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ABSTRACT

This summary report of a study of school integration (defined here as the extent to which students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds know and get along with each other) indicates that school integration is advanced by the following practices: social mixing, racial fairness, staff support for integration, security, staff modeling, and multicultural exposure. A high correlation is also reported between school integration and educational climate (student involvement in school activities, equal treatment, academic environment, and so on). Since these factors are all within the control of the school, it is urged that school personnel take those steps indicated for positive student relationships. (WP)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Promoting Student Integration In City High Schools:  
A Research Study and Improvement Guide for Practitioners

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September, 1979

## INTRODUCTION

Desegregated urban high schools vary considerably in the extent and quality of relations between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In some schools, students of diverse backgrounds interact freely and openly with one another, and their interactions are friendly and supportive; in other schools, they avoid one another, and when they do interact, their contact tends to be unfriendly, hostile, even violent.

Such differences between schools are difficult to explain. For example, some schools with good race relations have the same ratios of white and minority students as other schools with poor race relations. Within any one city, a uniform desegregation process yields some schools with effective student integration, and some schools with continued disruption and racial violence.

We undertook this study to see if we could explain what distinguishes schools with good race relations from schools with poor race relations. Among the factors known to affect racial attitudes and behavior in schools, some are tied to home, neighborhood, and community experiences. For example, family socioeconomic status and prior interracial experience have been found to be related to students' racial attitudes and behavior. These are examples of circumstances beyond the school's control, and are thus termed "unalterable" characteristics in this study. However, since they do effect student integration, their effects are controlled for in our analysis. Similarly, student-teacher ratios, student racial percentages, and school budgets are usually beyond the control of urban, desegregated schools since they are typically determined by court order or the district administration.

In contrast, most schools do have control over the use of multicultural curricula, internal groupings of students, and treatment of students. These factors are within the control of schools, and are thus termed "alterable" characteristics. Such alterable characteristics are the focus of this study for two reasons: First, our experience and review of previous studies indicates that school practices (such as racial mixing and multicultural education) affect both the extent and quality of student integration in schools. Second, by focusing on characteristics that schools can control, our research will have practical applications in guiding school efforts aimed at improving relations between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The main focus of the study is on student integration, defined here as the extent to which students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds know and get along with each other. To be more precise, our index of student integration consists of three parts: 1) knowledge -- the extent to which students are correctly informed about significant aspects of people of other racial and ethnic groups; 2) attitudes -- the extent to which students have positive feelings toward interracial association; 3) behaviors -- the extent to which students report positive interracial association. Six school practices and thirteen school climate factors were selected as factors likely to relate to student integration

#### SAMPLE

Central office administrators in five city school systems in three northeastern states were asked to identify all of their desegregated high schools with between a 20% and 80% white student population. Twenty-three

(23) of the high schools in those cities met these criteria; of those, three (3) declined to participate because of recent racial conflicts, and two (2) schools in one city declined because the teacher's union objected to the study. A plan was developed for TDR staff to administer questionnaires under uniform, controlled conditions to approximately eighty (80) juniors in eighteen (18) schools in four (4) cities, for an expected sample of 1,440 students. Actually an average of 84 students in each school, or 1,510 in total responded to the questionnaire. After screening for set responses, multiple responses, and missing data, a sample size of 1,484 student questionnaires was used in the analysis.

RESULTS

After accounting for the effects of the control variables, such as family socioeconomic status and the student's prior interracial experience, all of the six school practices and thirteen school climate factors show significant correlations with student interracial attitudes and behavior, but not with student interracial knowledge. The "partial correlations" are shown in Figure 1 (p. 4), in descending order of the magnitude of the correlations. Also shown in Figure 1 are our definitions of these school practices and school climate factors.

Blacks express more positive, and whites express less positive, integration attitudes than other ethnic groups; and whites report less positive integration behaviors on their own part than do other groups; girls report more positive integration attitudes and behavior than do boys; girls less often report being in vocational programs and more often report being in business programs; the percent of whites in the school, individual

FIGURE 1: Differential Effect of School Practice Related to Student Integration

Alterable School Characteristic	Definition	Controlled, Partial Correlation With Student Integration*	
		Attitudes	Behaviors
<b>SCHOOL INTEGRATION PRACTICES</b>			
Racial Mixing	The extent to which students of different racial and ethnic groups associate in learning, social and recreational activities.	.41	.43
Racial Fairness	The extent to which students perceive that people of different racial and ethnic groups are treated equally in the school.	.36	.37
Staff Support for Integration	The extent to which students perceive that their teachers and administrators promote supportive interracial association, and acknowledge and deal effectively with racial and ethnic differences.	.28	.30
Security	The extent to which students feel safe in and around the school in their associations with students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.	.31	.26
Staff Modeling	The extent to which adequate ratios of white and minority adults make up the school staff, and associate openly, cooperatively, and with equal status.	.21	.25
Multicultural Exposure	The extent to which students study and discuss unique and common aspects of the history and culture of various racial and ethnic groups.	.21	.25
<b>SCHOOL CLIMATE FACTORS</b>			
Involvement	The extent of school members' interest and participation in learning, social and other school activities.	.25	.22
Accessibility and Receptivity	The availability and openness of school members to conversation and assistance about concerns.	.21	.18
Learning Orientation	The extent to which learning and acquiring academic, vocational and interpersonal skills are emphasized in the school.	.19	.18
Community	The level of friendship and mutual support school members feel toward each other.	.17	.18
Dealing With Problems	The extent of identifying, analyzing and resolving school problems when they arise.	.19	.16

\*Correlations of .06 and .08 are respectively significant at the .05 and .01 levels.

FIGURE 1: continued

Alterable School Characteristic	Definition	Controlled, Partial Correlation With Student Integration*	
		Attitudes	Behaviors
Equal Treatment	The uniformity of school members' opportunities and treatment in the school.	.19	.15
Groupings	The extent to which group membership is a positive or negative experience in the school.	-.19	-.13
Expressiveness	The extent of originality and open expression of ideas and feelings among school members.	.17	.15
Goal Direction	The extent to which school members understand and accept what they are expected to accomplish, which provides a framework for focusing their efforts.	.17	.15
Influence Distribution	The extent to which school members contribute to decisions regarding rules, procedures, and options, for example.	.18	.14
Options	The extent of choices available to school members regarding goals, courses, levels of challenge, and social opportunity, for example.	.15	.14
Order	The extent to which school rules reflect established legal procedures, and are accepted by school members to maintain favorable learning conditions.	.10	.10
Challenge	The level of difficulty of school members' goals and tasks, and the pace of effort required.	.07	.05

\*Correlations of .06 and .08 are respectively significant at the .05 and .01 levels.

parental education and occupation, and years of integrated school experience predict student enrollment in a college preparation program; college aspirations are also predicted by percent white in the school but not by the other control variables.

The partial correlations between school practices and school climate are in the same direction for boys and girls of separate racial and ethnic groups and cities, as they are for the total sample. This consistency suggests that effective school integration practices and favorable school climate are generally beneficial to all subgroups in all four cities, rather than beneficial to the integration for some subgroups or cities and detrimental to those of others.

#### MEASURING AND IMPROVING STUDENT INTEGRATION IN SCHOOLS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the students in our sample who exhibit positive interracial attitudes and behaviors, also report extensive experience with the six school integration practices, and rate their school climate high (except groupings, or cliques, which they rate low). Thus, the schools with the most positive student interracial attitudes and behaviors are those with the highest proportion of students involved in the six integration practices, and the highest proportion of students who rate their school climate favorably.

These findings do not prove causality, but the argument that these characteristics affect student integration is strengthened by many other supporting survey and experimental studies. Furthermore, these characteristics are alterable - they are under the control of a school to improve and maintain at high, positive levels. The magnitude of their association with positive student attitudes and behaviors varies, suggesting that some



efforts will be more productive than others.

Specific school activities for improving these practices and climate factors are described in the report. These activities are derived from an extensive literature search on available research and practice. Several examples are given, so that schools can choose those that are consistent with their philosophy and particular circumstances. These activities describe "what" to change. They are followed in the report by a step-by-step guide to putting these activities into practice in a school.

Thus, the activities which promote racial mixing include cooperative learning teams, learning team competition, athletic teams, social activities, and one-to-one activities. Racial fairness involves an examination of "tracking," suspension rates, the uses of positive reinforcement, course grade distribution, and student guidance. These are examples of what schools can do to improve race relations among school members. How improvements can be made in each of these areas is discussed in the concluding section of the report, where we describe a nine-step process that schools can follow. The process is carried out by a student-staff-parent team, or teams, who work in concert with the school administration, and with the established student, teacher, and parent organizations. These procedures place the locus of change within a school, and specify the nature of support and resources necessary. They have been followed successfully in measuring and improving school climate - with consultant assistance-in over twenty secondary schools in the past three years. The results of this study on student integration practices have been added to those procedures.

The report was written in the hope that many schools, once made aware

of the steps they can take to promote improved student integration, will be encouraged to take those steps. The limiting condition, we have found, is the degree of concern and interest by the schools in improving student integration and school climate, and the readiness of school people to invest the time and effort that is required to make these improvements.