

School Integration Best Practices – Housing-School-Transportation Policy Collaboration

By the Poverty & Race Research Action Council for the IDRA EAC-South

Equitable education requires racially, and economically integrated schools staffed by skilled teachers who are adequately prepared to teach in diverse classrooms. This summary includes best practices reflecting the concerted efforts of communities across the country working to pursue integrated communities reflecting the rich diversity in the United States.

Regional Problem Solving on Housing and Schools

The Richmond, Virginia, region leads in bringing together stakeholders from the housing and education sectors around a shared housing and school integration policy agenda. Beginning in 2016, school board members from Richmond and its surrounding suburban school districts began meeting with key housing representatives from the regional housing authority, the housing and community development office, Housing Virginia (a statewide housing coalition), the state housing education departments, and researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Richmond. The process helped to lead to the development of a regional magnet school in Richmond that draws students from the counties, and yielded two publications: a manual for cities considering undertaking a similar regional process, and a report titled, *Confronting School and Housing Segregation in the Richmond Region: Can We Learn and Live Together?* The report includes a series of action steps that the participants continue to pursue.

- Siegel-Hawley, G., Koziol, B., Moeser, J.V., Holden, T., & Shields, T.J. (September 2017). *Confronting School and Housing Segregation in the Richmond Region: Can We Learn and Live Together?* University of Richmond, School of Professional and Continuing Studies. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1074&context=spcs-faculty-publications>

Collaboration Across City Departments

Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) coordinated with the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) to coordinate transportation for students in support of school integration. All non-zone schools (i.e., “choice” schools) offer MTA bus passes to students who qualify

for free and reduced-price meals. Many magnet and other optional schools offer MTA passes to students from outside the zone of those schools if they qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

- Metro Nashville Public Schools. Diversity in Metro Schools. <https://www.mnps.org/diversity/>

Prioritizing Access to High Performing Schools in the Fair Housing Planning Process

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development issued the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing regulation that requires recipients of HUD block grant funding to assess and take steps to address local fair housing issues. This analysis, the “Assessment of Fair Housing,” is conducted every five years and informs state and local planning processes, such as their Consolidated Plan (for block grant distribution) and Public Housing Authority plan. The regulation provides a framework that explicitly considers the intersection of housing with “opportunity factors,” including both access to high-performing schools and access to quality transportation. Local governments and community organizations that engage in the Assessment of Fair Housing process are to examine federal and local data on school quality, in relation to demographic distribution and affordable housing distribution. They also are encouraged to assess whether local education policies are “contributing factors” to housing segregation and to engage with education agencies and advocates as part of the assessment. This process can yield collaborations between local housing and education agencies and can guide local planning agencies to consider the reciprocal effect of housing and school policies on integration and to formulate their plans and policies accordingly. For example, the City of Los Angeles’s housing and community development department produced a draft Assessment of Fair Housing that includes as a goal: “Partner with LAUSD to explore ways to expand access to proficient schools through housing and community development programs and activities.” (Part V, Goal 5 at p. 298). The regulation also encourages program participants to use the Assessment of Fair Housing to inform their education and transportation planning.

- <http://hcidla.lacity.org/assessment-fair-housing>

- Note: Though encouraging diversity and equity in fair housing is still relevant as a best practice for increasing overall equity, in 2018, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development indefinitely suspended the 2015 AFFH regulation. <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2018/01/the-trump-administration-derailed-a-key-obama-rule-on-housing-segregation/549746/>

Maintaining School Diversity in a Gentrifying Urban Neighborhood

The City Garden Montessori School was established in 2008 as an intentionally diverse public charter school in a racially and economically diverse neighborhood in southwest St. Louis. But, due in part to the popularity of the school and the local neighborhood revitalization that the school spurred after a few years accelerating gentrification threatened the school's diversity goals. In response, the school's leadership began to reach out to affordable housing developers to maintain and increase the housing supply in the neighborhood for low income families. The school has also brought housing services providers into the school to assist parents. It has also formed a "Coalition for Neighborhood Diversity and Housing Justice" with homeowners and renters in the school community, committed to maintaining an economically and racially diverse neighborhood. City Gardens has further incorporated anti-racism training into its parent-teacher organization to help ensure that more privileged parents coming into the neighborhood do not take over and disempower lower income parents who also want to have ownership of the school and their children's education.

- Program website: <http://citygardenschool.org/>

Working with Realtors to Market a Diverse School District

Responding to negative (and inaccurate) impressions of the Pasadena Unified School District that were reflected in the marketing of homes in the city, the Pasadena Educational Foundation recognized that these impressions were based on a combination of perceived "lower rankings" of schools based on socioeconomic diversity, implicit bias based on student demographics, and lack of basic information about what was happening in the schools. In response, over the past few years the Foundation developed an innovative "Realtor Initiative" that gives real estate brokers in the city information about the school district that they can use with their clients. It also brings realtors into the school to get a first-hand impression of the high standards pursued in the district. The goals of the program include "to help realtors now and in the future see our public schools as they really are; to equip realtors with current information about our schools; and to encourage realtors to be active ambassadors for PEF, PEN, and

especially, the PUSD." As part of this initiative, the foundation started the "Realtors Read Across Pasadena" program, where realtors are invited to read in classrooms at all PUSD elementary schools and learn more about the schools.

- Miyake-Trapp, J. (March 2018). Changing the Perception of Pasadena Unified School District Through an Innovative Realtor Outreach Program. *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*. <https://prarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PasadenaRealtorFieldReport.pdf>

Teacher Housing Development in Segregated School Districts

The Newark-based RBH group, a real estate development firm, has pioneered a unique approach to connecting housing and school policy, with the Teachers Village development in Newark and Teachers Corner in Hartford. Newark and Hartford are both highly segregated school districts that are at a competitive disadvantage for teaching talent with surrounding school districts, and both have downturns in need of revitalization and increased residential development. The Teachers Village concept helps to provide a positive incentive for experienced teachers to remain in the city school district. It also brings a group of young middle-class professionals back into cities that desperately need additional economic diversity. For higher cost, rapidly gentrifying cities, the Teachers Village concept is a way of helping retain educators who might otherwise be forced out of the city.

- Project website: <http://www.teachersvillage.com/>
- According to the site: Teachers Village is a mixed-use community in the heart of downtown Newark. Designed by world-renowned architect Richard Meier and located on five blocks along Halsey Street and south of Market Street. The Village features six new buildings consisting of: three charter schools, daycare, 204 residential units, and 65,000 square feet of retail space.

Targeting High Performing Schools in Siting New Low-Income Housing Developments

A number of states now use school performance ratings as a factor in the siting of low-income housing through the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program. Each state housing finance agency manages its annual competitive funding round through a "Qualified Allocation Plan" (QAP), which includes points for project features that further state or federal policy goals. The most recent study of state QAPs found that Massachusetts and Indiana had particularly strong incentives for citing near high performing elementary schools. Since school rating systems are based largely on overall test score performance, and

test scores are primarily related to student demographics, these siting criteria have a natural tendency to promote racial and economic integration.

- Oppenheimer, S., Haberle, M., Toussiant, E., & Tegler, P. (July 2015). Building Opportunity II: Civil Rights Best Practices in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program (2015 Update). *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*. <http://prrac.org/pdf/BuildingOpportunityII.pdf>

Acquiring Existing Multifamily Housing Near High Performing Schools

The National Housing Trust, a non-profit housing preservation and policy organization, recently launched its “Opportunity Fund,” with seed capital from national foundations, designed to finance the acquisition of small apartment buildings located near high performing elementary schools in communities with strong local school districts. After acquisition is completed, the Trust will work with local housing authorities to place eligible public housing clients (low income families with federal housing choice vouchers) into up to 20% of the units in each development.

- Opportunity Fund Information: https://www.nationalhousingtrust.org/sites/default/files/page_file_attachments/SIP1012-Opp-Fund-042017.pdf
- National Housing Trust Fund Information: https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/HTF_Factsheet.pdf

Regional Housing Mobility Programs

Regional housing mobility programs, operating in several U.S. metro areas, work with low income families who receive portable federal Housing Choice Vouchers (also known as “Section 8” vouchers) to help to expand their housing search to “areas of opportunity.” Most maps of regional opportunity consider school rankings along with other factors like access to employment, low poverty, and crime rates. Some mobility programs, like the larger programs in Dallas and Baltimore, have had significant success helping children transition from high poverty, low performing schools, to high performing and low poverty schools.

- Engdahl, L. (October 2009). New Homes, New Neighborhoods, New Schools: A Progress Report on the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program. *Poverty & Race Research Action Council*. www.prrac.org/pdf/BaltimoreMobilityReport.pdf

Providing Access to Cars

In Baltimore, the Abell Foundation supports families participating in the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program with access to reliable, low cost automobiles through the Vehicles for Change program, and provides free drivers education classes for teens in the

program. The Baltimore Housing Mobility Program prioritizes low poverty communities, with generally high performing schools.

- Vehicles for Change: <https://www.vehiclesforchange.org/need-a-car/maryland-northern-virginia/>
- Baltimore Housing Mobility Program: <http://www.brhp.org/>

Exploring Community Racial History

“Designing the We” created the *Undesign the Redline* exhibit as a way to ground conversations in a historical context, understanding how explicit racism was designed into structural racism and systemic inequality over generations through policies and practices, such as redlining, urban renewal, planned shrinkage, and mass incarceration. The exhibit and accompanying community conversations expose systemic and entangled challenges in areas like education, housing, health and income through a structural framework. Because it is physical, visual and interactive, it creates an equitable footing to deal with these larger challenges, using design as a tool to meet these challenges.

- Exhibit website: <http://www.designingthewe.com/undesign-the-redline/>

Gerrymandering School Segregation – Or Integration

Building on research by Richards & Monarrez, the online publication Vox has created an online tool for illustrating the degree to which local school attendance boundaries perpetuate, increase, or reduce background levels of residential segregation within a school district. The tool allows the user to select a local school district and compare the current racial demographics of each elementary school with the predicted demographics if students were assigned to the school nearest where they live.

- Chang, A. (27 August 2018). We Can Draw School Zones to Make Classrooms Less Segregated. This is How Well Your District Does. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2018/1/8/16822374/school-segregation-gerrymander-map>

Encouraging Integrative School and Housing Choices:

Oak Park Housing Center

Oak Park Housing Center and the City of Oak Park recognizes that a factor regarding integration in Oak Park is the connection between housing and schools. The boundaries of the elementary districts were redrawn with integration in mind which dramatically reduced the influence of schools on housing choices. All the new boundaries included at least modest integration. The middle schools were also set up to promote integration in a pattern that corrects small

segregation patterns that might occur at the elementary level. The Housing Center staff improve understanding about school quality and eliminate schools as a factor in the housing choice process. In turn, the schools play a role in educating the community regarding its integration strategy. In collaboration with the Housing Center, presentations about how Oak Park works intentionally to promote diversity and integration ensure that the next generation will understand the effort required to sustain the community's core values.

- Housing Center website: <https://liveinoakpark.com/history-of-the-housing-center/>

Chicago United for Equity is working across housing and education with parents and community members who are looking to re-frame education choices people are making within diverse neighborhoods to re-segregate their communities. This is part of a two-year effort that looks at the relationship between housing (especially affordable housing) and education and leverages local leadership on the issue through the elected local school council structure.

- CUE Racial Equity Assessment Information: <https://www.chicagounitedforequity.org/reia>

Integrated Schools: “Integrated Schools has a simple, yet ambitious mission: build out grassroots efforts with parents to integrate schools – to *deliberately* and *joyfully* enroll our children in schools that are racially, ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically diverse. Integrated Schools develops and supports coalitions of parents from all racial, socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds to work together to integrate schools, campus by campus, community by community, parent to parent.”

- Organization website: www.integratedschools.org

The IDRA EAC-South is available to provide technical assistance to state and local education agencies to help improve and increase pathways to teaching for faculty of color, among other capacity-building services addressing equity issues in race, national origin, sex/gender, and religion. For more information, please visit our website at www.idra.org/eac-south or send us at email to eacsouth@idra.org.

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