how our own behaviors affect how all the children in the school are served. Imagine if across our schools and our systems, privileged and marginalized parents supported one another without shame, guilt or fear. Imagine how different our country would be.

Reducing bias and building new power structures in changing communities would mean reflecting on, and potentially changing, every way in which schools interact with families to build a truly inclusive community.

Living Together

“Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.” Those words, penned by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, seem especially applicable today, with gentrification transforming a growing number of Denver neighborhoods. As gentrification gains a foothold, neighborhoods become diverse. But without policy intervention, that diversity is illusory and short-lived.

Who better to become strong advocates for diverse and inclusive neighborhoods than people who have had first-hand experience learning in diverse environments? People who have learned together can lead the way in helping us live together.

Many integrated schools have been created through busing or magnet programs, which bring children of different races and socioeconomic classes and from different parts of a city together. Gentrification can create an opportunity to build mixed-income schools in mixed-income neighborhoods. Yet it can also be fleeting if not addressed and commitment to established communities to make integration meaningful and a permanent fixture of schools and the community. “Denver has always been home to families and individuals from all income levels. This economic and cultural diversity made Denver a great city. Gentrification is not bad in and of itself, in fact, many of these historically low income neighborhoods needed investment due to years of neglect from the practice known as redlining. But without planning and thoughtfulness from the City and the community, gentrification can lead to displacement and unaffordable housing for all of us,” says Andrew Romero, longtime affordable housing leader and Board Member of All in Denver, a new organization that advocates for policy and ballot changes that promote an inclusive Denver community.

Doing so would have multifaceted benefits: if school systems could figure out how to create diverse schools amid gentrification, that might also enable what Jennifer Stillman, the author of “Gentrification and Schools: The Process of Integration When Whites Reverse Flight,” calls the missing piece in most gentrifying neighborhoods: “meaningful social interaction” between a neighborhood’s new arrivals and its existing residents. These two groups are likely to go to different restaurants, different churches, even different grocery stores. “But schools, to me, are the one place in the community that really are the anchors of the neighborhoods where meaningful social interaction can happen,” Stillman says. Integrate schools, in other words, and that might help better integrate the neighborhoods around them.²⁶

It’s an idea that people on both sides of the gentrification divide should be able to get behind. There is a growing body of evidence that children who attend diverse schools will be better positioned.

Given this reality, more affluent families, who inadvertently contribute to displacement of lower-income residents from gentrifying neighborhoods, could and should become strong advocates for maintaining economically balanced neighborhoods—and schools.

There is ample evidence that consigning low-income people to high-poverty neighborhoods is damaging to their current and future prospects. According to the Urban Institute:

Living in profoundly poor neighborhoods seriously undermines people’s well-being and long-term life chances. Preschool children living in low-income neighborhoods exhibit more aggressive behavior when interacting with others. Young people from high-poverty neighborhoods are less successful in school than their counterparts from more affluent communities; they earn lower grades, are more likely to drop out, and are less likely to go on to college. Studies have also documented that neighborhood environment influences teens’ sexual activity and the likelihood that girls will become pregnant during their teen years. Young people who live in high-crime areas

are more likely to commit crimes themselves, other things being equal. And finally, living in disadvantaged neighborhoods increases the risk of disease and mortality among both children and adults.²⁷

Again, it becomes a question of collective self-interest rather than another case of “pulling up the ladder” once you’ve secured your piece of a newly desirable neighborhood. Everyone benefits if neighborhoods remain diverse, especially if ample opportunities exist for residents of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds to mix and mingle in common spaces. The Urban Institute report explains it this way:

Quality grocery stores, reliable child care, safe after-school activities, and healthy recreational facilities also shape the quality of life a neighborhood offers its residents. Neighbors help transmit the norms and values that influence behavior and teach children what is expected of them as they mature. Teenagers in particular are profoundly influenced by their immediate peer groups, which are often dominated by neighbors and school mates who have the potential to either fuel healthy competition over grades and athletics or pressure one another to join risky adventures or engage in illegal activities. Where people live influences their exposure to crime and violence, including the risk of being a victim of burglary or assault.

It’s beyond the scope of this study to delve into the causes of gentrification and policies that can mitigate its effects. A recent report does an excellent job of examining these issues from Denver’s Office of Economic Development.²⁸ Despite the inexorable market pressures that accelerate gentrification, government and advocacy groups can work together to slow the process.

“We have to intervene,” said Tony Pickett, Vice President for Master Site Development at Denver’s nonprofit Urban Land Conservancy. “We can’t allow it to be only market-driven. We have created a sense of desirability (in these neighborhoods), so we are obligated to mitigate some of the effects of that desirability.”

Denver can and should summon residents who had positive experiences in integrated schools to help lead this charge. An article in the journal *Education Next* points out that research shows such people would make strong advocates:

“Reviewing research spanning 25 years, the National Academy of Education found a consistent association between early desegregated schooling experience and later working in desegregated work places, living in desegregated neighborhoods, and people’s perception that they acquired skills that made them more effective and able to persist in racially diverse settings.”²⁹

The evidence is clear: building solidarity across communities not only benefits the individual household, but the entire neighborhood. We should hope that these communities of diverse families can be our loudest and strongest advocates for change.

INTEGRATING MORE DENVER SCHOOLS

In theory, then, it shouldn't be difficult to make a compelling case for socioeconomically integrated schools in Denver, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods, and to find a diverse array of people to advocate for new policies that aggressively push integration. A key question remains: how, practically, do we make this happen?

There is a basic demographic challenge: the student body in Denver Public Schools has far more low-income students than affluent students. Enrollment data from the 2016-17 school year shows that 69 percent of DPS students qualify for subsidized meals. And there are many schools whose student bodies are not representative of the neighborhood in which they are located, let alone of the district more broadly.³⁰ Even if you spread those more affluent students evenly across all Denver schools, you wouldn't have what research considers a healthy mix of lower-income and more affluent students.

It's counterproductive, though, to throw up one's hands and surrender because achieving the ideal is impossible. Indeed there are many strategies the district could use to integrate more schools, from redrawn enrollment boundaries to prioritizing integrated seats in either new or existing schools.

But perhaps it isn't that simple, as one recent example illustrates. When the McAuliffe International Middle School moved in 2014 from the high-income, predominantly white Stapleton neighborhood into the Smiley Middle School building in North Park Hill, the population of students the facility served flipped in a few short years from high poverty to decidedly more affluent.

The venerable old Smiley facility had been home to two high-poverty, low performing, severely under-enrolled schools, Smiley Middle School and

Venture Prep Charter School. DPS opted to phase out the Smiley program and relocate Venture prep, while moving McAuliffe into the Smiley building as a completely separate program.

In 2013, 82 percent of Smiley students qualified for free or reduced-cost lunches, while just 22 percent of McAuliffe students qualified as low-income.

As Smiley phased out over three years, one would have hoped to see the poverty percentage at McAuliffe climb, as some of the Smiley students enrolled. Theoretically, with McAuliffe's boundaries enlarged to include more lower-income sections of North and Northeast Park Hill, this should have happened.

Yet, as the school has grown it serves proportionally more and more affluent Stapleton families. Without a floor establishing the minimum seats for low-income students, the proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch dropped down to 18 percent in 2016-17.

DPS officials point out that the school now serves many more students, with high-quality seats, than Smiley did in its final years. Before Smiley closed, 83 percent of the students who lived within its boundaries choiced out. Now, 83 percent of boundary families choose to attend McAuliffe.

And although the percentage of low-income students has dropped, as affluent Stapleton and Park Hill families flood the school and its enrollment surges, indeed the raw numbers of low-income students has grown. As the 2017-18 school year started, McAuliffe had 201 students eligible for free or reduced price lunches, out of total enrollment of 1,158.³¹ That's up from 165 last year, and from 168 students eligible for free or

reduced price lunch who attended Smiley Middle School in 2012-13, the final year before it was phased out.

Brian Eschbacher, DPS' Executive Director of Planning and Enrollment Services, argued that McAuliffe is serving its neighborhood better now than Smiley did in its final years. But North and Northeast Park Hill are gentrifying, so combined with the affluent influx from Stapleton, the numbers look more skewed in contrast to the past than they actually are.

Also, he said, middle class Latinx and black families are sending their kids to McAuliffe in significant numbers. While the socioeconomic integration numbers aren't good, 37 percent of the student body consists of kids of color.

Seeking Opportunities

So where in Denver might some integration opportunities exist? Let's examine Bill Kurtz's assertion earlier in this report that "between Park Hill and downtown you have six neighborhoods with different racial and socioeconomic profiles, all within a 15-minute drive."

DPS and Denver city government data show that in theory, these neighborhoods could be home to schools far more integrated than they are today.³² Here are some salient points:

- The six neighborhoods in question are North Park Hill, Clayton, Cole, Skyland, Whittier, and Five Points. The percentage of residents living in poverty ranges from 24 percent (Cole) to 8 percent (North Park Hill).
- The range of school poverty levels vary more widely, from a high of 97 percent (Bruce Randolph Middle School in Clayton) to a low of 3.9 percent (Polaris, a gifted and talent magnet school in Five Points). With the glaring exception of Polaris, schools in that corridor cluster close to the high-poverty end of the spectrum, with between 80 and 95 percent of students eligible for subsidized lunches.

- While many households in the area may not have children, it's clear that more affluent families with kids in those neighborhoods are choosing either private schools or schools in other neighborhoods. That would seem to create an opportunity to open programs that would attract a more balanced and representative mix of students.

DPS has created a series of enrollment zones over the past seven years which may be used to make its schools more diverse. Under enrollment zones, families are assigned to one of several schools within broader boundaries than those surrounding traditional neighborhood schools. Families can list their preferred school but wouldn't be guaranteed a spot in that school. They do, however, get a spot in one of the schools within their zone.

DPS Superintendent Tom Boasberg, in a 2014 interview, said enrollment zones help break down neighborhood patterns of segregation by drawing from a larger, and therefore more diverse area.³³

"In Denver, in many neighborhoods if you put a compass point down on the map and draw a very small radius out from it, a half mile, you will often find within that circle you draw not a lot of racial and economic diversity," he said.

"But if you take that compass and draw it out a little further, maybe a mile, mile and a half, so you have a three-mile diameter circle, there are many, many places that are very richly diverse."

Under DPS's school choice application and assignment system, however, neither race nor socioeconomic status are factors in the algorithm that assigns students to schools, save in select cases where schools have set explicit hold-backs for students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.³⁴ So any integration that occurs as a result of enrollment zone is more a result of happenstance than intentionality.

But that may be in the process of changing. This year, DPS launched a new pilot in an attempt to address this issue at 26 more affluent schools across the city. Under the pilot, once neighborhood kids are accommodated, students eligible for subsidized lunches get priority for remaining seats. In schools like Slavens in southeast Denver,

and most Stapleton schools, where neighborhood kids fill all seats, this has had no impact. But at East High School, the pilot resulted in a 10 percentage-point increase in the freshman class free and reduced lunch population for 2017-18.³⁵

“At East, under the pilot 85 FRL students entered the freshman class who wouldn’t have otherwise,” Eschbacher said.

DPS plans to study the result of the pilot to see how it might be adjusted or expanded in subsequent years.

Models That Attract

Are there particular school models that can attract more- and less-affluent families alike? Several districts across the country have found that the answer is yes.

“The most sophisticated districts find ways to make integrated schools more enticing,” Kahlenberg of The Century Foundation said. “Often that involves adoption of magnet themes or teaching approaches that surveys suggest will be attractive to a broad cross-section of population.”

One example of this in Denver is Academia Ana Marie Sandoval, a pre-K through sixth grade school that offers a combination of dual immersion Spanish-English instruction and a Montessori teaching approach.

Located in the largely gentrified Highland neighborhood, where just 12 percent of families live in poverty, Sandoval has a student body where 34 percent of students qualify for subsidized meals.

This rare balance in a gentrified neighborhood can be explained in part by Sandoval’s particular model. Dual immersion language programs require that a significant percentage of students be native Spanish-speakers. So maintaining a semblance of balance is essential to the program’s integrity. This has the benefit of appealing to common shared values of both newer residents and longtime families. Dual language programs

have had similar success in other school districts across the country.

High quality arts magnet programs have been integration-enhancers in cities like Raleigh, N.C. But the Denver School of the Arts (DSA), a magnet middle and high school, provides another example of how Denver is falling short of walking its integration talk.

"Integration is critically important for our schools in Denver. The sad reality is that we are far away from that goal in too many of our communities. **We need to be able to work with families and leaders to help them understand the need for policies to promote integration** so we can build diverse schools across the city."

-Rosemary Rodriguez, Former DPS School Board Member

DSA has been a socioeconomically segregated school for much of its history. It is a magnet that draws affluent students from Denver and its suburbs. That’s because students must clear a high audition bar to be admitted. This disadvantages children who can’t afford private classes and lessons, where they can hone their natural abilities. Indeed, Denver has no explicit feeder programs

that support low-income students to meet school audition requirements.³⁶

In a city where two-thirds of students qualify for subsidized meals, DSA's free and reduced price lunch percentage hovers at around 10 percent, and has dropped each of the past four years.

Instead of maintaining schools like DSA that segregate students by socioeconomic class, Denver could emulate the Raleigh model, which hit its peak a decade ago. Beginning in the 1980s, the Wake County Public School system created a network of magnet schools, all of them located in the heart of the 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. About half the seats in those magnets were reserved for neighborhood kids, and the remainder were assigned by lottery. It showed promise and strong outcomes.³⁷ There's no reason Denver couldn't try a similar approach.

A CALL TO ACTION

If one thing is clear, it's that Denver cannot accomplish its professed goal of integrating more schools without city leaders investing some of their political capital in the effort. Attempts to promote integration are frequently derided as social engineering, and are reflexively resisted by a significant portion of the population.

The propensity to self-segregate runs deep, and it is clear that both individual choices and institutional boundaries impact school population composition.

So how can Denver realize the vision of creating integrated, inclusive new schools, when families of different economic classes are currently self-segregating to such a significant extent? Rick Kahlenberg of The Century Foundation says it will take a combination of attractive school options and concerted political pressure.

"Using the example of places that have established good integration policies, it is possible to cobble together a coalition of business interests, civil rights groups, teachers who recognize they can do a better job in economically integrated schools, and faith leaders, to push elected officials and school district leaders to become champions for change," Kahlenberg said. "Parents and students from diverse schools can also provide a powerful voice," he added.

How might Denver's political leaders be persuaded to jump into the fray and push hard for school integration? One strategy might be to persuade them that becoming champions of integration would help shield them from the growing chorus of progressives who complain the city is selling its soul to developers and doing little to help people of modest means who are being pushed out of the city by rapidly escalating housing costs.

DPS began to address the issue with a citywide task force dubbed "Strengthening Neighborhoods." Over the course of six months, the group of community members was charged with digging into how changing housing patterns, demographics, and enrollment patterns were affecting schools, and how the district might create or change policies around boundaries, choice, and enrollment to increase integration.

This task force was an important start to a concerted effort to understand and develop strategies to address school segregation. The Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee presented its slate of recommendations to the Denver School Board in December 2017. It is clear that the members of the committee were incredibly thoughtful and engaged in the work. We at A+ applaud these initial recommendations. We also recognize that the committee's recommendations are extensive; arguably DPS cannot undertake all recommendations at once. Outlined here are the strategies that we feel are most critical to tackle school segregation in the district. These strategies echo and further many of the recommendations of the Committee to address many of the systemic challenges that have entrenched segregation in the district.

District Policy Recommendations

1. Establish clear goals to decrease school segregation and report on progress toward goals. Directly echoing the Strengthening Neighborhood Committee, it is critical that DPS not only acknowledge that entrenched school segregation is a problem but that it is actively working to change the experience of students in extremely high or low poverty schools. While the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee

recommended setting goals around the share of DPS students in integrated schools, leaving the DPS Board to define integration, A+ recommends setting a goal around eliminating the number of students served in extremely high or low-poverty schools. Specifically, A+ recommends defining a goal where no one school serves more than 90% of students who either do, or do not, qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

DPS should also issue an annual report on the state of school integration, to include the progress toward overall goals, status of school-level and community-level measures of inclusion and diversity within schools in Denver, and reflection on district policies and practices targeting integration.

2. Invest in community-wide education and engagement about integration. DPS needs early and regular family and community engagement to help explain the need for integration in schools, the region and the district overall. Partner with local community organizations to create awareness of the benefits of integration and mobilize families to advocate for the change. Build on the momentum of the Strengthening Neighborhood Committee by establishing stronger co-creation and co-construction of regional, neighborhood and school visions for integration.

3. Build integration into SchoolChoice priorities. The district should leverage the SchoolChoice process to hold seats for students in economically segregated schools to intentionally integrate them. Echoing the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee, it is critical that the “burden” to integrate schools is not placed solely on low-income families. The district should hold back seats for low-income students in the most affluent schools. The district should also hold seats for non-low income students in high poverty schools, particularly in schools that are part of enrollment zones. This could ensure that schools are more reflective of the broader community. The floors for these seat hold-backs could start between 10-20%, and phase in more seats over a couple years until schools are more integrated.

4. Create enrollment zones that are intentionally diverse. Prioritize zones that include a diverse set of communities, and resist the temptation to

default to “natural boundaries” to define the zone. Revisit current zones and redraw boundaries that are more inclusive. A litmus test when setting enrollment zones should be to include schools that currently serve different student populations. As emphasized by the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee, all schools, with very limited exceptions, in the geographic area should be included in the zone. All schools within the zone, pending capacity, should be open to students who move between schools either mid-year or in non-traditional transition grades.

Zones have to be thoughtful. Having completely open enrollment markets could accelerate segregation by allowing those with more resources, transportation, and information to access schools with limited available space.

Additionally, transportation is key to ensuring enrollment zones work for students. The focus and priority of transportation should be to improve access to quality schools for low-income students in particular. Transportation must be provided within zones, and there must be transportation options for students to move between zones, particularly when students do not have access to a certain school model within their zone. Transportation is expensive, but it cannot be a barrier to students accessing a quality program of their choice. Improving transportation is a citywide solution and requires the commitment and collaboration of DPS, RTD, and the City.

Creating more zones will take political courage, as the most effectively integrated zones are likely to open schools that are currently inaccessible to most of the Denver community due to high home prices within the current boundary.

5. Construct feeder patterns that prioritize students who have historically been left out of specialized programs. Create elementary and middle schools designed to support low-income students to successfully enter programs like George Washington’s IB program and Denver School of the Arts. Denver must have a quality arts K-5 school that serves low-income students if DSA is to be successfully integrated. Provide universal screening for highly gifted and talented students at all schools to broaden access to gifted programs like Polaris.

6. Support new diverse by design schools.

Support new schools that are placed in low-income neighborhoods that will appeal to higher income families. Intentionally reserve space for low-income families to avoid the circumstances that the district has experienced with other schools like Polaris, that have followed this model and become some of the most economically segregated schools in the district. Prioritize models that promote integration in the Call for New Quality Schools process and Facility Allocation Process.

Every day, some Denver neighborhoods get closer to tipping into full gentrification, and long-standing communities are at risk of being fully displaced. Schools are powerful community institutions that can bring people together, and the district must be thoughtful about building inclusive communities. Schools can truly lead this work across our city, and impact our cultural fabric well beyond the classroom door. The time to act is now.

Does Denver have the will to take this on?

School Policy Recommendations

1. De-track schools. Understand and make public the extent to which schools that serve diverse student populations are currently tracked. Specifically, better understand who has access to what programming within schools, and pressure schools where access to advanced coursework is limited by perceived rather than actual ability. A concrete step to opening doors is to require universal screening for gifted and talented programming. Incentivize and support schools to expand access to and success in honors, AP, IB and gifted classrooms so that more students are served in effective heterogeneous classroom settings.

2. Invest in relationship building. DPS should take a hard and close look at the current demographics and patterns of Parent-Teacher Organizations and school governance committees. DPS should hold schools accountable for and support the development of school governance and PTO structures that represent the full mix of family diversity. DPS should accelerate its home visit program, and create a focus on bridging divides across difference.

Conclusion

As this report has shown, opportunities exist to create a broad-based movement for socioeconomically integrated schools in Denver. It's in everyone's collective self-interest to have a system of diverse, inclusive, and excellent schools. But that requires concerted action by city and school district leaders.

APPENDIX A

Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver CO 413 U.S. 189 (1973) Opinion of the Court delivered by Mr. Justice Brennan.

Note 10:

The Board was found guilty of intentionally segregative acts of one kind or another with respect to the schools listed below. (As to Cole and East, the conclusion rests on the rescission of the resolutions.)

PUPILS 1968-1969	ANGLO	NEGRO	HISPANO	TOTAL
Barrett	1	410	12	423
Stedman	27	634	25	686
Hallett	76	634	41	751
Park Hill	684	223	56	963
Philips	307	203	45	555
Smiley Jr. High	360	1,112	74	1,546
Cole Jr. High	46	884	289	1,219
East High	1,409	1,039	175	2,623
Subtotal Elementary	1,095	2,104	179	3,378
Subtotal Jr. High	406	1,996	363	2,765
Subtotal Sr. High	1,409	1,039	175	2,623
Total	2,910	5,139	2,910	8,766
Total Negro school enrollment in 1968 was:		Elementary	8,297	
		Junior High	2,893	
		Senior High	2,442	
Thus, the above-mentioned schools included (percent of all Negro pupils):		Elementary	25.36%	
		Junior High	68.99%	
		Senior High	42.55%	
		Total	37.69%	

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ABOUT A+ COLORADO

The mission of A+ Colorado is to sharpen public education by building public will and advocating for the changes necessary to dramatically increase student achievement in schools and districts in Colorado. We are an independent, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization working to bring the power of data and research to challenge ourselves, educators and policymakers to rethink public education.

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