Magnet Schools and Metropolitan Civil Rights Planning

A Strategy to Revitalize and Stabilize Distressed Communities

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LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE

AUGUST 2022

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Acknowledgments

The authors thank Linda Darling-Hammond, Tiffany Miller, and our Learning Policy Institute (LPI) colleagues for their invaluable input. In addition, we thank the members of the LPI Communications team for their invaluable support in editing, designing, and disseminating this report. Without their generosity of time and spirit, this work would not have been possible.

Funding for this research was provided to the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity at the University of Minnesota by the Ford Foundation, Kresge Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation. Core support for the Learning Policy Institute is provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Raikes Foundation, Sandler Foundation, and MacKenzie Scott and Dan Jewett. We are grateful to them for their generous support. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

External Reviewers

This report benefited from the insights and expertise of two external reviewers: Susan E. Eaton, Professor of Practice in Social Policy and Director of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, and Philip Tegeler, Executive Director of the Poverty and Race Research Action Council. We thank them for the care and attention they gave the report.

Suggested citation: Orfield, M., & Stancil, W. (2022). *Magnet schools and metropolitan civil rights planning: A strategy to revitalize and stabilize distressed communities*. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/197.312

This report can be found online at https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/magnet-schools-housing-desegregation.

Document last revised August 3, 2022

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Executive Summary

In the United States, both neighborhoods and schools have grown increasingly segregated since the late 1980s, as federal supports for desegregation have been eliminated by the courts and Congress. The harms of racial segregation are well established: Many studies confirm that segregated schools for minoritized students produced worsened academic, economic, health, and criminal justice outcomes over the short and long term.

By contrast, a substantial body of research establishes that students of all races benefit from attending diverse schools. These benefits include increased academic outcomes and reduced prejudice and stereotyping. Despite this evidence, the tools for achieving greater integration have been limited by courts and legislatures in the past few decades, and new approaches to achieve integration are needed.

One tool that could be leveraged more fully to create high-quality, integrated educational environments is the use of magnet schools. Well-designed magnet schools can support desegregation and improve student learning, as they create innovative education models and accommodate geographically dispersed families to produce a racially and economically integrated student body. This is especially true for "whole school" magnets without selective admissions, in which all students fully participate in the school's specialized program (as opposed to magnet programs that serve only a portion of a school's student body).

Whole school magnets, if operated effectively, can halt or reverse school resegregation in areas experiencing demographic pressures or concentrations of poverty, contributing to neighborhood stability and revitalization. Quality school options are a major determinant of family housing choices. Magnet schools afford policymakers the opportunity to significantly improve schools in areas of concentrated poverty and racially segregated communities—attracting middle-class families to those areas and producing greater residential integration.

This report presents a policy proposal for a new, federally coordinated approach to magnet school development, conducted under the framework of the Fair Housing Act's mandate to affirmatively further fair housing. This proposal envisions an interagency effort conducted by both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education, potentially incorporating programs managed by other federal agencies, such as the Internal Revenue Service's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. Social science research has long established the link between housing and k–12 education, and magnet schools represent a natural subject in which to pioneer interagency coordination on these two policy spheres. But federal civil rights policy, especially in recent decades, has often addressed schools and housing in separate silos.

The use of magnet schools as a housing policy and urban revitalization tool is not new, although the approach has been little utilized by federal agencies. This proposal builds on the 1968 Kerner Commission Report, which detailed the role of school segregation in exacerbating urban inequality, concluding that "racial isolation in the urban public schools is the result principally of residential segregation and widespread employment of the 'neighborhood school' policy, which transfers segregation from housing to education."

This report offers an opportunity to improve and refine several legal and policy tools for desegregating schools and communities. First, federally coordinated magnet school creation and siting policies, informed by commuter pattern analysis, offer opportunities to refine the Fair Housing Act's fair housing mandate under a Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration framework. This classifies neighborhoods by their demographic characteristics and sets forth different Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) metrics and requirements depending on the neighborhood classification. Second, magnet schools offer a chance to add needed substance to the federal mandate that low-income housing proposals receiving certain tax credit preferences be incorporated into "concerted community revitalization plans."

Designing and Siting Magnet Schools

Through coordinated metropolitan planning, magnet schools can contribute to neighborhood revitalization, which not only provides a benefit to existing residents of a segregated community but also attracts a new population of residents who can help make the community more racially diverse and economically affluent. This, in turn, helps undo the economic and social damage wrought by residential segregation and poverty concentration.

An attendance policy that admits a portion of students from the magnet's immediate geographic community and a portion of open-enrollment students from the greater region (for instance, half from each group) could encourage school and neighborhood integration. If the school is in a lower-income, racially segregated area, students from the geographic attendance zone are likely to also be nonwhite and from lower-income households, while the open-enrollment students are more likely to be white and from affluent households. If there is strong demand for seats in the magnet, parents may recognize that the geographic attendance zone of such a magnet school represents an opportunity.

Job centers and commuter sheds are important concepts in the design and creation of magnet schools because they show the geographic areas in which centrally located schools are likely to elicit the most student demand. Commuter sheds represent flows of commuters across a region to and from job centers, or areas within a metropolitan region with a high concentration of jobs. They reveal where magnets can be accessed by the greatest number of students as parents drop off and pick up their children during their commute. Siting schools based on job centers and commuter sheds increases demand for the open-enrollment spots and thereby encourages families to vie for entry through this second means of admission.

While commuter sheds are not the only consideration in magnet school siting, particularly if a magnet is intended to revitalize a neighborhood, such analysis can help policymakers in three ways:

1. To chart centrally located, accessible sites as well as to predict student demographics, enabling policymakers to more effectively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various candidate sites.

2. To inform magnet themes and curricula. Once the likely population of a school is identified, its members can be contacted, surveyed, and studied to determine what types of schools would be most appealing.

3. To analyze the ways metropolitan investment and development might interact with magnet school enrollment, allowing policymakers to coordinate school development with upcoming regional infrastructure changes and to plan new schools, housing, and transit in a concerted fashion.

Magnet Schools as a Component of Federal Fair Housing Mandates

Through concerted efforts to establish magnet schools in strategic locations, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Education can meet policy goals around integration. The Fair Housing Act requires the Department of Housing and Urban Development and its funding recipients to "affirmatively further" fair housing, which can entail implementing policies that proactively increase housing integration, provide access to opportunity for disadvantaged families, and eliminate residential segregation. The AFFH rule, which was repealed in 2020, outlined ways for jurisdictions to meet these requirements. As the current administration revisits AFFH, opportunities arise to reimagine ways to synthesize k–12 education, particularly magnet schools, into the framework. As previously discussed, magnet schools can be effective integration tools, helping plans meet Fair Housing Act and AFFH requirements.

One opportunity to root high-quality magnet school creation within the AFFH planning process is through proposed Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards, which classify neighborhoods by their demographic characteristics—as (1) areas of minority concentration, (2) racially mixed areas, or (3) predominately white areas—and establish different AFFH requirements depending on the neighborhood classification. Under Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards, jurisdictions conducting AFFH planning could be encouraged or required to consider the creation of magnet schools in areas of minority concentration as a strategy to reintegrate and revitalize those areas. Likewise, jurisdictions could be encouraged or required to consider magnet schools in racially mixed areas as a strategy to preserve existing integration and prevent additional white flight from those areas. Meanwhile, magnet schools would be discouraged or disallowed as an AFFH strategy in predominantly white areas.

Another opportunity to incorporate magnet schools into concerted community revitalization plans is to propose that a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project in a qualified census tract be paired with a scheme to develop a new magnet school in the vicinity of the project. The magnet school would serve children who occupy the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project census tract and draw in parents from more affluent areas, helping to integrate the neighborhood and potentially revitalize it with increased housing market demand and an improved tax base.

A proposed Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project could also be incorporated into an existing magnet school plan within an area of minority concentration, as part of the Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards previously described. As with the proposed Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration planning, the Department of Education Magnet School Assistance Program could provide priority grants to magnet schools created as part of a concerted community revitalization plan.

Conclusion

Magnet schools can be a tool for increasing community and school diversity and providing academic benefits to all students. However, achieving these outcomes requires holistic thinking about civil rights and integration across multiple policy spheres. Traditionally, k–12 school integration has remained the focus of magnet school development, but analysis suggests magnet schools present prime opportunities for neighborhood revitalization and stability as well. Schools and neighborhoods are inextricably linked, and state, local, and federal policies that reflect this reality will garner better results for both children and communities.

Introduction

In the United States, both neighborhoods and schools have grown increasingly segregated since the late 1980s, as federal supports for desegregation have been eliminated by the courts and Congress.[1] Consequently, more than 40% of Black students currently attend intensely segregated schools, as do nearly 20% of white students. The harms of school segregation are among the most studied topics in the history of social science. Studies confirm that segregated schools produced worsened academic, economic, health, and criminal justice outcomes.[2] By contrast, a substantial body of research has found that racially integrated learning environments have positive impacts on academic achievement for students of all races. The academic benefits of attending diverse schools include higher achievement in math, science, language, and reading; school climates supportive of learning and studying; increased likelihood of graduating from high school and entering and graduating from college; higher income and educational attainment; increased access to highly qualified teachers and leaders who are less likely to transfer to other schools; enhanced classroom discussion; and more advanced social and historical thinking.[3]

> Racially integrated learning environments have positive impacts on academic achievement for students of all races.

The social benefits of integration extend outside the academic realm. A meta-analysis of more than 500 studies of intergroup contact across many kinds of organizations found that increased intergroup contact can have positive impacts on all groups by reducing prejudice, negative attitudes, and stereotypes.[4] Magnet schools are an important tool for both integrating k–12 schools and stabilizing and integrating residential neighborhoods. They are also an area of significant interagency collaboration on civil rights. Optimal siting of magnet schools for neighborhood integration requires analysis of commuter sheds and job centers. Commuter sheds represent flows of commuters across a region to and from job centers, or areas within a metropolitan region with a high concentration of jobs. Siting magnets along transit corridors or near major universities presents potential benefits. Magnet schools could potentially be coordinated with federal fair housing mandates through a Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration framework, which classifies communities by demographic characteristics. Federal magnet programs could be modified to prioritize funding under this framework. Magnets could also help fulfill current statutory requirements for concerted community revitalization plans as a component of certain housing tax credit allocations.

This report presents a policy proposal for a new, federally coordinated approach to magnet school development, conducted under the broad framework of the Fair Housing Act's mandate to affirmatively further fair housing. This proposal envisions an interagency effort conducted by both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Education, potentially incorporating programs managed by other federal agencies, such as the Internal Revenue Service's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

The Benefits of Magnet Schools for Promoting Integration

Magnet schools are a powerful tool for producing both school integration and neighborhood integration. Well-designed magnet schools can both support desegregation and improve student learning, as they create innovative education models along with student choice designed to produce a racially and economically integrated student body.[5]

Quality school options are a major determinant of family housing choices. High-quality, racially integrated magnet schools can halt or reverse school resegregation in areas experiencing demographic pressures or concentrations of poverty. Moreover, if operated effectively, such schools are an important tool for neighborhood stability and revitalization. Magnet schools afford policymakers the opportunity to significantly improve the school options in areas of minority and poverty concentration, attracting white middle-class families to those areas and producing greater residential integration.

Although magnet schools will typically be outnumbered by traditional schools in a given metropolitan area, they serve an essential role in regional civil rights planning. Magnet schools are a potentially powerful tool for combating residential racial segregation.

Residential racial segregation is present in every major American metropolitan area and is often the defining feature of regional living patterns. Residential segregation is often the product of historic and present-day discrimination by both government and private actors. Common forms of racial discrimination in housing include mortgage redlining and discriminatory lending, racial "steering" by real estate agents, racially motivated placement of affordable housing, and exclusionary zoning.[6] Discrimination in other policy fields, such as transit planning and school attendance policies, can also produce racially segregated housing.[7] When racial segregation creates low-income neighborhoods deprived of services and supports, it produces profound harm for individuals, families, and communities. Those harms include lowered academic outcomes,[8] worsened economic outcomes through adult lifetimes or even across generations,[9] worsened health outcomes,[10] and demographically and fiscally unstable municipalities and regions.[11]

Civil Rights Planning

Metropolitan civil rights planning focuses on preventing these harms and fostering more prosperous individuals and places through the creation of economically and racially diverse neighborhoods across an entire metropolitan area.

Metropolitan civil rights planning can be roughly divided into three broad goals:

1. Diversification of affluent and white-segregated communities in outer-ring suburbs and exurban areas
2. Stabilization of diverse and integrated communities, particularly in inner and second-ring suburbs
3. Revitalization of economically distressed and nonwhite-segregated communities, particularly in urban centers and inner suburbs

Of these, the first goal is conceptually the simplest to address, since demand to relocate to affluent communities usually exceeds opportunities to do so. However, stabilization and, particularly, revitalization pose a more challenging problem. These goals require the creation and preservation of racial integration and economic diversity in neighborhoods where powerful outside forces such as discrimination, disinvestment, and white flight have caused demographics to transition toward nonwhite racial segregation and poverty concentration. As government cannot force families to involuntarily relocate to distressed or endangered neighborhoods, policymakers must find ways to indirectly increase the appeal of these areas, drawing in residents from a wider range of socioeconomic backgrounds to live, work, and attend school in those places. Well-designed magnet schools are one of the few proven methods for increasing the appeal of otherwise distressed, segregated, or unstably integrated neighborhoods.

The use of magnet schools as a housing policy and urban revitalization tool is not new, although the approach has been little utilized by federal agencies. Indeed, a version of the idea was discussed by the 1968 Kerner Commission, frequently credited with helping spur the passage of the Fair Housing Act. The commission reported at length on the role of school segregation in exacerbating urban inequality, concluding that "racial isolation in the urban public schools is the result principally of residential segregation and widespread employment of the 'neighborhood school' policy, which transfers segregation from housing to education."[12] To rectify this problem, the commission recommended "increasing efforts to eliminate de facto segregation."[13] These efforts include the use of funding granted under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 to "stimulate development of exemplary city or metropolitan schools . . . designed to attract, on a voluntary basis, students of varying racial and socioeconomic backgrounds"—in short, magnet schools.[14] The commission noted that "development of exemplary schools could operate to retain middle-class white families in the city and induce others to return, thereby increasing opportunities for integration."[15] This program would be supported by "educational planning on a metropolitan basis."[16] This proposal builds on the Kerner Commission's idea, incorporating it into existing frameworks for civil rights planning, particularly the Fair Housing Act.

In doing so, this proposal offers an opportunity to improve and refine several legal and policy tools for promoting metropolitan civil rights. A new magnet school policy offers an opportunity to refine the Fair Housing Act's affirmative fair housing mandate under a Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration framework, through which neighborhoods are classified by their demographic composition and fair housing goals differ depending on a neighborhood's classification. Magnet schools also offer a chance to add needed substance to the requirement that some low-income housing proposals be incorporated into concerted community revitalization plans. Magnet schools are an ideal area in which to utilize the concept of job centers and commuter sheds in fair housing planning to promote stabilized and revitalized regions.

Finally, magnet schools are an ideal proving ground for new interagency cooperation on civil rights. Social science research has long established the link between housing and k–12 education.[17] But federal civil rights policy, especially in recent decades, has often addressed schools and housing in separate silos. Magnet schools represent a natural subject in which to pioneer interagency coordination on these two policy spheres.

This report is divided into two sections. The first section describes the function of magnet schools and their role in neighborhood revitalization. It discusses important programmatic components of any magnet school policy, with a particular emphasis on the use of commuter shed analysis to optimize school siting and design. The second section discusses how a new policy of magnet school development might fit within the larger statutory and regulatory scheme for housing civil rights and metropolitan planning, including the Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration framework and existing requirements for housing tax credit allocation.

Designing and Siting Magnet Schools

As their name suggests, magnet schools function by offering special programs or curricula that "magnetically" draw in parents and students to voluntarily enroll. These may include themes, such as arts or health sciences or legal studies, or they may be organized around philosophies, such as experiential learning, service learning, or use of technology. Because they draw enrollment from a wide geographic swath and—at least in theory—face greater demand for enrollment than they have seats to fill, magnet schools permit the formation of integrated schools in places where neighborhood demographics would otherwise likely result in the formation of a segregated school.

The challenge facing all magnet schools is walking the line between high parental demand and stable integration. Absent policies to prevent it, a high-demand school is likely to become heavily white and affluent, as high-resource parents outcompete more disadvantaged groups for seats in the school. Alternatively, if concentrations of poverty or disadvantage begin to grow too severely at a school, the perceived quality of the school may suffer in the eyes of affluent parents, resulting in declining demand for seats at the school.[18] In that circumstance, a magnet risks losing its "magnetism," opening itself up to the risk of becoming nonwhite-segregated and suffering from reduced enrollment overall. To avoid these two pitfalls, magnet schools have to be carefully designed and attendance rules must be thoughtfully tailored. For instance, successful magnet schools in the Hartford, CT, and San Antonio, TX, regions have devised systems for carefully weighting their student enrollment by socioeconomic strata.[19]

However, incorporating magnet schools into housing and metropolitan planning further complicates these considerations. The traditional purpose of magnet schools is simply to produce or increase the number of racially integrated k–12 schools in a region or school district. But in the context of the coordinated metropolitan planning envisioned in this paper, magnets can serve another purpose as well: neighborhood revitalization. The goal of these schools is not only to provide a benefit to existing residents of residentially segregated communities but to attract a new population of residents who can help make those communities more racially diverse and economically affluent. This, in turn, helps undo the economic and social damage wrought by residential segregation and poverty concentration.

When using magnet schools as a tool for neighborhood revitalization, the siting and attendance policies of the school become an even more critical consideration. Unlike magnets designed to attract students for greater in-school integration, schools meant to encourage neighborhood revitalization are designed to attract new families to a particular residential area. As a result, these schools ideally combine voluntary, open attendance policies with a more traditional attendance boundary—for instance, implementing an attendance policy in which 50% of a school's enrollment is drawn from a particular geographic zone and 50% is drawn as open enrollment from the larger region.

When using magnet schools as a tool for neighborhood revitalization, the siting and attendance policies of the school become an even more critical consideration.

Such an attendance policy may be initially useful in encouraging greater school integration. If the school is located in a lower-income, racially segregated area, students from the geographic attendance zone are likely to also be nonwhite and from lower-income households, while the open-enrollment students are more likely to be white and from affluent households.

But if there is strong demand for seats in the magnet, parents may recognize that the geographic attendance zone of such a magnet school represents an opportunity. Home prices in highly desirable school zones are typically inflated. A magnet with a geographic attendance zone serving a low-income area is likely to offer a comparative bargain, allowing homebuyers access to a good school at a more affordable price. Such an arrangement could be expected to increase real-estate demand within the attendance zone, reversing middle-class flight from a segregated area and bringing new life to area housing markets.

It should be recognized that one potential concern when seeking to attract new, more affluent residents to a neighborhood is the possibility of inducing or worsening gentrification and the associated risk of displacement of existing residents. Many concepts around gentrification are heavily disputed, including its overall level of harmfulness and even the definition of the term. While it is important to acknowledge the disputes around gentrification, revitalization-focused magnet-school policies are unlikely to produce severe gentrification. First, recent studies have suggested that poverty concentration is a much more common trend in American metropolitan neighborhoods than economic growth producing housing displacement.[20] Second, racially balanced magnets are somewhat self-limiting drivers of growth, in that the number of available seats to affluent students is restricted, and thus the school cannot realistically benefit an endless influx of affluent families. Finally, in the unlikely event that a preferential attendance zone for a magnet school appears to be producing gentrification in an area, that zone can simply be altered to omit the affected area (while grandfathering in current students).

The following section discusses several important data tools that can be used to identify areas in which magnet schools are most likely to produce effective integration while having a revitalizing effect.

Job Centers, Commuter Sheds, and Magnet Schools

Job centers are areas within a metropolitan region with a high concentration of jobs. This concept is an important tool for understanding the flow of people into and out of a region every day. Typically, job centers are more closely packed within a region's interior, and commuters transit between those centers and residential areas located farther from the region's center.

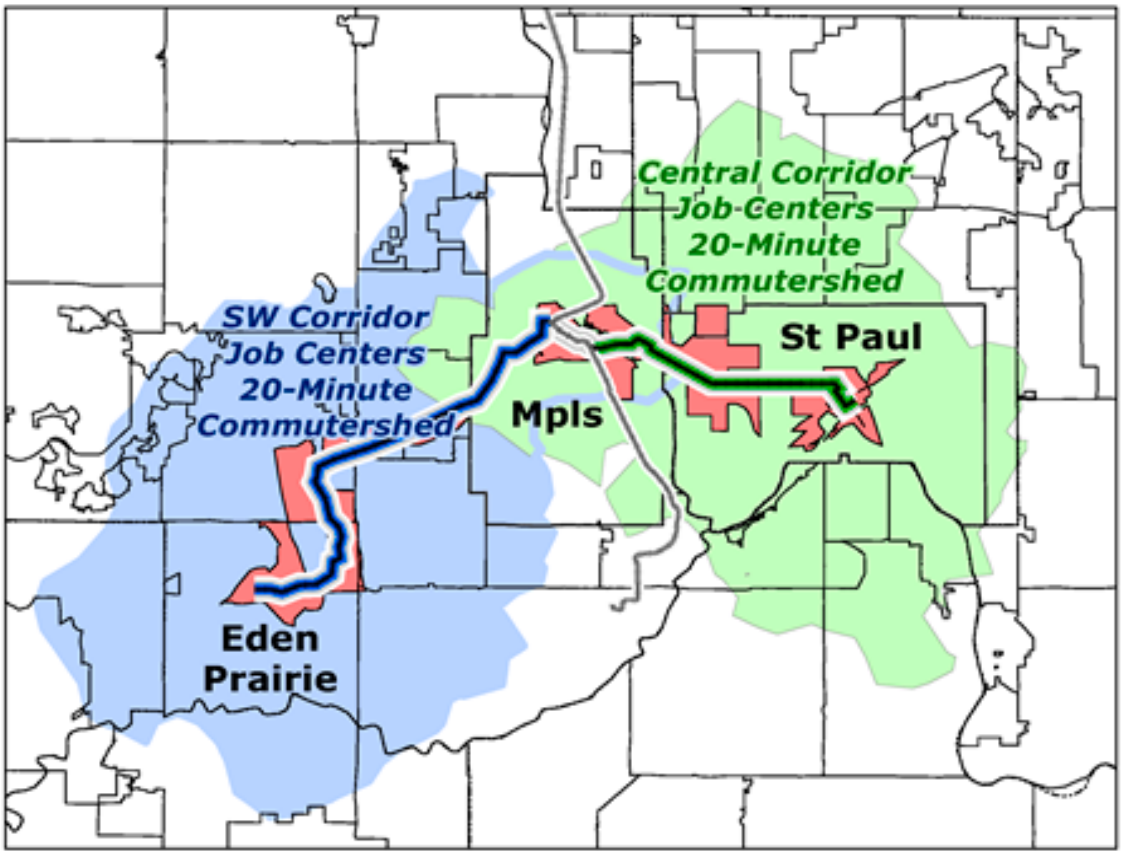
Commuter sheds represent those flows of commuters across a region. They show the area from which a particular part of the region—usually a job center—is accessible within a certain amount of time. (As the name suggests, the concept is analogous to how a watershed shows the area from which a particular river draws its water.) Commuter sheds can incorporate all forms of transportation, including both automobile and public transit.

Job centers and commuter sheds are important concepts in the design and creation of magnet schools because they show the geographic areas in which centrally located schools are most likely to be accessible to the largest number of students. This is because many parents, especially more affluent parents, are likely to opt to drive students to school themselves. As a result, schools located near a particular job center are most likely to draw students from that center's commuter shed.

Figure 1, below, illustrates the concept of commuter sheds. This map shows the 20-minute commuter shed of two clusters of job centers in Minnesota's Twin Cities region—job centers linked by an existing (green) and proposed (blue) light rail line.

Effectively, each commuter shed represents the potential practical attendance zone for a magnet school located within the core job centers. Although students from outside those zones are able to attend the schools, these are the areas in which attendance is relatively convenient, and thus they are the primary service areas of a magnet.

Figure 1
Commuter Shed of Two Job Centers in the Twin Cities Region



Source: Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity based on 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau Journey to Work.

This form of analysis is beneficial to magnet school design and creation in several ways.

First, commuter shed analysis provides an essential tool for siting potential magnet schools. Determining the location of a region's job centers and the reach of its commuter sheds allows policymakers to find centralized locations where magnet schools would be geographically proximate to large numbers of daily commuters. Placing magnets near areas that many workers are commuting to facilitates easier attendance by allowing parents to transport children to and from school on their way to and from their workplaces.

Of course, this is not the only consideration in magnet school siting, particularly if a magnet is intended to produce neighborhood stabilization or revitalization. It is also necessary to site schools near or within the areas in need of revitalization. Job center and commuter shed analysis, however, allows policymakers to more effectively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various candidate sites.

Second, once a site is proposed or selected, the school's commuter shed allows policymakers to roughly model the expected demographics of a magnet school, prior to other attendance restrictions, such as attendance zones or preference policies. For instance, in the above map, the blue commuter shed represents a far more affluent and more heavily white set of neighborhoods than the green commuter shed, which incorporates the majority of both Minneapolis and St. Paul. As a result, a magnet school opening near the central job centers of the blue commuter shed would likely have more white and affluent enrollment and would be at less risk of immediate resegregation.

Determining a magnet school's likely effective attendance zone through the use of commuter shed analysis facilitates better design of magnet theming and curricula.

Determining a magnet school's likely effective attendance zone through the use of commuter shed analysis facilitates better design of magnet theming and curricula. Once the likely parent and student population of a school can be identified, that population can be contacted, surveyed, and studied to determine what types of schools would be most appealing. For instance, if a school's commuter shed contains a large immigrant population, a language immersion school serving that population may prove an attractive option.

Commuter shed analysis also shows the way that other forms of metropolitan investment and development, such as new housing or transit investment, potentially interact with magnet school enrollment. In the example above, the blue commuter shed includes a light rail transit line that is under development.. The analysis demonstrates that the completion of that line will extend the commuter shed of western suburban job centers from those western suburbs into the core of the central city of Minneapolis. This data allows policymakers to coordinate school development with upcoming regional infrastructure changes, potentially planning new schools, new housing, and new transit in a concerted fashion.

Other Factors in Magnet School Design

It is important to recognize that magnet schools are not a foolproof remedy. Poorly designed magnet programs can and do lose their ability to attract new enrollment. It is essential to monitor the full range of metropolitan systems that can affect the success or failure of a magnet.

Although magnet schools can drive neighborhood integration, neighborhood changes can affect magnet schools as well. Any factor that impacts the demographic composition of a neighborhood—such as housing availability or employment opportunity—will also alter the area schools, potentially undermining magnet programs. As a result, efforts to stabilize neighborhoods with magnet programs are best paired with efforts to ensure access to housing and economic opportunity.

By contrast, public transit development has a potentially positive effect on magnet school efficacy. Major transit investment expands the potential attendance areas of schools within transit corridors in two ways. First, by providing safe, regular, and rapid transportation that students can use, it expands a school's practical service area as a neighborhood school, creating the potential to serve resident students along an entire transit corridor. Second, major transit development like light rail transportation encourages high-density job development near stops. School-age children of the workers commuting to these jobs represent another potential pool of enrollees for a school located along the corridor. Enrolling their children in schools close to a transit line that serves their work locations creates significant advantages for parents. Because most workers now commute so far to their jobs, schools near their job sites are often much more convenient than those near home. A brand-new light rail transit line with safe, reliable, and frequent service extends the potential service area to job sites along the entire line and, from those sites, into the entire commuter sheds from which workers are drawn.

As a final note, one significantly underutilized site for magnet school development is urban colleges and universities. Many major American regions contain large colleges and universities near or within their central city. Often, these centers of higher learning are located near distressed and racially segregated neighborhoods that are promising sites for revitalization. Moreover, colleges and universities are almost always major job centers, drawing thousands of employees from a large part of a metropolitan region. Areas with large student populations are typically relatively well served by public transit, further increasing accessibility to and from a nearby magnet. Finally, as well-known learning institutions, colleges and universities hold a particular social cachet that gives them an inherent advantage in creating high parent demand. By locating a magnet school near a college or university campus, and particularly by establishing an affiliation between that k–12 school and the larger institution, policymakers can begin the process of magnet design with an instantaneous advantage.

Magnet Schools as a Component of Federal Fair Housing Mandates

Education, and particularly k–12 schooling, is a critical component of housing policy and metropolitan planning. There are at least two major reasons for this. First, access to education is a critical determinant of family welfare. The opportunities provided by a particular neighborhood or community are closely connected to the quality of its schools. Second, families make many housing choices based on the nearby schools. Thus, the existence or absence of high-quality k–12 schools helps determine population flows at the regional level. Families with means will seek out neighborhoods perceived to have high-quality schools, and they will leave neighborhoods perceived to have low-performing schools.

Social science research has confirmed these relationships between education, opportunity, and housing choice. For instance, research has shown that neighborhoods that participate in regional school integration programs tend to be more demographically stable.[21] Other studies have confirmed that local school options play a role in income segregation, specifically by driving greater segregation of families with children as they purchase housing in areas with higher-quality schools.[22]

Because of the links between housing and educational opportunity, schools fall under the purview of the Fair Housing Act, which requires the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and municipal recipients of department funding to "affirmatively further" fair housing.[23] Notably, the Fair Housing Act also provides a statutory basis for interagency cooperation on the issue, which states that "all executive departments and agencies shall administer their programs and activities relating to housing and urban development … in a manner affirmatively to further" the Fair Housing Act.[24]

Historically, the mandate to "affirmatively further" fair housing has been understood as a mandate to implement policies that proactively increase housing integration, provide access to opportunity for disadvantaged families, and eliminate residential segregation. In 2015, the Obama administration promulgated the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule, which laid out a process for entitlement jurisdictions to meet these requirements. That rule included mention of school improvements as one mechanism through which jurisdictions could meet AFFH requirements: "A program participant's strategies and actions must affirmatively further fair housing and may include various activities, such as … improving community assets such as quality schools."[25]

However, the AFFH rule was repealed in 2020, leaving the precise obligations of entitlement jurisdictions somewhat unclear.[26] As the current administration revisits the AFFH rule, it has an opportunity to more closely incorporate k–12 educational considerations into the AFFH framework, particularly by incentivizing the creation of high-quality magnet schools.

The Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration Framework for Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing

One of the core challenges of fair housing policy is that while the overarching aims of the Fair Housing Act are universal—the creation of stable integration, access to opportunity, and the elimination of segregation and discrimination—there is no single set of policy prescriptions that are appropriate for all jurisdictions.

In the past, the lack of one-size-fits-all policy recommendations has been resolved through the Analysis of Impediments process, in which jurisdictions conducted a self-guided study of the barriers to fair housing within their borders and issued recommendations and action steps to eliminate those barriers. The Analysis of Impediments process is not completely open-ended, and litigants have successfully challenged Analyses of Impediments that failed to address key topics, such as racial segregation.[27] However, the existing loosely constrained Analysis of Impediments process does not consistently result in significant AFFH planning, nor does it provide specific guidelines, frameworks, or structures to individual areas or jurisdictions based on their circumstances.

The incorporation of magnet schooling into AFFH planning would be facilitated by explicitly codifying goals for stable, long-term integration into the AFFH planning process. One proposal for such codification is Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards,[28] which propose classifying neighborhoods by their demographic characteristics and setting forth different AFFH metrics and requirements depending on the neighborhood classification.[29]

The proposed Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration system divides metropolitan areas into three types of communities:

1. **Areas of minority concentration.** In these segregated areas, racial minorities make up a disproportionate share of the population. Because minority status is highly correlated with income, in almost all cases, areas of minority concentration exhibit high poverty. Typically, k–12 schools in such areas are nonwhite-segregated as well and are also high-poverty. Often these areas also suffer from a number of other difficulties, such as commercial disinvestment, stagnant or declining home values, persistent middle-class flight and neighborhood abandonment, and few employment opportunities. The primary challenges facing areas of minority concentration are reintegration and revitalization.

   Historically, these areas were primarily located in core neighborhoods of major cities, but in the past several decades, suburban demographic change has produced major areas of minority concentration in suburban locales as well, especially the "inner ring" of older suburbs adjoining central cities.

2. **Racially mixed areas.** These areas are currently racially integrated. Their racial demographics are reasonably reflective of the overall demographics of the entire metropolitan area. Racially mixed areas exhibit low to moderate poverty, may contain significant job growth, and usually contain housing affordable to middle- and working-class residents. However, these areas are frequently demographically unstable. In most cases, integration of racially mixed areas has occurred recently, as the result of greater in-migration of nonwhite residents, often from areas of minority concentration. Moreover,

many racially mixed areas are experiencing significant white flight and middle-class flight, speeding their transition into greater segregation. Consequently, the primary challenge facing racially mixed areas is stabilization of existing demographics.

In major metropolitan areas, racially mixed areas are most commonly found in the inner- and second-ring suburbs as well as in some central city neighborhoods.

3. **Predominantly white areas.** These are areas where a disproportionate share of residents are white. Most often, they are comparatively affluent and under no immediate threat of resegregation. In some instances, these areas may be heavily white-segregated, with white resident populations exceeding 90%. These neighborhoods often feature extensive educational and employment opportunities but a lack of affordable housing and transit options. Consequently, the primary challenge in these areas is allowing lower-income and nonwhite residents access to the opportunities they offer, primarily through the introduction of affordable and low-income housing.

   Predominantly white areas are most often found in second-ring suburbs and other suburban communities located near the developing periphery of major metropolitan regions.

Precise criteria for each classification could be determined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development as a component of AFFH rulemaking, or it could be determined by entitlement jurisdictions themselves as a part of the AFFH or Consolidated Plan process.[30] A centralized taxonomy produced by the Department of Housing and Urban Development would limit opportunities for gamesmanship by entitlement jurisdictions but could potentially elide important regional distinctions between diverse and less-diverse metropolitan areas. Although the proposal above classifies communities by racial demographics, it may be possible to construct a similar system using a combination of other demographic measures. However, it is inadvisable to classify communities entirely based on economic characteristics while omitting demographic and racial characteristics altogether.[31]

Under Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards, entitlement jurisdictions conducting AFFH planning could be encouraged or required to consider the creation of magnet schools in areas of minority concentration as a strategy to reintegrate and revitalize those areas. Likewise, jurisdictions could be encouraged or required to consider magnet schools in racially mixed areas as a strategy to preserve existing integration and prevent additional white flight from those areas. Meanwhile, magnet schools would be discouraged or disallowed as an AFFH strategy in predominantly white areas.

Magnet schooling programs implemented under AFFH planning should be required to follow best practices for racial integration and academic quality and should not be allowed as an AFFH strategy unless they are incorporated into a plan to maintain stable integration within both the school and the surrounding residential area.

The U.S. Department of Education can help incorporate magnet schooling into AFFH planning through its Magnet School Assistance Program. Magnet schools that are created pursuant to an AFFH plan, that are in an area with an appropriate Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration classification, and that follow best practices for racial integration and academic quality should receive priority consideration for Magnet School Assistance Program funding. At present, U.S.

Department of Education regulations allow the secretary of education to consider a variety of feasibility and need factors when evaluating Magnet School Assistance Program applications.[32] These factors could be modified to include participation in an AFFH planning process.

Magnet Schooling as a Component of a Concerted Community Revitalization Plan

In addition to the broad civil rights mandate of the Fair Housing Act's "affirmatively furthering" requirement, federal low-income housing policy provides another opportunity to directly link magnet schooling with neighborhood revitalization.

The primary federal source of funding for low-income housing is the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. Housing tax credits are allocated indirectly by the federal government. The Internal Revenue Service provides tax credits to states and several major cities, which then reallocate the credits to specific projects. The criteria for a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit award are determined by the state or local allocator as part of a Qualified Allocation Plan devised by the recipient jurisdiction. However, these Qualified Allocation Plans must meet certain requirements laid out in federal law.

One such requirement is that state and local tax credit allocators create a preference for Low-Income Housing Tax Credit projects located in certain very-low-income areas, designated as "Qualified Census Tracts."[33] Qualified Census Tracts are defined as areas where 50% of households have incomes below 60% of the Area Median Income or areas with a poverty rate of 25% or greater. To avoid deepening segregation by siting low-income housing in low-income areas, the federal statute mandates that the qualified census tract preference *only* be given to a housing project that "contributes to a concerted community revitalization plan."[34]

The federal statute mandates that the qualified census tract preference *only* be given to a housing project that "contributes to a concerted community revitalization plan."

At present, unfortunately, this requirement is threadbare. Federal agencies have not issued regulations or guidance specifying what constitutes a "concerted community revitalization plan." Internal Revenue Service guidance specifies little more than that such a plan should include some component beyond the proposed housing project:

> Although the Department of the Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service (the Service) have not issued guidance defining the term "concerted community revitalization plan," the preference fails to apply unless, not later than the allocation, a plan exists that contains more components than the [Low-Income Housing Tax Credit] project itself.[35]

As with AFFH planning, magnet schooling plans fit neatly into the framework of a concerted community revitalization plan. There are at least two ways to incorporate magnet schools into such a plan. First, a proposed Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project in a qualified census tract could be paired with a proposal to develop a new magnet school in the vicinity of the project. The magnet

school would fill the dual purpose of serving children who occupy the project zone and drawing in parents from more affluent areas, helping to integrate the neighborhood and potentially revitalize it economically with increased housing market demand and an improved tax base.

Second, a proposed Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project could be incorporated into an existing magnet school plan proposed for an "area of minority concentration" as part of the Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards described above. In such an instance, the magnet school plan would double as a concerted community revitalization plan required by IRS regulation. To prevent any segregative effects, the project proposal should describe how the existing or planned magnet schools would be able to provide sufficient capacity to children occupying any new low-income housing without intensifying segregation in the magnet schools. If this condition can be met, the newly developed Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project would be less likely to destabilize or segregate the surrounding neighborhood, and it could reliably offer its occupants higher educational opportunities than a project in a low-income neighborhood served by traditional schools.

As with the proposed Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration planning above, the Department of Education Magnet School Assistance Program could provide priority grants to magnet schools created as part of a concerted community revitalization plan.

Conclusion

For many decades, magnet schools have been incorporated into school desegregation plans, both voluntary and those created by settlement and court order. Traditionally, the focus of magnet school development has remained k–12 school integration. The schools' potential boons for neighborhood revitalization, integration, and stability, while sometimes acknowledged and certainly accepted, were not pursued or leveraged as a policy tool.

New data analysis methods, as well as long-standing federal law, present opportunities to unlock the full potential of magnets as a source of neighborhood growth and stability. Detailed analysis of commuter sheds can help optimally site magnets for both integration and parental interest. And several preexisting statutory rules aimed at furthering housing integration can be coordinated with federal magnet school policy.

Unlocking the full potential of magnet schools requires holistic thinking about civil rights and integration across multiple policy spheres. In the real world, schools and neighborhoods are inextricably linked. State, local, and federal policy that reflects this reality will achieve better outcomes for children and communities alike.

Endnotes

1. George, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2021). *Advancing integration and equity through magnet schools*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/advancing-integration-equity-magnet-schools-report

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3. The National Coalition on School Diversity has produced several research briefs succinctly summarizing research into the benefits of school integration. See: Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., & Siegel-Hawley, J. (2017). *The complementary benefits of racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools* [Research Brief No. 10]. National Coalition on School Diversity. http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf; Tegeler, P., Mickelson, R. A., & Bottia, M. (2010). *What we know about school integration, college attendance, and the reduction of poverty* [Research Brief No. 4]. National Coalition of School Diversity. http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo4.pdf

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5. George, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2021). *Advancing integration and equity through magnet schools*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/advancing-integration-equity-magnet-schools-report

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7. For a discussion of the intersection of many regional policy fields and k–12 education, see: Holme, J. J., & Finnigan, K. S. (2018). *Striving in Common: A Regional Equity Framework for Urban Schools*. Harvard Education Press.

8. See: Wodtke, G. T., Harding, D. J., & Ewert, F. (2011). Neighborhood effects in temporal perspective: The impact of long-term exposure to concentrated disadvantage on high school graduation. *American Sociological Review*, *76*(5), 713–736. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411420816; Harding, D. J. (2009). Collateral consequences of violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods. *Social Forces*, *88*(2), 757–784. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0281; Sampson, R. J., Sharkey, P., & Raudenbush, S. W. (2008). Durable effects of concentrated disadvantage on verbal ability among African-American children. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *105*(3), 845–852. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0710189104

9. See: Chetty, R., & Hendren, N. (2018). The impacts of neighborhoods on intergenerational mobility I: Childhood exposure effects. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *133*(3), 1107–1162. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy007; Chetty, R., Hendren, N., & Katz, L. F. (2016). The effects of exposure to better neighborhoods on children: New evidence from the Moving to Opportunity experiment. *American Economic Review*, *106*(4), 855–902. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20150572

10. See: Krivo, L. J., Washington, H. M., Peterson, R. D., Browning, C. R., Calder, C. A., & Kwan, M.-P. (2013). Social isolation of disadvantage and advantage: The reproduction of inequality in urban space. *Social Forces*, *92*(1), 141–164. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sot043; Kling, J. R., Liebman, J. B., & Katz, L. F. (2007). Experimental analysis of neighborhood effects. *Econometrica*, *75*(1), 83–119. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2007.00733.x

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12. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (1968). *Report of the Commission*. (p. 426).

13. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (1968). *Report of the Commission.* (p. 440).

14. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (1968). *Report of the Commission.* (p. 442).

15. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (1968). *Report of the Commission.* (p. 442).

16. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (1968). *Report of the Commission.* (p. 442).

17. Housing and school demographics form a reciprocal relationship. Because most students attend schools based on area of residence, neighborhood demographics have a direct effect on school composition. See: Burgess, S., & Briggs, A. (2010). School assignment, school choice, and social mobility. *Economics of Education Review*, *29*(4), 639–649. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2009.10.011; Sohoni, D., & Saporito, S. (2009). Mapping school segregation: Using GIS to explore racial segregation between schools and their corresponding attendance areas. *American Journal of Education*, *115*(4), 569–600. In addition, many families select their home based on school options, meaning that racially or economically concentrated schools—often considered undesirable—can drive affluent families from an area, causing greater residential segregation. Likewise, high-performing schools, which are often disproportionately white, can strongly increase demand for nearby housing, driving out lower-income people and causing white segregation. See: Owens, A. (2016). Inequality in children's contexts: Income segregation of households with and without children. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(3), 549–574. https://doi.org/10.1086/599782; Goldsmith, P. R. (2010). Learning apart, living apart: How the racial and ethnic segregation of schools and colleges perpetuates residential segregation. *Teachers College Record*, *112*(6), 1602–1630. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811011200603; Frankenberg, E. (2005). "The Impact of School Segregation on Residential Housing Patterns: Mobile, Alabama, and Charlotte, North Carolina" in Boger, J. C., & Orfield, G. (Eds). *School Resegregation: Must the South Turn Back?* University of North Carolina Press; Holme, J. J. (2002). Buying homes, buying schools: School choice and the social construction of school quality. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(2), 177–206. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.72.2.u6272x676823788r

18. There is strong social science evidence that the racial composition of a school directly influences white parents' perception of the quality of the school. See: Billingham, C. M., & Hunt, M. O. (2016). School racial composition and parental choice: New evidence of the preferences of white parents in the United States. *Sociology of Education*, *89*(2), 99–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040716635718

19. Demonstrating the vast number of potential attendance policies available to policymakers, the San Antonio and Hartford systems differ subtly but fundamentally in approach. The San Antonio system sets admission quotas for students on the basis of the socioeconomic classification of their resident neighborhood, ensuring an even balance of students from all neighborhood types while avoiding individual student classifications. The Hartford system, by contrast, uses individual socioeconomic classifications to balance enrollments and limit the maximum number of very-low-income students in a given magnet school.

20. Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity. (2019). *American neighborhood change in the 21st century: Gentrification and decline* [Interactive map]. https://www.law.umn.edu/institute-metropolitan-opportunity/gentrification

21. Orfield, M., & Luce, T. F. (2013). America's racially diverse suburbs: Opportunities and challenges. *Housing Policy Debate*, *23*(2), 395–430. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2012.756822

22. See: Owens, A. (2016). Inequality in children's contexts: Income segregation of households with and without children. *American Sociological Review*, *81*(3), 549–574. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416642430

23. 42 U.S.C. § 3608 (2020).

24. 42 U.S.C. § 3608(d) (2020).

25. Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, 78 Fed. Reg. 42353 § 5.150 (2015).

26. See: Preserving Community and Neighborhood Choice, 85 Fed. Reg. 4799 (July 23, 2020).

27. See: United States ex rel. Anti-Discrimination Center v. Westchester County, 668 F.Supp.2d 548 (2009).

28. For a detailed discussion of the Stable Metropolitan Racial Integration standards in a broader context, including housing, transit, and public investment, see: Orfield, M., & Stancil, W. (2017). "Fair Housing and Stable Suburban Integration" in Squires, G. (Ed.) *The Fight for Fair Housing: Causes, Consequences, and Future Implications of the 1968 Fair Housing Act*. Routledge.

29. A similar approach already appears in Department of Housing and Urban Development regulation with regard to siting standards for public housing. To prevent the segregative placement of public housing, 24 CFR § 905.602(d) forbids the siting of new public housing in areas of minority concentration unless certain conditions are met.

30. At present, the Department of Housing and Urban Development typically defines an "area of minority concentration" as a census tract that is more than 50% nonwhite. State and local grantees are required to produce their own definition of "area of minority concentration" in their Consolidated Plans. Consolidated Planning is the process through which HUD requires jurisdictions receiving funding to lay out priorities and goals and to establish action steps toward accomplishing those goals. The other two classifications are presently undefined.

31. This is for several reasons. First, while racial and economic characteristics of American neighborhoods are correlated, with more heavily white areas tending to be more affluent and less heavily white areas tending to be lower income, that correlation is not perfect. For instance, the outer periphery of most metropolitan areas contains both affluent suburbs and sprawling, less-affluent exurbs—but both community types tend to be heavily white. Second, the historic forces that created dividing lines between modern-day communities were heavily focused on race. Practices like government-sponsored and private-market real-estate redlining were focused on race, as was school segregation. Finally, racial integration produces a set of benefits similar to, but distinct from, the benefits of socioeconomic integration. For example, racial integration has been demonstrated to reduce intergroup racial conflict and reduce stereotype formation. See: Mikulyuk, A. B., & Braddock, J. H., II. (2016). K–12 school diversity and social cohesion: Evidence in support of a compelling state interest. *Education and Urban Society*, *50*(1), 5–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124516678045; Uslaner, E. M. (2011). Trust, diversity, and segregation in the United States and United Kingdom. *Comparative Sociology*, *10*(2), 221–247. https:///doi.org/10.1163/156913311X566571

32. 34 CFR § 280.30 (2020).

33. 26 U.S.C. § 42(m)(1)(B)(ii)(III) (2020).

34. 26 U.S.C. § 42(m)(1)(B)(ii)(III) (2020).

35. Internal Revenue Service, Notice 2016-77 (2016).

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